



FAMILY VALUES AS PANACEA FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY WELLNESS IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The family is generally accepted as that small unit of a community which is also a significant part of the society. Everyone in a community represents a product of their family expectedly to contribute to the wellness of their community through values developed in their families. Contemporary societies globally, including Africa is faced with issues of moral decadence due to loss of family values and eroding community virtues which are essential for sustenance of collective wellness. This paper examined family values as panacea for building community wellness in Africa. Using an exploratory approach to gather secondary data, it clarified the key terms including family values, community wellness and building of panacea. The paper also described the significance of the family to community wellness in Africa, highlighted some family values necessary for community wellness, enumerated some marks of community wellness and discussed building values in family members for community wellness. Some family values identified as necessary for community wellness include; love, respect, tolerance, courage, honesty, and hard work. The study therefore discussed developing family values as a necessity for building community wellbeing. Marks of community wellness include physical, social, and cultural elements which are healthy environment, good interpersonal relationships and good character. To build family values for community wellness, parents are to model good character, share personal experiences of their growth and biblical principles of life and wellness.

Key words: Building, Family Values, Community Wellness, Panacea, Society

INTRODUCTION

The family is a vehicle for cultivating, establishing and advancing moral qualities that will result in the wellness of the community they belong and bring about development of the society they constitute. The saying; “charity begins at home”¹ affirms that the family or home is crucial and a vital institution in the birth of a community and society with harmonious existence. Communities in the contemporary African societies are plagued by issues that

¹J. Jessy Brinda Mary, “Role of Parents in Inculcating Values,” *IJARIE* Vol. 1, Issue 2 (201s6), 59-61.

might be linked to the denigrated family values including institutional, political, religious, and cultural.

Many contemporary African communities are plagued with violence, injustices, poverty, environmental neglect, inter-tribal, religious and political clashes which endanger development and total wellness of the people. This deplorable experience stems from the individuals who are products of families within the community. It is pertinent to understand that many of the atrocities and social vices in the communities today are perpetuated by individuals and most specifically, those with poor family upbringing. Every community that is composed of families with lack of moral values will be plagued with dysfunctional systems contrasting its wellness..

This paper is purposed to examine family values as panacea for building community wellness in Africa. The paper clarifies the key terms of family values and community wellness and describes family values as veritable tools for community wellness in Africa. Furthermore, it highlighted the marks of community wellness and family values necessary for community wellness. Finally, the paper discussed the building of family values and recommendations for as well as methods of inculcating family values that will foster wellness and transformation in the community.

I. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Key terms such as family values, community wellness, and building panacea are defined in the way they are used in this study as follows;

Family Values: A family is defined as a social unit which comprises parents and the children they raise.² The word family is a derivation from the Latin term *familia* which means a collection of people that are brought together either by marriage or recognized births such

²M. F. T. Susie Duffy, *Parenting Skills You Must Have for a Happy Family*
<http://www.parentiq.com/news/definingyourfamilyvalues.asp> Accessed on 11/05/2022

as biological, adoption or other similar relationships. Thus, a family is a group of people who share biological relationship, emotional tie, common values, intentions and commitments.³ Values in this sense are the beliefs individuals regard as essential for themselves and perhaps for humankind generally.⁴ As such, Family Values imply the moral and social values that are established and kept within a family.⁵ They include the ethical virtues, social norms, moral standards that are learned and cultivated within the family through speech, behavior, character and general disposition of the family members.

Family Values according to Bik and Andreasens are the fundamental beliefs, ambitions and values of the individual members of the family which influence how things are executed or achieved within the family.⁶ As morals that assist in modelling attitudes, beliefs and ideals of a family, they consist of ethical standards considered as right or wrong and practiced through the generations to becoming traits, norms, and noticeable identifications of family members.

