

# ETHICAL TOOLKITS FOR EFFECTIVE YOUTHS TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*The Nigerian youths in general have various moral and social problems. These include: dishonesty, cheating, disobedience, laziness, examination malpractices, drug abuse, banditry, murder, violence, sexual promiscuity, pornography, stealing, cultism, rape, queer practices, kidnapping, and internet frauds. The inordinate anxiety of some youths to get rich 'quick' and die 'quick' have made some to join bad companies which led them to smoking of hard drugs or drinking themselves to stupor, that they become mad and useless to their families. Some who do not run mad are caught and killed in the act of perpetrating one evil or another. Moreover, exposure of youths to information about sex from internet has led to the widespread of pre-marital sex and to some extent extra-marital sexual affairs in contemporary Nigerian society. The Yahoo Boys- a new class of young Nigerian fraudsters dislodged traditional 419ers and their outdated repertoire of tricks. There is no doubt that changes in the perception of human dignity, influence of western civilization or globalization, poor parental upbringing, lack of self-confidence, peer group factors, poverty, unemployment, and corruption have generally influenced the Youths behaviour. In addition, the growing generation is being used by some politicians as thugs, riot promoters or violence organizers. Hence, it should be no surprise that life orientations of the young ones are being negatively impacted. However, Youths are admonished to access ethical toolkits x-rayed in this paper for effective transformation. Employing analytic and prescriptive methods, this paper recommends that government should empower the young generation by initiating for skills acquisition and vocational training; capacity building; job creation and employment. More so, Youths should be sensitive to their visions and talents; recognize their potentials and capabilities; discourage laziness; imitate great achievers and personalities through hard work.*

**Keywords:** Youth, Nigeria, Ethics, Transformation, Crime

## Introduction

The Youths of today are the elders of tomorrow and the future of our race. They are what the present generation bequeaths to the future. Indeed, the level of societal and public

morality in our country in general is very disheartening. Many moral ideals that should be deeply and relentlessly inculcated in the youths, to make them responsible, have virtually been abandoned in our public life. Ejike (2008:7) regrettably noted that:

The moral scene of the present generation can be likened to the state of Sodom and Gomorrah before their destruction. Everyone continues to go deeper into skyrocketing God's wrath daily, with general degeneration and obnoxious practices in our day-to-day lifestyle.

Hence, Newman (1997:5) laments that:

The youth of this generation want truth. They have been lied to so often- so much is fake. They are searching for identity, meaning in life, support and direction. Battered by pressures from their peers and society, they are rewriting the scripts of their lives, heading in a multitude of directions –and often running into serious trouble in the process.

Thus, some negative social influences have affected the Youths in our society. To neglect the youths is to neglect our most precious common good.

There is no doubt that the society in which we live today will be managed tomorrow and led by the Youths of today. Our businesses, positions, institutions, and social positions, houses, family, homes, towns will be manned, managed, occupied and inherited by them. They are veritably our greatest legacy; and bear our imprint in a formative sense. They are result of the modelling influence of our behavior. They carry our ideals to the unforeseen future (Okeke, 2009:8-9). The Youths can effectively play their roles responsibly and efficiently only if they received a balanced formation. The paper examined the concepts of youth, ethics and transformation. It also identified ethical/moral principles/standards; the need for moral standards in society. It further evaluated ethical toolkits for effective Youth transformation in Nigeria; and made conclusion and recommendations.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

**Youth:** Ibikunle (1996) describes 'Youth' as persons, irrespective of age who believes he/she can contribute to the progress of the group he/she belongs. Hence, a youth is more recognized by his qualities rather than the age limitations. Iroegbu in Ndubuisi (2005), sees the youth as persons between the ages of childhood (in most societies 14-18 and ripe adulthood 50-60 etiologically (age-wise) constitute the youth. However, he emphasizes that this age limitation is fluid as it is large, and ideologically defines the youth as: “Whoever is young in mind or body, whoever is dynamic, active and with the vitality qualities of action, passion, drives, inspiration and motivation belongs to the youth” (2005:1).

Furthermore, Umedum (1992) in Ekwunife (2000:6) offered an operational definition of a youth. For him a youth is someone between the ages of fourteen and forty with the following characteristics: physical growth and development, high mental alertness, out-going, crave for independence and very inquisitive about the facts of life, its meaning and purpose. Okogie (1992) in Ekwunife (2000:7) also insisted that youths are not only open to truth, but

thirst avidly for truth which can help them shape their adult life- making them bearers of life and hope and of the task of ensuring that there will be a tomorrow for the history of today.

