

# RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION: A CATALYST FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** *Nigeria as a nation is seriously drifting into abyss of darkness as a result of the fallen standard of education and poor sustainable development in the past two to three decades. A lot of factors have contributed to this. Part being the deliberate action of the political class that has neglected its primary duty of providing a leveling ground for proper functioning of the various arms of the institutions in the society. The fallen standard of education resulting from poor implementation of the national policies resulting in constant disagreement between Academic Staff Union of Universities and the Federal Government and total breakdown of law and order in the society. The fall in moral values and subsequent decay of national values has given rise to various level of crimes in different organs of the society. This research therefore is aimed at exploring how the re-introduction of moral and religious education can help in revamping the national value system of Nigerian and reposition the country in the part of sustainable development. The research employed the qualitative and descriptive research design and made use of the secondary method to elicit information. The paper suggests re-introduction of moral and religious education as against secular study of religion as an academic subject in Nigerian educational system in order to give way to character reformation and character building for meaningful sustainable development in the country. Conclusion and proper recommendations were made based on the findings of the study.*

**Keywords:** Religious and Education, Catalyst, Sustainable-Development, Nigeria

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## INTRODUCTION

For an individual or group of individuals to grow and be productive there must be some level of discipline and sound character formation. This is because when one forms a good character there is the tendency that he/she will be peaceful and productive in the immediate environment and the society in general. Currently in the Nigerian society there is high level of moral decadence, which has resulted in killing, kidnapping for money, yahoo plus or advanced 419, sexual promiscuities, high level of indecency in the name of fashion and imitation of Western culture, corruption in high and low places, both in public and private to mention but a few. Religious education which plays a vital role in the formation of good character and discipline of the individual has completely been removed from formal education. We hardly wake up every day to hear of anything good about Nigeria only evil or bad reports of activities of destruction of lives and properties. In Nigeria today,

human life is made worthless and valueless because of the reports of killing and kidnapping.

In African traditional society and indeed during the missionary era, these were vices abhorred by the society because religious and moral instruction form the bases of teaching and the traditional institutions which cared for the moral behaviour of people to make sure that people adhered to the principles guiding behaviour were held sacrosanct. During this period sustainable development was accelerating in regular speed and workers were paid as and when due so that people will not have to look elsewhere for how to augment life or to make ends meet.

One of the greatest challenge that Nigeria is facing today is youth unemployment which has given rise to a lot of crimes like internet fraud or Yahoo plus, killing for rituals, gangsters, youth restiveness etc. According to Ogunbadejo and Ayoola (2020), ‘a number of African youths have

been attracted to destructive practices such as alcoholism, drug abuse and sexual promiscuity.” People are literally frustrated and confused about life and what the future holds as a result of rising insecurity in the country. All these things hinder sustainable development in the society. There is no way development can thrive without a conducive atmosphere. Religious and Moral Education is education that gives man right direction in life. It disabuses man’s mind from all negativities of life when properly channeled. Religious and Moral Education seeks to communicate a systematic understanding of the religious traditions which play significant part in the molding of the culture and civilization where people live.

There is a general negative feeling about religion and religious education because of the activities of religious fanatics like the Islamic Jihadist group, the Boko Haram and other religious crises in various places. Going by all these one can easily say that religion has caused the society more harm than good, that religion divides more than it unites the society. Some even claim that the introduction of religious education in school will go a long way to polarize than unite the people. It in this regard that Aliva Manjari (2019) observed that ‘giving a place in education is impracticable because in school, there are children from various religious groups/ beliefs ...following a particular type of religion in school will create differences in people and all of them will defect from cooperating with the school effort.” While these observations may seem to be true, the aims and objectives of religious and moral education stands out clear.

The aims and objective of religious and moral education is to enable individuals understand their beliefs and practices and to accept other groups whose beliefs and practices are different from their own. It enables man to get a better understanding of the phenomenon of religion. Unlike all the subjects taught in school, Religious Education is the only subject that touches the inner part of man. It gives man a better understanding of self and why he is existing or living. Religious Education enables man to get to the inner meaning of issues without judging from the face value. Religious Education helps man to have an intelligent understanding of the historical and contemporary role of religion in the society. Most

importantly Religious Education helps man to curb the innate negative propensities of human nature that is the tendency of man to satisfy self or toe the easy way. Religious Education is more or less a process of facilitating necessary and desirable changes in the individual. It is the education that uplifts the whole being of the individual spirit, soul and body to the transient. It is theoretical, practical, moral and spiritual, human and divine. Religious Education generates new life into the totality of human person. It revolves around human person taking into consideration the all-round development of the human person. Corroborating the importance and relevance of religious and moral education in schools, Odudele (2006) posits that religious and moral education serve as guidance, not only to the people involved in the religion, but also, the pupils. It helps the people in recognizing what is good and bad. He argues further that since it is clearly stated in the Bible that anybody who does not work must not eat, therefore religious and moral education encourages the pupils to work hard and discourages laziness, gossiping and unnecessary waste of time. Going further, Ogunbadejo and Ayoola (2020) observe that religion and moral education encourage Christian attitude and values such as respect for life, obedience to constituted authority, responsible self, selfless service to God and humanity. Religious and moral education provide learners with moral and spiritual transformation. Therefore, if religious and moral education is given its proper place in the school curriculum in Nigerian educational system, it will go a long way to bring our Nigeria society to its proper place among the nations of the world and sustainable development will be ensured.