Community Wellness: A community is a group of people that shared common interests, aspirations and values either virtual or physical. It is not just a people in a geographical area but people of the same ideas, aspiration, interest, and social groups that are scattered across the globe but bounded together by their ideas, interest, and philosophy of life. Wellness entails the state of being well. It does not only connote a good physical or health condition but also considers fitness in all aspect of the being. The term will also be used interchangeably with wellbeing. Community wellness means different things in different communities, however, it is primarily concerned with the combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by the individuals and their

³What is the definition of a family? <http://www.raq.org.au/faq/what-definition-family> Accessed on 7/05/2022.

⁴Elizabeth Crary, Values Matter: Using Your Values to Raise Caring, Responsible, Resilient Children. <http://centerforparentingeducation.org/library-of-articles/indulgence-values/values-matter-using-your-values-to-raise-caring-responsible-resilient-children-what-are-values/> Accessed on 9/05/2022.

⁵The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4th Edition, <https://www.wordnik.com/words/family%20values> Accessed on 8/05/2022

communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfil their potential within a reasonable time frame.⁷

Building Panacea: to build is to put needed materials together in the construction of desired structure or object. Panacea implies a solution to some problem or antidote to unruly situation. Thus building panacea implies performing or applying some actions to solving problems obstructing the achievement of desired good result.

In this paper, family values which refer to a set of ethical standards with long history of traditional practice and specifications including honesty, diligence, generosity, humility, hospitality and more in the upbringing of family members are considered as the necessary building blocks to achieving community wellness. These have the tendency to encourage mutual love not only within the family but also among families within a community, forming a network of goodness to encourage total wellbeing of all members of the community.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FAMILY TO AFRICAN COMMUNITY

Family in Africa context is the primary unit of human culture and community. Family organization is a crucial aspect of African cultural identity. This is the reason why family life is often governed by social and cultural structures that encourage activities and constraint others. Family constitutes the smaller structure of groups shared by individuals that make up a given community whereby their social and cultural functions as individuals are made manifest within the community. In other words, family is a prominent nexus in the community life of Africans.

Typical African family is a system whereby everybody is linked with all the other members of the family to form a network of connections like a web within the community they all belong. Ojua et al argue that the family in a typical African perception is the cradle of

⁶Olof Bik and Michel Adriaansens, *Fostering Family Value(s): Managing Culture and Behaviour in the Family Business* <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/family-business-services/publications/assets/pwc-fostering-family-value-2012.pdf> Accessed on 11/05/2022

⁷ Wiseman, J., Bbasher K. "Community Wellbeing in unwell World: Trends, Challenges, and Possibilities" in *Journal of Public Health Policy*, Vol. 29, 353-366.

human values and formation.⁸In the similar assertion, Mafunmbate sees the family as an integral instrument for community cohesion, continuity, and stability.⁹ Thus, living and being together are the essence of a community in the basic expression of the African family. Consequently, in many African communities, the family is inclusive in nature, it is not limited by space or time, but cuts across generations of relatives, living far and near as well as the ancestors. African community is characterized by familial bonding and a sense of belonging to a large family. Community-based solidarity pervaded every aspect of social life. As the custodian of cultural expressions and guide on social functions, the community takes responsibility to individual safety, security through the family instructs members on expressions of values to fostering stability and development among the people. Thus, the family is a significant aspect of African community.

III. FAMILY VALUES NECESSARY FOR COMMUNITY WELLNESS

Every culture is tasked with the duty to shape the behaviours of its people and make them distinct not only in language, dressing, or occupation but also become evident in their habits, traits, and values. The ideal family takes responsibility for the well-being of its members and as custodian of the cultural elements and traditional practices inherent within it, the family owes all its members the duty of transference of the values from one generation to another. According to Mafumbate, the community is a body with common implicit principle of living and promoting communality, collectivity, social justice, unity, and pluralism at the same

⁸ Ojua, T. Asu, Lukpata, Felicia E. and Atama, Chimezie “Exploring the Neglect of African Family Value System and its Effects on Sustainable Development” In *American Journal of Human Ecology* vol. 3, No 3, 2014, 44.

⁹ Racheal Mafumbate, “The Undiluted African Community: Values, The Family, Orphanage and Wellness in Traditional Africa” In *Information and knowledge management* vol. 9 No 8, 2019, 8.

time.¹⁰ In essence, the community is the larger version of a family through which values from the many families that come together get combined for the wellness of everyone.