Ekwunife (2000:7-8) identified the indices of youthful period to include:

- Idealism-imaginative ideas on how things should be and not how they are, appeal to youths. The more articulated these ideas, the chances of their appeal to enterprising youths
- Intensive and sincere desire to conquer their environment and subject it to their wills is stimulating and challenging to youths. In a bid to realize this goal the youth is ready to risk everything in order to explore all perceptible realities.
- Impatient when faced with insoluble obstacles to the realization of cherished goals and aspirations.
- Tends to be either violent to perceived oppositions or use any means, fair or foul, to destroy oppositions.
- Does not reflect deeply and globally on the consequences of his or her actions before execution. Hence, they are bound to make innumerable mistakes, some of which may be irredeemable and may have terrible consequences on his future life in the society.
- Wants to achieve and be recognized as someone who matters in society.
- Hence he or she tends to imitate achievers in any society like Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Michael Jackson, Legendary Pele, Mohammed Ali, Churchill, Kennedy, Margaret Thatcher, great University Professors. Even those who excel in wickedness like Abacha, Anini, Idi Amin, Hitler and so on are not excluded in their models for imitation provided that each character suits their present ideals.

The youths engage in some socio-moral problems because of their characteristic-immature, halve informed, exuberance etc., only to be highly disappointed when they realize that “not all that glitters is gold”

**Ethics:** Ethics is used in three different but related ways. The first sense of ethics signifies a general pattern or “way of life”. This is akin to Christian and Buddhist ethics. In the second, we speak of professional ethics and of unethical behavior. In the third sense, ethics is a branch of philosophy that is frequently given the special name of metaethics (Ethics, History of Encyclopedia.com, 2020). Generally, the two major divisions of ethics are known as normative ethics and meta-ethics. But in recent times; and with the emphasis on such practical issues of life as abortion, in vitro fertilization, cloning and euthanasia, etc., philosophers have identified as a third and crucial division of ethics, what is known as practical ethics (Agulanna, 2010).

According to Frankena in Agulanna (2010:150) “ethics or moral philosophy is a philosophical thinking about morality, moral problems and moral judgments”. Lillie in Omoregbe (1993:2) defines ethics as “the systematic study of the fundamental principles of moral law, the normative science of human conduct”.

**Transformation:** Transformation is a term that appears in various fields and interpreted in relation to the particular field it describes. An analysis of the various definitions shows the presence of a key word, “change”. Thus, transformation no matter the usage must involve a noticeable change. The free online Dictionary in (Iwuoha, 2012:85) describes it perfectly well when it states that transformations is a marked change as in appearance, or character wholly, for the better”. It is therefore, a positive word targeted at making a person, thing or situation better.

### **Ethical/Moral Principles/Standards**

According to Omoregbe (1993:62-63): The fundamental principles of moral law are generally referred to as “moral principles”. Moral principles are standards of moral behavior, norms with which our conduct should conform. Moral principles are explicit formulations or explications of moral law. They are guides, to human conduct, indicating certain things or ways of behavior which should be avoided and other things or ways of behavior which should be adopted. Moral principles are of two kinds, namely, the positive principles and negative principles. The positive principles indicate what we ought to do; how we ought to behave or the attitude of mind we ought to cultivate and adopt. They enjoin the cultivation of: “Justice, honesty, fidelity to one's duty, generosity, kindness, hospitality, truthfulness, respect for human life and dignity, respect for other people's properties, altruism or consideration of the interest of others”. The negative principles prohibit certain actions and ways of behavior which are wrong and which should be avoided in society. To perform such actions or behave in such ways is destructive to society. Thus, the negative principles prohibit: “Murder, stealing, embezzlement of public funds, (which is one way of stealing), adultery, incest, rape, false oath, bribery, cheating, hatred, suicide, and so on”.

These principles are universal; they are valid at all times and in different parts of the World. However, diversity of practices at different times or in different parts of the world may be due to ignorance in some cases and does not make morality relative. The standards which could be formal or informal are inherent in social customs, the laws of society, religious beliefs and practices, reason and experience accumulated by society over time. Others include; intuition, and conscience.

### **The Need for Moral Standards**

The need to check the behavior of every man through moral standard becomes imperative for these reasons, firstly, one has to interact with fellow men and if there is no standard to follow, there would always be conflict of interest, desire and ambition and possibly war among people. Aristotle argues that human beings are social animals, not alone as isolated, entirely self-sufficient hermits. For this reason it becomes a responsibility for the people to follow the common good as against their own private, and such tend to promote social harmony. Secondly, failure to check behavior of man, would once again take him to the state of nature, whereby there was no standard to regulate man's behavior, the strong preyed upon the

weak; the strong prevailed and the weak perished: ceaseless struggle and competition for security and survival were the order of the day. Consequently, individual life was solitary and short. Thirdly, in a society where there is no standard to follow, there would not be concepts of right or wrong, sin guilt, praise, punishment and reward, value and vices, justice and injustice, as well as morality and immorality. Nothing will be prohibited and nothing will be required. Obviously, such a society would not be a society worthy of living. It was the realization of this fact that, perhaps led the society to formulate standard of behaviour, which, provides guides of human conduct (Ayantayo, 2009:12-14).

