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AN ETHICAL EVALUATION OF PARENTING AND FAMILY VALUES AS FOUNDATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

National development can best be understood as a broad and multifaceted process encompassing political stability, social advancement, economic expansion, and cultural growth. While governments, institutions, and public infrastructure play vital roles, the foundational influence of the family, particularly parenting and the transmission of core values cannot be overstated. Employing analytical and conversational methods, this study shows that family is the primary social environment in which individuals are formed, supported, socialized, and instilled with values that shape their character and behavior. It is in the light of the quest to lay the foundation for sustainable national development that a viable and pragmatic theoretical framework is pertinent. The study reveals that the harmful effects of media and technology, along with the weakening of family structures reflected in rising levels of divorce, separation, and unsupported single parenting undermines household stability and hinder the consistent transmission of values within the home. It is therefore the submission of this essay that a renewed commitment to responsible parenting and strong family values of which if properly strengthened could substantially reduce societal challenges such as corruption, violence, and moral decline-problems that undermine sustainable national development.

Keywords: National Development, Media and Technology, Political Stability, Family Units, Institutions

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Introduction

It is reasonable to argue that sustainable national development involves the combined contributions of governments, institutions, and families, all working towards achieving the same goals, i.e, social, economic, political, and cultural advancement of a nation. Just as was enunciated by Nwosu that:

> National development is a multifaceted process that encompasses social, cultural, and psychological transformations aimed at improving a country's overall progress and welfare. It goes beyond mere economic expansion or industrial output, involving enhancements in living standards, greater access to education and healthcare, strengthened social relationships, and the protection of cultural values and traditions (Nwosu, 2024:69).

Corroborating Nwosu's assertion, Claude Ake was of the opinion that development is not a project but a process by which people create and recreate themselves and their circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values (Ake, 1996:2). These values are better learned in the family as first point of contact. Over the years, emphasis has largely been placed on public policy, infrastructure, and economic strategies, while the essential role of the family particularly in parenting and transmitting core values has not received comparable attention. The family nonetheless, represents the earliest and most fundamental social institution, where individuals form bonds, receive care and discipline, learn social norms, and are prepared to participate fully in society.

However, family structures in Nigeria have changed over time due to historical, economic, and cultural developments. Traditional family systems, which were strongly based on communal living and mutual dependence, have gradually transitioned into modern forms shaped by urbanization, financial challenges, and evolving social values. While traditional families focused on shared responsibilities and extended family support, contemporary families are more often made up of nuclear and single-parent households, highlighting changes in living patterns and economic realities (Alabi, & Olonade, 2022; Adegboyega, 2024).

Thus, Kwame Gyekye maintains that while individuals are naturally members of society, they depend on the social environment to realize their full potential and live meaningful lives. The relationship between the individual and society, he suggests, is expressed through the social structures developed by a community. Such structures are not optional but essential features of every human society. They exist both to reflect particular understandings of human nature and to create a framework that enables individuals to achieve their aspirations while ensuring the continuity and survival of the society itself (Gyekye, 1997, 35). So, we believe that it is crucial to nurture a child carefully in order to develop moral sense required for sustainable social development; hence without the community (society) perhaps humans will not be able to learn speech capacity, sympathy, love and values.

Parenting as the Bedrock of Human Capital and the Transmission of Family Values

Parenting is fundamental to the formation of human capital, as the family serves as the child's first environment of learning and character development. Within this setting, children acquire essential life skills, moral standards, self-discipline, appreciation for education and shaping their social behaviour and interactions. Experiences during early childhood within the home influence a person's identity, emotional regulation, and capacity to relate well with others, all of which are essential for national development just as Rotimi posits that, "through daily interactions, parents and caregivers function as role models, imparting values such as ethical

conduct, discipline, and civic responsibility that contribute to a stable and cohesive society" (Rotimi, 2023.p.30).