Belonging to a smaller family unit and a larger community unit at the same time leaves some sense of obligation on individual member for the security of other members within the family or community frames. In order to make valuable contributions to the wellness of their community, it is necessary to promote family values that will present the family well within the community. African family values that have been identified with the people across different nations globally include the following:

Love and Respect: Through love and respect, a myriad of problems are solved both at the family and community levels. Love and respect go together making it possible to recognize and accommodate others as human though they might be from other family or community backgrounds. In Africa, children are taught to respect elders and their peers. Children are to reflect love and respect in the way they speak, act or discuss with others.¹¹ This is well explained among the Yoruba of the western part of Nigeria in a saying; *aibowo fagba ati aibowo f'enikan ni ko je ki aye o roju*, meaning “lack of respect for the elder and the other person is what destroys the world.” And a similar proverb in Ghana says “the brother or sister who does not respect the tradition of the elders will not eat with the elders.” This tends to call the attention of elders to bring the younger ones up with the values of respect through greetings, speech, and actions. This relates to caring for others in love and giving respect to those in higher authority within the family and community. Family members should be taught to be considerate with other people’s feelings. A community that lacks families who promote the values of love and respect will not exhibit signs of wellness.

Godly Communication: Communication resolves majority of the problems experienced within relationship and produces healthy relationship. Hence, learning how to

¹⁰ Mafumbate, 10.

¹¹ Richard Fugate, *What the Bible Says about Child Training* (U.S.A: Alatheia Publishers, Inc. 1980), 67.

talk with other people becomes inevitable so as to promote good relationship. Also, by communicating one's challenges other members of the society can proffer solution. Good communication and pleasant words are strong elements to build family and develop community

Understanding/Sensitivity and Empathy: Human beings are created as social beings to live well with other persons in the community. It is important to do to others as one is expected from others. Therefore, to understand others, be sensitive to their needs and empathize with them are imperative. Human beings are not replica of one another, thus, they cannot think or act alike. Since there are diverse kinds of people living together in the community, conflict of interest is inevitable. This requires understanding on the part of community members to accommodate others' point of view and adjust where necessary.¹² In this vein, community members who have cultivated these values will be able to tolerate other persons differences and accommodate them as well.

Empathy is a vital discipline and value in families that should be inculcated in children. Egocentricity or selfishness is a trait by which a well-behaved human being should not portray.¹³ Being sensitive to the needs of other individual is an attribute that depicts one as a good person and also enables one to contribute to the stability of the community to which one belongs. This trait should be encouraged to start within the family. Therefore, this is one of the values that are embraced in building community wellness.

Honesty and Hard Work: Honesty is the ability to tell the truth in every situation irrespective of the outcome. To be honest is to possess credibility in every aspect of life including character and work. It is often said that "there is no alternative to hard work." When it relates to teaching children values, they should be made to understand that success in

¹² Rujuta Borkar, *A Marvelous List of Family Values You Just Can't Ignore* <https://www.buzzle.com/articles/list-of-family-values.html> Accessed on 11/12/2017.

¹³Ibid, 82.

life requires hard work. To discover this attribute earlier equips one for challenges of life. This inevitably earns one respect and approval in the community coupled with self-esteem.

Forgiveness: Forgiveness is a vital value in the family which has to do with tendency to pardon somebody for a wrongdoing, relieving oneself. There is no way there will not be issues within the family setting, therefore, the need for forgiveness is of high essence. It is necessary for every member of the family to exhibit love which would be the basis for forgiveness when wronged.

Courage and Gratitude: Parents are expected to encourage their children to be courageous. This will greatly assist the children to confront any challenge that may come their way in life.¹⁴ Occasionally, people experience fears and insecurities. Children should be encouraged to back up their family members in moments of trials. All family members should be taught to show appreciations unto God for wonderful things received from Him, especially breath of life. Also, they are to be thankful for whatever help or favour extended to them by any member of the community.¹⁵

The aforementioned values become more or less inborn traits developed by individuals as members of a given family. Parents and older persons are to impart family values into the children and younger ones within the family for them to be good and reliable members of the community.

