Chapter 4

The Imperatives of Critical Thinking, Social Norms, and Values in Africa:
Pathways to Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines critical thinking as a veritable tool in the usage of values, norms, and beliefs for sustainable development in contemporary societies. The problem statement raises the need for knowledge of what critical thinking, social norms, and values are, as well as the competence in how to employ and apply its tools in social policy designed for development. Illustrating from an extensive contemporary literature on social norms and values, this chapter examines how social norms, values, and beliefs can enhance the development and transformation of the society. Findings hypothesize that critical thinking, social norms, and values, based on thoughts and experience, are capable of guiding human behavior towards truth, development, and functional transformation toward solution to many societal problems. The study suggests collaborative measures to encourage inculcating social norms and values in the society.

INTRODUCTION

In every society, the strength of social values lies in the conformity to the societal norms and values of the social system where individuals and groups participate in social activities (Essien, 2017). This requires critical thinking because changes in the evaluative norms and values in the society are imperative with any social transformation, standards of behaviour, stability, personality development and consistency to the prevalent cultural values (Turkkahramana, 2013). In many African societies, just as in any society across the globe, norms and values provides the substratum of social order and behaviour. In this regard, some social practices and unapproved behavioural pattern are proscribed by social norms. It is therefore, not surprising that some individuals who emphasize the validity of fundamental moral

principles, norms, or laws (nonrelativists) have relatively negative attitudes about proscribed forms of behaviour (Ullah & Shah, 2016).

In contrast, individuals who challenge the value of universal moral norms endorse more permissive attitudes. Social values in every society have sociological, psychological, religious, and ethical bases, even though their sociological foundations were becoming much stronger. This explains why social values under transition tends to display disparity in its observance by various social layers of our society, creating confusion and increasing social problems in society, at home and schools (Aydun, 2011). The increasing gap between ways of thinking and behavior of people especially the youths in our contemporary and ideal society is aptly considered an indicator to moral gulf, social violence and intolerance problems. Norms and values are responsible for providing basis to the prevalence of a healthy cultural tradition in any society as well as devising the rules and laws which governs the relative society (Bacanli, 2011).

Although changes are inevitable in every society as has been witnessed in the history of both human beings and societies, nonetheless always in a subtle manner which guarantees consistency to the social equilibrium of the society, any deviation or disregard to the existing norms and value system always lands such society into a social disintegration and disorganization of social fabrics. Thus, the perverse manifestations experienced in our society today are the result of permissive anti-social practices and normlessness (Cagel, 2011). This has given birth to deviant behaviours such as violence conflicts, extramarital and premarital sex, terrorism, militancy, insurgency, drug addiction and many more all associated with decrease in positive values and normlessneass. This is symptomatic to a strong violation of code of ethics, social values and norms in our contemporary society. This study therefore, set out to examine the imperatives of critical thinking and social norms as a tool and pathways to positive values and sustainable development in Africa (Essien, 2017).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This scholarly discourse is founded on Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Planned Behaviour (TPB) which posits that "a person's behavior is determined by his/her intention to perform the behavior and that this intention is, in turn, a function of his/her attitude toward the behavior and his/her subjective norm" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 179). According to this theory, the best predictor of behavior is intention. Intention is the cognitive representation of a person's readiness to perform a given behavior, and it is considered to be the immediate antecedent of behavior. This intention is determined by three things: their attitude toward the specific behavior, their subjective norms and their perceived behavioral control. The theory of planned behavior holds that only specific attitudes toward the behavior in question can be expected to predict that behavior (Ajzen, 1991, p. 180). In addition to measuring attitudes toward the behavior, we also need to measure people's subjective norms – their beliefs about how people they care about will view the behavior in question.

This study also finds premise on Vygotskian's socio-cultural model which cogitates that superior order functions and develops out of every social interaction. According to this theory, "every function in an individual's cultural development becomes visible in life in twofold" (Adamson & Chance, 1998). Firstly, it appears on the social level between people, and secondly, it emerges later on in an individual level from inside the person involved. This implies that the individual in the society must first relates with people which includes the parents, siblings, elders and peers in order to develop culturally before the norms and values are molded and deposited in such an individual. The most important goal worthy

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