## **THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION**

Religious education means different things to different people, some see it as an academic activity that contributes nothing to development when compared with science and technology while others view it as a religious activity that should be restricted to the Churches or Mosques. In the day to day language, religious and moral education is an education about a particular religion and sometimes about religion in general. It is concerned with religious beliefs, practices, rituals, customs, rites and personal attitude or behaviour. Ayantayo

(2018) says ‘that religious education is a holistic education of the mind, intellect, position and attitude of religious practitioners regarding their understanding and expected attitude and disposition to religions different from the ones they practice’. This is different from academic study of religion as a subject in the school curricula. Religious and moral education is a system of unfolding which enables man to become aware of himself as a being with intellectual, physical and spiritual dimensions that must be explored and followed. The National Policy on education clearly recognizes the importance of religious education in National issues and national development by stating that “at all levels of instruction, education should aim at inculcating moral and spiritual values in inter-personal and human relations.” Here therefore the National Policy recognizes that the spiritual development of man must be an integral part of any educational system for inter-personal and human relationship. Religious education is instruction in doctrine and faith. Religious education promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of individuals and of groups and community. According to Collins Dictionary religious education is “an education in school which places a strong emphasis on the beliefs associated with a particular religion or the teaching or instruction of a particular religion”.

Moreover, religious education helps individual for personal development and supports an understanding of the moral, social, and cultural questions that enhance their lives. Religious education challenges stereotypes, promotes cohesion and tackle extremism. Religious education teaches doctrine which define social customs as laws and the violation thereof as crime or misdemeanors requiring punitive correction. In some peoples’ mind religion and morality are related but different. In their distinction morality relates to human conduct and human affairs and relationship between persons while religion deals with relationship between man and the supernatural. However, religion and morality deal with norms that govern conduct. Morality is dependent on religious revelation. Religion focuses on God who rewards both the righteous and punishes the wicked to ensure moral commitment, this means that religion promotes morality by adding its social sanctions from the supernaturally mediated rewards

and punishment. morality on the other hand, serves as a judge of religion. Religion and Morality are intertwined as well as conceptually distinct. Religion concerns itself with beliefs, attitudes and practices that relate human beings to the supernatural or transcendent reality and it addresses such issues as the nature and purpose of man and the natural world, the meaning of death and suffering. Morality on its part deals with a way of regulating human conduct in communities, it concerns ways of settling disputes, ways of appealing to share beliefs involving the supernatural or the sacred.

Religious and moral education is a discipline that helps children and young people to acquire a set of beliefs and value regarding what is right and wrong. This set of beliefs guide their intentions, attitudes and behaviour towards others and their environment.

Thus, religious and moral education does not mean an education about religion, rather, it is an invitation into a pattern of thought and personal commitment. It is an invitation for spiritual enlightenment. The Nigerian society being a secular society does not place any particular religion above the others. What is obtainable is that as a multi-religious society, the major religions are included in school curricular. So, wherever a particular religion happens to be dominating, such religion constitutes the religious subject taught in schools in such environment. For instance, in most schools in the north, Islamic Studies is the major religious subject in schools while in the south, Christian Religious Studies constitutes the dominating religious subject. The pertinent thing, however, is that, in Nigeria, religious education is that enterprise designed to induct each new generation into attitude, beliefs and practices of a particular faith or religion thereby perpetuating the religion and at the same time providing for the individual a unifying center for his life, as well as providing moral precepts for molding and reforming life.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Wikipedia defined sustainable development as an organizing principle for meeting human development goals while simultaneously sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services on which the

economy and the society depend on. The essence of sustainable development is to have a state in the society where living conditions and resources are used to meet the needs of people and at the same time maintain integrity and stability in the society. Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. The United Nations have for the past ten years developed sustainable development goals to overcome various challenges in the global society. Some of the challenges of the development goals include poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. Recently the concept of sustainable and environment protection of the future generation development also covers area of economic and social development and environmental protection of the future generation. Sustainable development is a confluence of three parts namely social economic and environment that must be viable bearable and equitable. This process requires maintenance of productivity by replacing used resources with resources of equal or greater value without endangering or degrading natural biotic systems. This development is the responsibility of present generation to maintain and improve available resources for use by future generation. Nigeria is lacking in the area of sustainable development and this is seen in the poor maintenance culture of the society. Many of our infrastructure have been abandoned to dilapidate. Our roads are death traps, many of the public school buildings have collapsed, our hospitals are hospitals have no modern or outdated equipment. There is no sector of the country that is functioning properly. To worsen the matter our politicians do not believe in continuity. Everyone wants to outshine his predecessor and so we have so many uncompleted or abandoned projects leading to colossal waste of tax payers' money.