In Nigeria, where communal values are highly regarded, family socialization plays a significant role in fostering respect, cooperation, and leadership from an early age (Chineyemba, 2023.p.1129). These formative experiences shape individuals' understanding of social norms and influence how they participate in society and support collective progress. When parents provide consistent support, care, and guidance, they are more likely to raise individuals who are self-assured, accountable, and driven to make meaningful contributions to society. Such qualities are indispensable for cultivating a skilled workforce, encouraging creativity, and maintaining long-term economic advancement. In addition, Okwuogo & Onwudiwe on their parts opined that, "studies have shown that early childhood experiences-largely shaped by parental guidance and care-giving styles significantly influence brain development, emotional control, and cognitive growth" (Okwuogo & Onwudiwe, 2024). It can be deduced from Okwuogo & Onwudiwe assertion that supportive parenting characterized by steady discipline, warmth, and open communication fosters psychological health and resilience, traits that are vital for sustaining an active and productive community.

Moreover, John Mbiti underscores the centrality of community in African thought, emphasizing that African life is deeply communal and religious in orientation. He argues that religion in African societies is not an individual affair but a shared reality that binds members of the community together. To be human, in this view, is to participate fully in the beliefs, rituals, and traditions of one's people (Mbiti, 1969:3). Detaching oneself from these shared elements, he suggests, is equivalent to severing ties with one's roots, identity, and social foundation. Thus, religion and community are inseparable dimensions of social existence (Mbiti, 1969: 3). In addition, the Yoruba people of South West Nigeria hinges on the need of a community which its first duty is the integration of individual for such a being to become both rational and ethical. In this regard, Danoye O. Laguda cited in John Mbiti who comments on the nature of Africa community writes, "To be human is to belong to the whole community (society)" (Laguda, 2004: 34). Children raised in stable and supportive families are generally less prone to criminal behavior and more inclined toward constructive social engagement. This, in turn, lowers the broader social costs associated with crime, poverty, and instability.

In pluralistic and multiethnic societies such as Nigeria, strong family values can also foster tolerance, mutual understanding, and peaceful coexistence. When parents teach their children to appreciate diversity and respect others, they help build the groundwork for inclusive governance and harmonious social relations. Family influence is equally crucial in shaping future leadership. The often-quoted idea that leadership begins at home reflects the reality that parents serve as a child's earliest role models. Through daily interactions, they transmit lessons about responsibility, accountability, integrity, and service. Children who internalize these qualities are more likely to demonstrate them later in life, emerging as principled leaders, engaged citizens, and transformative contributors within their communities and beyond.

Furthermore, when families prioritize education and encourage critical inquiry, they help nurture the next generation of innovators, entrepreneurs, and skilled professionals who propel national progress. Supporting parents and strengthening constructive family values, therefore, represents a long-term investment in a country's future leadership and development. At the same time, meaningful attention to parenting and family values carries important policy implications. If governments acknowledge the central role families play in national advancement, they must adopt family-oriented policies and support systems. Such measures may

include accessible parenting education initiatives, family counseling services, quality healthcare, and economic assistance programs. By fostering conditions in which families can flourish, societies better prepare young people to navigate the complexities of an ever-evolving world. In addition, public awareness campaigns that highlight the significance of family values, parenting seminars, and collaborations between schools and communities can further strengthen the role of the family within national development efforts and public dialogue.

Ethical Significance of Family Values in National Development

Family values, including honesty, integrity, respect, empathy, responsibility, and civic-mindedness constitute the moral foundation of society. They shape personal conduct, influence character development, and guide social interactions, playing a pivotal role in fostering social unity and advancing national development. Ethically, these values are essential for cultivating responsible citizens who contribute to just, stable, and thriving societies. The family is the primary institution where ethical principles are introduced and practiced.