IV. MARKS OF COMMUNITY WELLNESS

The importance of family values cannot be overemphasized sequel to the roles attached to them. Community wellness is described as “where all members [of the community] have the essential tools to be their best selves.”¹⁶ This will enhance living a healthy life in all aspects

¹⁴ Asha, *10 Family Values to Teach Kids* <https://www.boldsky.com/pregnancy-parenting/kids/2014/ten-family-values-to-teach-kids-040641.html> Accessed on 12/12/2017

¹⁵ Brahma Kumaris, *8 Family Values* <https://www.speakingtree.in/allslides/8-family-virtues> Accessed on 12/12/2017

¹⁶ “Wellness” in St Mark’s Episcopal School accessed from <http://www.stmes.org> on 14/04/23

including physical, social, psychological, emotional and spiritual. It implies that community wellness does not only consider the wellbeing of individuals in the community but also include wellness in the inter-personal relationships of all people in the community starting from the families. Some of the marks of wellness are discussed as follows:

Physical: this comprises the physical health condition of members of the community connoted by lack of an outbreak or epidemic, or manageable and controlled disease conditions. According to Mark Hyman, “the power of a community to create health is far greater than any doctor, clinic or hospital.”¹⁷ Healthy physical environment should include clean air and water ways, personal hygiene and green physical environment. Physical appearances of members should depict joy, happiness and stress free lives.

Social: These are marks of belonging to a family within a giving community. This will promote equity, justice, love and inclusiveness. Cultural elements from the family level to the community focusing on individual development will result into communal wellness. Social marks of wellness will reduce violence in families, schools and society. Inter personal relationships within the community are aligned to foster among the members advancements in health, and quality of life. Families with distinct values can defend their family virtues from attempts of infiltrations with contradictory principles in the face of external hostility.

Cultural: The cultural background of families are found interconnected with the community they belong. Community values are imperative to the socialization of individuals within their family set up developed through the family, school, and environment. Some of these values may comprise acquiring knowledge and essential aptitudes and then employing them at home and living out the values obtained within the family.¹⁸ Social norms defined by a family provide the emotional and physical basis for children serving as the foundation upon

¹⁷ “Welcome to the Community Wellness Centre” in Columbia University , New York. Accessed rom <https://communitywellness.manhattanville.columbia.edu/> on 15/04/23

¹⁸Gener and Emily Geminiano, *Filipino Family Values*[https://wehavekids.com/parenting/ Filipino-Family-Values](https://wehavekids.com/parenting/Filipino-Family-Values) Accessed on 11/12/2017

which family members learn, develop and operate in their community and the world. Also, customs taught by the family bring about a disciplined and organized life within the community. Thus, family is important in developing the culture and moral values of the child.

Good Character: Ideas transmitted from one generation to the other constitute family values. It takes into consideration how people desire to live their family life. Family values improve the character and transform the children to become good individuals. Also, there is provision of emotional and physical foundation for children. Family values guide every individual in their actions. Children come to be good sequel to the values imparted by their family members.¹⁹

V. BUILDING OF FAMILY VALUES

It is important to instill family values on all members of the family. Doing this begins with the parents who are the first contact adult persons the children and younger members of the family will look up to. The following are some methods parents can employ in building values in members of their families:

1. Modelling Good Values: Parents are expected to set good examples for their children and all family members as models. The home is the first and the best place to learn. Children learn from the way they are being treated by parents and what they overhear parents say. Thus, if parents desire their children to demonstrate good values like respect for others, honesty, compassion and hard work, they must display these traits themselves. Any good value inculcated in children can be easily discarded if parents are seen behaving contrarily. When inconsistency is noted between what parents say and what they do, children pay no attention to their instruction. However, when parents' actions are coherent with their words, then their message is reinforced.