In the areas where the projects are completed they are poorly executed so that they start dilapidating as soon as they were completed. The Nigerian roads are typical examples. Another major hindrance to sustainable development is the attitude of Nigerians to public properties. We tend to spoil public properties than maintaining it. At any giving opportunity, Nigerians destroy public properties all in the name of staging protests. Any

slightest unrest is opportunity to destroy public properties. This is where religion and moral comes into play. Any well-formed conscience cannot go on rampage to bomb, burn down or deliberately destroy properties for public use all in the name of protest.

In the year 2015, the United Nations gave a 17-points sustainable development goals (SDGs) as a blue print for sustainable global development. These include ending poverty, protecting the planet, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation and to ensure that by 2030 all people will enjoy peace and prosperity among others. These developments must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. To be able to achieve this there must be financial resources, technological knowhow and the political will power on the part of the government and the people. Unfortunately, the meager resources available are channeled to fight religious insurgency in the name of Boko Haram and Fulani herders and farmers' crises. Thus, a lot human and material resources have been lost in Nigeria as a result of religious crises.

### **MORAL AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Education in Nigeria was introduced by missionaries in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The missionaries established missions and schools to teach the three Rs' namely reading, writing and religion and later arithmetic. The major educational programme of the missionaries was to whip-up individual consciousness and help to train the new elite that championed the course of nationalism and constituted a virile leadership for the young nation at independence. The major aim of education during the missionary period was to cultivate the mind of the pupils and change them to their converts. They made the schools spiritual and religious centers, to eradicate the practices and behaviour of natives like idol worship, bigotry, among others. Missionary education fostered democracy, economic development and civil society and most importantly they changed morality and standards of behavior. They taught people how to love God and their fellow men. They also made sure that people's actions not only fulfill a need, but also, they are sustained even after they left the community. It is in

this context that the importance of religious education comes in.

Religious and moral education built good characters in children. In religious and moral education, young people as well as children engage in the search for the meaning, value and purpose in life. They do this by exploring the beliefs and values available in the religion they are practicing. It is in this regard that Ajah (2015) notes that religious education is a veritable tool for teaching and inculcating moral values. This was the scenario before the Government take-over of school and subsequent removal of religion and moral instruction as it was called then from the schools' curricular. The aim of the government then was that the Churches and Mosques are doing enough preaching and sermons to cover that aspect. The resultant effect now is the high level of moral decadency among school students and youths in general.

During the missionary period people were trained to have conscience and the fear of God in every of their dealings with their fellow men, with their environment and they should always have the well-being of all in the society in general at heart. There was respect for the rule of law. Public life and public properties were preserved and protected. Grievances were expressed in the proper manner without destruction of life and property. There were no traces of bribery and corruption in public offices because people had conscience then. In fact, the civil servants of then regarded bribery and corruption as a serious offence against God and humanity and they seriously abhorred it. The people trained by the missionaries valued self-respect and integrity and would always stay clear of anything that will soil or drag their names to the mud. In those days, title taking was done by merit not by how much money you have acquired either by fair or foul means. National award was given only to those who merited it and not by connection to people in power.

Religion and moral education is meant to train our mind and conscience to be sensitive in everything we do. Religion abhors killing, stealing of any type, bribery and corruption. Selling people for money, homosexuality and lesbianism are offences punishable by death in the Bible but today people are proud of things that we ought to be

shameful about. People proudly go nude in the social media all in the name of body positivity. Religion and morality teaches us that there is limit to everything even in the traditional African society certain things are not accepted. The Nigerian society is seriously sinking deep into the evil with the activities of the youth and children in schools and if care is not taken to bring things especially education to statusque we will be heading to total collapse and disintegration.

### **TOWARDS RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

In the words of Okoro and Obiora (2020) 'sustainable development borders on the imperative of envisioning and objective assessment of the potential impacts of individual or government decisions, policies and programmes on the diverse but interconnected sectors of human society, the environment and the economy.' Sustainable development involves all area of the society that has to be harmonized and holistic because while it is expected to satisfy the present needs of the people it must not in any way compromise the ability of the future to satisfy their own need too. Collaborating this view, Tolu and Abe (2015), opines that 'sustainable development is the social process by which a nation harnesses and mobilizes all resources (human and material) available to it for the purpose of transforming its environment and ultimately improving the quality of social, political and economic life of its citizenry.' The process is a gradual but progressive one which requires combined effort of all the people involved.