The contribution of family values to national development is multifaceted. First, they foster 'social cohesion' by encouraging empathy, cooperation, and constructive conflict resolution, as highlighted by John Mbiti, who situates community at the center of African life (Mbiti, 1969:3). Second, as the ultimate moral principle, Kant, a Deontologist, restates the golden rule in logical form, and posits that, "Act as if the principle on which your action is based were to become by your will a universal law of nature." This rule is called the *categorical imperative*, because it is unqualified and a command. Kant further insists that one must treat all others as "in every case an end, never as a means only" (Jacques P. et al, 2012), which lay credence to our earlier position that parenting is fundamental to learning and character development, hence these values help mitigate 'social ills' such as corruption, crime, and moral decline, thereby supporting justice, accountability, and institutional integrity.

Third, families that prioritize education, critical thinking, and hard work contribute to 'human capital formation', producing competent, innovative, and responsible individuals who drive economic growth and national progress. Fourth, parenting shapes 'future leadership': parents serve as the first role models, transmitting lessons in accountability, service, and ethical decision-making. Children who internalize these traits are more likely to become principled leaders, engaged citizens, and agents of positive societal change.

The ethical importance of family values also carries 'policy implications', i.e, Governments and institutions have a responsibility to support families through programs that enhance parenting capacity, provide family counseling, improve access to healthcare, and offer economic assistance. Public campaigns promoting family values, parenting workshops, and school-community collaborations further reinforce the moral and civic education initiated within the home. Such measures ensure that ethical lessons taught at the family level extend into broader society, promoting social stability, inclusion, and sustainable development.

Challenges Confronting Family Values in National Development

Suffice it to say that family values play a vital role in nation-building; their transmission is confronted with both ethical and practical challenges. Consequent upon this, various factors weaken or threatens the continuity of these values, and when this occurs, national development is often negatively affected. Some of the obstacles include negative media and technological influence, where unrestricted exposure to violent, immoral, or overly materialistic content may contradict family-taught principles and strongly shape children's attitudes and behavior. Second, economic hardship and poverty—families struggle to meet basic needs may lack the time and energy required to instill values, while children may be driven into labor, crime, or street life,

disrupting moral guidance (Odejide, et al, 2024; Ogunniyi, et al., 2024). Third, substance abuse and crime which encapsulate alcohol and drug misuse, as well as criminal activities within or around families can erode trust, stability, and proper moral upbringing. On his part, Eweka maintains that financial instability heightens anxiety and emotional strain, often leading to unhealthy coping behaviours such as social withdrawal, aggression, or reduced participation in community duties. Prolonged exposure to economic hardship can impair cognitive functioning and emotional regulation, increasing the risk of mental health issues, including depression (Eweka, et al., 2024). Also, Aluko et al suggests that children raised in financially challenged households are also more likely to face academic difficulties and experience low self-confidence, perpetuating cycles of poverty and restricting their capacity to contribute meaningfully to national development (Aluko et al., 2024; Uwadia, et al., 2024).

Another visible challenge bedeviling family values in national development is poor governance and corruption—leaders who act without integrity send signals that honesty and responsibility are unimportant, discouraging families from promoting such values. Breakdown of family structures, evident in rising cases of divorce, separation, abandonment, or unsupported single parenting can reduce stability and consistency in value formation at home. Also, moral decline and loss of cultural traditions, as modernization may lead to the neglect or rejection of traditional principles such as respect for elders, communal living, and social responsibility, just as Berman indicates, "modernity promises us adventure, joy, growth, power, transformation of ourselves and the world – and at the same time that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are" (Berman, 1983:15).

Another challenge facing parenting and family value could also be traced to urbanization and migration—movement from rural to urban areas separates families, weakens extended family networks, and exposes individuals to lifestyles that may undermine traditional values. Poor parenting and inadequate value education, as parents lacking awareness, education, or positive role models may find it difficult to effectively teach discipline, respect, and integrity. Weak educational and social institutions, this happens when schools, religious organizations, and community groups fail to reinforce family values, families are left without sufficient support. Peer pressure and negative social environments, where children and youths may adopt harmful behaviors from peers, gangs, or communities that do not uphold positive family standards.