¹⁹M. F. T. Susie Duffy, *Defining Your Family's Values*
<http://www.parentiq.com/news/definingyourfamilyvalues.asp> Accessed on 9/12/2017

2. **Admittance of Mistakes Committed:** When parents prove inadequate to their children, they need to acknowledge their mistake and apologize. By doing this, children will learn respect for others and taking responsibility for their errors. When parents apologize to their children, they simply teach how to react when errors are committed.
3. **Sharing of Personal Experiences:** Parents can reminisce over their past and consider several occurrences through which they learn worthwhile lessons. They should be ready to tell their children some of those occurrences, particularly those that have to do with decision making that were in line with good values. Parents can also narrate how they refused to follow the multitude on some issues but held unto their opinion. They can tell of the occasions when they were in dilemma and how they were able to make good decisions. Times when bad choices were made in which parents learnt the hard way can be shared as well. This will help adults who are confronted with comparable moral struggles. When parents' mistakes are made known to them, they will learn and avoid such in their journey of life.
4. **Effective Communication for Learning:** Occasions always occur that opens opportunities for communication to instill values in children. It is essential for parents to have positive mind set while children are in their early years for whatever children learn will have indelible mark on their pattern of thinking. As parents will not want their children to be depressed or pessimistic, they should ensure that the atmosphere at home is relaxed. Regular communication with children will contribute to positive atmosphere at home for while family is the first school for children, parents are the first instructors.
5. **Bible Friendliness and Holy Spirit Factor:** Parents need to encourage their children to love the word of God by organizing Bible studies that deal with different values such as honesty, generosity, love, gratitude and humility. The Holy Spirit is important to help pass desirable values to family members through the study of the Bible. Parents

should pray and commit their children or family members to the hands of God so that there could be spiritual illumination.

6. **Being Responsible and Learning Perseverance in Challenges:** Parents are to allow children to be responsible for their actions. When they violate school rules they must be made to face the consequences. This will teach them to be obedient to constituted authority. Also, when children destroy other people's properties they should be punished for it for them to learn how to be careful in handling things. Children should be taught to complete whatever project they embark upon no matter how tough it seems to be. Parents should make children understand that winners never quit and quitters never win. In the process, they will learn commitment, persistence and accountability.
7. **Applaud and Encourage Good Behaviour:** Any time children do something good, they should be appreciated. Maybe they do school assignment without being forced or they do home chores without being instructed, they should be praised. When children are appreciated or praised, good behaviours are reinforced.²⁰ Also, parents should encourage their children to assist other people whenever they have the opportunity. This will develop in them virtues like compassion. They should likewise encourage people who are passing through unpalatable experiences. As they engage in this, it will help them to be strong in their own moments of trials.
8. **Encouraging Family Bond:** Parents should introduce growing children to other family members, especially from the extended circle. Parents are to explicate in clear terms the relationships that exist between those family members and the children and how the children are expected to relate with them. By doing this, children will understand how to esteem people close to them and thereby come to know the significance of family from their early years.

²⁰ Becky Sweat, *10 Practical Ways to Teach Your Children Right Values* <https://www.ucg.org/the-good-news/10-practical-ways-to-teach-your-children-right-values>. Accessed on 13/12/2017.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has examined family values as panacea for building community wellbeing in Africa. It identified several basic family values that are integral for community wellbeing, this include love and respect, tolerance, honesty, courage, sharing, hardworking among others that must be put in practice to foster community wellbeing. These values should be established and taught by the family so as to make individuals acceptable and responsible towards the wellness of the society. It is believed that whatever is planted by the family is what will be nurtured by the community because the family as a very important aspect of the community which must be given attention in order for each member of the community to build communality and stability.

Building a community of wellness requires the need to develop right values and approaches to life and to communicate these values to immediate family members and neighborhood via an exemplary lifestyle which will ultimately culminate in community transformation. Parents should try to lead their children to know the Lord at the early stage to inculcate the fear of the Lord in their heart which will guide their behaviors and attitudes. It is important that parents and the elderly members of every family to instill and inculcate family values in their children and the younger family members from the early ages while parents model such values to curb denigration of values in the contemporary community. Restoring family values in the contemporary family will reduce the moral decadence in the African community.

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