Further for any nation to be termed developed there must be equity in gender wage labour, zero gender discrimination and complete gender equality (Diprete and Buchanan 2013). Sustainable development ensures the well-being and dignity of humans, ecological integrity, gender equality and social justice now and in the future. It is a requirement for balancing environmental, social and economic issues in the pursuit of any form of development to improve quality of life of members.

Religion and morality has a lot of roles to play in the maintenance of sustainable development. Religion and morality trains and

equips the individual persons in the community. It teaches tolerance, acceptance and respect for one another. Sustainable development involves maintenance culture and not destructive one like we have in Nigeria today. Therefore, religion encourages dialogue as a means of settling issues. Dialogue and negotiation is important in both private and public life, between family members and government and its workers. Religion teaches basic moral principles needed for peaceful living in the society, such moral principles as love, cooperation, tolerance, justice, responsibility, accountability, peace obedience to constituted authority etc. all these are essential ingredients for sustainable development.

Nigeria nation today is being destroyed by the activities of religious fanatics, creating religious crises in different parts of the country. This has resulted in the destruction of human and material resources needed for sustainable development. Millions of people have lost their lives in various crises ravaging the country. Many properties have been destroyed and worst still the money that could have been channeled to education and other developmental projects are being pumped to fighting Boko Haram insurgency, Bandits kidnapping saga, herdsmen and farmers' killings. All these problems keep occurring because man has been removed from his Source-God. The Bible rightly said that foundation once destroyed what can the righteous do? The religious and moral formation of many Nigerian youths and children has been destroyed by the removal of religion and moral education from formal education curricular. The consciences of many young Nigerians are formed wrongly and that is why they have taken to evil. There is no fear of God in the minds of the people any longer. There is no respect for the rule of law, no respect for constituted authority. The political leaders are not helping matters. There is lack of responsibility and accountability in governance. Our leaders are increasingly self-centered and working only for their own personal interest. Nigerians are completely alienated from moral and religious values that can promote peaceful living and sustainable development.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Religion and Morality have always been agents of change in the society. Religion contributes

significantly to character formation and all round development of the individual. Religious education has helped Nigeria to produce great and respected individuals in the past. People who served the nation meritoriously and contributed their own quota to the development of the Nigerian nation. Many of these past leaders went to mission schools are noted for personality molding and conscience formation.

In Nigeria today we need moral and religious education as much as we need food, water and air to breath. The reason being that every section of Nigeria is collapsing if not completely collapsed. Few sections will serve as example to buttress this statement. First, the Nigerian educational system for instance, the level of examination malpractice cannot be quantified. Both parents and teachers aid and abet cheating in examinations. The government of the day does not help matters, they owe teachers in the universities lot of arrears and entitlements causing them to go on strikes at regular intervals. The number of months' undergraduates stay at home is more than what they stay in school causing students to graduate with only paper certificates that they can hardly defend. Many of the students cannot express themselves properly, it is always garbage in garbage out.

Besides when students graduate there is no hope of employment. As a result, many have taken to yahoo business, some to drugs and still some to stealing, kidnapping and what have you. In the political system Nigeria is not safe either, the elected politicians are not there to serve but there for their own interest. Rigging and thuggery and even killing of opponents has taken over elections in Nigeria. Governments' appointments are lopsided and the federal character system does not exist anymore. In the business arena business men and women flood the market with substandard goods and at the same time increase the prices of goods. Inflation rate is on the high side. In the economic sector the price of dollar cannot be compared to that of any other country even Cote d'Ivoire, Benin Republic currency weighs better than the Naira in the international market. The rising inflation in Nigeria today is indescribable, and the prices of commodities go up on daily basis. All these call for redesigning of our educational

system. In view of the above the following recommendations are made as a head way to hyper hydra problem of Nigeria.

Religion and Moral education should be re-introduced in our educational system and if the Government feels they cannot do it, they should hand over schools to the churches for proper administration. There is nothing wrong if the government partner with the churches to produce good results.

The national policy on education should be revisited. In Nigeria, we always have good policy but the major problem is implementation. As the national policy on education rightly postulated, there should be religious and moral instruction at all levels of education in Nigeria for conscience formation.

All stake holders in education, parents, teachers, religious functionaries etc. should all join hands to achieve this one important objective of ensuring success for the programme. More teachers of Religious and moral education to ensure the success of the programme.

The National orientation agency should be mandated to go round the nation to reawaken the conscience of everyone in the society. They should carry out massive campaign for value re-orientation to awaken the conscience of the Nigerian populace to stand up and defend our values

In the meantime, the teachers of the academic aspect of religion should endeavor to abide by the pedagogical principles of teaching religion. They should bring out the moral lessons of each biblical topics they teach the students as something they go home with every day

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