Ethical evaluation of Parenting and Family Values in National Development

In essence, any factor that diminishes the family's capacity to raise morally responsible individuals becomes an obstacle to sustainable national development. Modernization and the gradual erosion of traditional values have greatly influenced Nigerian families, shaping behaviour, identity, and moral development (Balogun, & Aruoture, 2024). The study shows that persistence exposure to global media and individualistic ideologies has transformed perceptions of marriage, parenting, and intergenerational responsibilities thereby shifting attention from collective welfare toward personal achievement (Balogun, et al., 2024). This change reflects a movement from community-oriented thinking to a more individual-centered mindset, where communal duties are increasingly replaced by personal goals whereas individualism promotes self-expression and personal advancement, which may weaken social connections and diminish the shared responsibility necessary for national development as was posited by Manago, et al (Manago, & McKenzie, 2022; Udoudom, et al., 2024).

Further, the decline of traditional values—such as respect for elders, communal care-giving and moral discipline was also identified and this has also contributed to an identity struggle where individuals attempt to reconcile modern ambitions with longstanding cultural

expectations (Nwosu, 2024). This fragmented sense of identity can result in greater social isolation, lower civic participation, and reduced national cohesion. A stable society can allocate fewer resources to policing and conflict resolution and more toward developmental initiatives. In addition, solid family support systems lessen the burden on social welfare services by caring for children, the elderly and vulnerable members, thereby allowing governments to channel funds into growth-oriented projects. Family values further underpin moral and ethical leadership. Since leaders emerge from families, early lessons in accountability, fairness, and service influence how they govern and manage public resources. Likewise, when responsibility, dedication, and integrity are modeled at home, individuals carry these traits into their professional lives, strengthening efficiency, trust, and professionalism across sectors.

Suffice it to say that families that instill sound values raise individuals who build strong institutions—and strong institutions form the foundation of sustainable national development. Furthermore, governments play a crucial role in reinforcing family values, as families function most effectively when supported by public policies and strong institutions. Governments can strengthen family values in several ways, which is, by supporting parenting and family counseling programs by funding awareness campaigns, parenting education, and counseling services that promote effective communication, responsibility, and emotional support within households. Government can also introduce family-friendly policies, such as parental leave, child support regulations, maternity and paternity benefits, and flexible work arrangements that enable parents to properly care for and guide their families. Governments may also strengthen cultural and moral institutions by supporting cultural festivals, community centers, and civic or moral education programs that preserve traditions and shared values passed down through families. In addition, promoting economic stability and employment through job creation, fair wages, and poverty-reduction initiatives helps families meet basic needs and provides the stability required for raising children with strong moral foundations. Encouraging community participation is another important strategy, as collaboration among families, schools, religious organizations, and civil society helps reinforce common societal values.

Conclusion

Family values exert a subtle yet profound influence on national development because they shape individuals long before formal institutions such as governments, schools, or economic systems do. Because the family is the primary environment where social values, civic responsibility, and emotional strength are developed, the strengthening of family is essential for national recovery and advancement. In Nigeria, where social, economic, and political challenges often place pressure on family relationships, it is suggested that a family-focused approach if properly harnessed can support mental well-being, preserve cultural traditions, and encourage community participation just as was buttressed by Ezeudu, et al that, “the emotional and psychological health of families greatly influences how individuals cope with stress, trauma, and societal demands. Families that encourage open communication, effective conflict resolution, and emotional support promote stronger mental well-being, which contributes to overall social stability” (Ezeudu & Fadeyi, 2024). Also, rising cases of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress in Nigeria have been linked to changing family structures, economic difficulties, and insecurity. By prioritizing emotional wellness, families nurture individuals who are better prepared to contribute positively to national development through stable relationships, improved workplace productivity, and active civic participation.

In addition, good governance and ethical leadership are essential; when leaders demonstrate integrity, fairness, and accountability, they model the very values families seek to

instill. Regulating media and digital content by limiting harmful material and promoting educational and culturally enriching programming helps reduce negative influences on family life. When governments actively support families, they contribute to raising responsible citizens and thereby establish a strong foundation for sustainable national development.

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