Furthermore, John Locke extols this very virtue in his social contract thus; “the state is simply the community formed by contract, the policy of state is to be determined by community, or where unanimous agreement is obtainable by majority rule of the number”. John Locke literally understands this as a democratic process in a consensus building of a set of ground rules in which various individuals/groups can have a consensus. It is this set of rules that would be required by the different ideological and cultural differences for the pursuit of common interest in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society (Asike and Anwuluorah, 2017:51). The rules are indeed important for the protections of rights of claims and conflict of interests. The rules are enshrined in the constitution to incorporate the importance of tradition, and identification with a group and social structures. For without this principle, the society will remain in the Hobbesian state of anarchy. Hence, adhering to moral standards of society, therefore, becomes a duty for members of society.

### **Ethical Toolkits for Youths Transformation**

- If the youths cultivate ethical principles and standards available in their places of endeavors, they become more focused and disposed to achievement of their dreams and desires.
- When the youths imbibe the value of respect, they begin to appreciate their parental disciplinary measures for good character formation. They will also respect the constituted authorities which will anchor them to become good citizens.
- As the youths inculcate the value of truthfulness, they are enabled to utilize their talents and potentials creditably as against 'cutting corners' in the effort to achieve success. For example, a student can harness all her strengths to studying very hard to enable her pass examination very well, instead of resorting to cheating or examination malpractices.
- Appreciation of value of justice and fairness will enable the youths to play responsible roles, for example, in the conduct of elections for political positions and other positions in the society. Since acting against justice will amount to abuse of human rights and dignity otherwise known as social injustice. For example, Christians are urged: “Do not pervert justice” (Amos 5:7). “Do not pervert justice or show no partiality” “Follow justice and justice alone” (Leviticus 19:35). ...In social relation honour both the rich and the poor... (James 2: 1-6).
- Bribery and embezzlement of public funds are some of the negative ethical principles.

If the youth understand it as such, then the issue of leaders amassing money that do not belong to them will reduce. Embezzlement needs to be checked because it is inimical to the country's development in general. In recent times rape is on the increase in our society. Cultivation of moral principles will enable the youths to realize the value of dignity of human person and the urgent need to desist from such acts and abuse of human rights.

### **Conclusion**

Considering the level of moral depravity in our society today, the youths must adopt or acquire the right values, such as honesty, dedication, sense of duty, moral probity, altruism, sincerity, loyalty, trustworthiness, accountability to enable them maximize their potentials for achievement of their visions. This will also reduce moral and social problems of youths. Since the youths are the leaders of tomorrow, it will further go a long way in addressing individual selfishness, nepotism, egocentricism, fanaticism, incessant killings, destruction of lives and property, corruption and general insecurity. For Example, Christians are urged to live good and righteous life for the well-being of the society. The Scriptures say: "Seek the good that you may live" (Amos 5:14); and "Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach (Proverb 14:34). Hence, the society should encourage the youths and endeavor to touch their lives positively through the family, institutions, town unions, church, mosques and the social media.

### **Recommendations**

The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow. They should therefore take advantage of ethical principles/standards available to them wherever they find themselves in the interest of common good. In businesses, institutions, social positions, family, homes, towns unions, markets, politics, government offices, religious institutions, every endeavor has moral principles/standards that guide its conducts. The following are recommended for effective transformation of the Youths in Nigeria.

- The government could reduce Youths restiveness by training them on skills acquisition and vocational studies.
- Qualified graduates should also be empowered through offer of grants to set-up businesses they can manage.
- Government should further create more job opportunities for the qualified unemployed.
- Sensitive youths always set their minds to the future. They set individual visions by asking and proving answers to these questions. Where I will be in the next ten years to come? What will I like to become in life? How do I achieve my future goals? What is the right part to follow and what are the right sets of people to copy?
- Transformation of youths' thought patterns, motives, attitudes, and priorities is very important in changing their values, attitudes and wrong beliefs. A person starts early to form a good personality by cultivating good habits through good parental upbringing.
- In cultivation of ethical principles/standards, they are enabled to recognize their

potentials and capabilities. They can now struggle to undertake tasks and skills and assume the responsibilities which are dignifying.

- Inculcation of positive ethical values will no doubt discourage: unnecessary waste of time, laziness, idleness, disrespect, avoidance of duty, disobedience, dishonesty, stealing, rape, snatching of hand bags and wallets from visitors and other despicable acts.
- Wise youths do imitate great personalities and achievers as models. They quickly realize that 'nothing good comes so easy'; and also that getting to the top entail endurance, patience and hardwork.

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