



**IWÒGBÈ ỌKÀN (SELF-CONSCIENCE): A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL
OF HUMAN BEHAVIORS AS VIEWED BY ỌFÚN MÉJÌ IN IFA'
DIVINATION SYSTEM**

**Oluwatoyin Adebola
GBADAMOSI, Ph.D,**

**Samuel Kayode
OLALEYE, Ph.D,**

**Julius Sunday
ADEKOYA, Ph.D,**

Department of Religious Studies,
University of Ibadan

Abstract

Humanity has grappled with different kinds of problems since antiquity ranging from natural disasters, sicknesses and diseases, famines and all sorts of problems. Unfortunately, a sizeable portion of human problems originates from fellow human beings, wars, civil unrests, frauds, corruption, rape and all sorts of evils. Nigeria, like other third world nation is bedeviled by its own array of problems given by its multi-religious and multi-cultural nature also made worse by the problem of bad leadership and mismanagement of public funds. The past decade has witnessed an unusual spike in killings and kidnapping, particularly in the menace of the Boko-Haram, Fulani herdsmen, other forms of insecurity, bad governance and blatant disregard for the rule of law. Nigeria is no doubt a religious nation. This realization makes it necessary to wonder if the populace especially the ruling class is still in possession of the individual guiding voice, judge or judgment known as conscience. Traditionally, philosophers, theologians and scientists view conscience as a unified faculty, from different perspectives, evidently this kind of conception is laden with tautologies because of the pluralistic and the subjective nature of the concept. This paper however, appraised the current realities in Nigeria especially in the area of human behaviours using the epistemic function of *Iwògbè Ọkàn* (self-conscience) as a philosophical tool through *Ọfún Méjì* of the *Ifá* Divination System. This was done with a view to re-examining the issue of the degradation in human behaviours in order to know where Nigerians, using the Yorubá of South-western Nigeria as a case study actually got it wrong. The

study discovered that degradation in human behaviours in the contemporary Nigeria shows that the populace in spite of their obvious religiosity got it wrong because *Ìwògbè Ọkàn* is either lost or broken in the society. It is imperative therefore that Nigerians should make re-examination of themselves at the personal level a priority. The same way personal adjustments are made to appearance when a mirror is looked at, *Ìwògbè Ọkàn* should lead to changes at the individual and national level.

Keywords: *Iwògbè Ọkàn* (self-conscience), *Ọfún Méji*, Ifá Divination System, Human Behaviours.

Introduction

Conscience, understood as *Iwògbè Ọkàn* among the Yorubais a term that features predominantly in discourses related to morality especially in a society like the Yoruba where ethical and non-ethical behaviours are taken seriously. Traditionally, philosophers and scientists view conscience as a unified faculty, evidently this kind of conception is laden with tautologies. Regardless of the ambiguity of the concept, when reference is made to conscience, it has to do with an individual, it is uniquely personal and the conscience of two persons is not analogous.

Conscience is often confused with concepts like emotions, intuition, affect or motive. Daniel Sulmasy made efforts to distinguish conscience from these closely related terms. He holds that although these concepts are associated with conscience, it is not reducible to them.¹ Asserting further that conscience itself is not what makes us act justly or wrongly, even though it may eventually lead to a motivational state, conscience is beyond motivation. It is also seen by Kelly Asao and David Buss as a set of psychological mechanisms designed to guide one's behaviour towards others². This is put in place to avoid negative consequences which happen when judgment fails. The key word here is the consequences of human actions, conscience makes people anticipate such consequences, which in turn influences their actions. The anticipated emotion of guilt that comes from betrayal may function as a stop to the temptation of hurting a loved one.

Simon Schall and Peter Canon show a connection between conscience and morality by beginning their article with two interesting questions: "How do people decide what is right and wrong and to what extent are their actions guided by such moral considerations"?³ There is another definition of conscience which shows the link between conscience and moral intuition. It is defined as the intense sense of goodness in morality or badness when judging one's actions, both intended and those already done⁴. This definition shows that

¹ (Sulmasy, 2008: www.springerlink.com)

² (Asao & Buss, 2016)

³ (Schnall & Canon, 2012: 295-315)

⁴ (Thagard & Finn, 2007: www.researchgate.net/publication/228495480)

conscience covers even human intentions, that is, it is not restricted to activities already done. The focus of Thagard and Finn in their study on conscience is from the perspective of the brain process. They highlight the role of intuition in evaluating moral claims while offering a comparative analysis of the theory of emotional consciousness and also the theory of moral intuition these theories are viewed with existing theories of conscience within philosophical and psychological contexts. They also posited conscience as God-given ability to distinguish right from wrong within a theological perspective.

Emmanuel Iwuagwu offers another position on the term conscience; by calling it "the subjective moral faculty"⁵ He holds further that the fact that it is common for people to refer moral judgment to conscience makes it a kind of Supreme Court of justice whose pronouncements are absolute and inviolable. People often abuse the conscience and they do all sorts of things in its name. This abuse he calls "privatization of conscience" and its pronouncements are subjective. According to him, the privatization of conscience makes moral judgments and individual affair leading to ethical relativism which disregards objective moral norms.

Although persons do not share conscience, they share these three cultural facets of conscience: cognitive, emotional and conative.⁶ Each one of these facets is influenced by peculiar historical, physical, cultural, religious, social or educational factors. These factors are responsible for shaping the three facets of conscience in individuals and the outcome is ultimately different among persons. Cognitive facet of conscience involves personal reflections on past or future acts, thereby considering the rightness or wrongness of such activities. This consideration is based on reflections on personal motives, intentions, emotions, dispositions and thoughts on whether they are morally good or bad. The emotional facet of conscience revolves around the ability to display certain emotions such as remorse, guilt, shame, or moral approval. The Conative facet of conscience makes individuals to pursue what they personally believe as good while those considered as bad are shunned.

Sulmasy looks at conscience in a unique way by asking questions on why respect for it is so important.⁷ He holds that there are two ways to look at conscience in order to arrive at a meaningful understanding of the concept; Retrospectively and Prospectively. According to him, retrospectively, conscience can be disturbed by things one has done or failed to do. This disturbance he believes is called judicial conscience, it is when people make judgement that what one has done upon further reflection was for example, wrongfully decided. Prospective conscience on the other hand, also called legislative conscience is alerted not only by the things we have already done but also by things we anticipate doing.

⁵ (Iwuagwu, 2018 :www.researchgate.net/publication/327100497)

⁶ (Koops, *Et al* 2010:2)

⁷(Daniel Sulmasy, 2008:www.springerlink.com)

Conscience and Morality

Questions on morality have been central in philosophy over the years, particularly, normative ethics which deals with how people are expected to act, the basis for the formulations of moral standards are formed and the degree to which people adopt such formulated standards in measuring their own behaviours and that of others. Morality, no doubt cannot be discussed without focusing on the idea or notion of self. According to Plato as quoted by J.M Cooper (1997), self is nothing other than the soul, which is the ruler of all which belongs to a human including his body.⁸ Immanuel Kant, another outstanding philosopher in his work *Categorical Imperatives*, holds that there are what he calls "absolute objective truths" within what people understand as morality and that it is our responsibility as humans to employ reason in the discovery of such truths. On another note, John Stuart Mill in his essay on Utilitarianism believes that every human being should do whatever results to the greatest level of happiness when applied to the highest population of people. David Hume, on the other hand focused on the idea of sentiment when addressing the issue of conscience and morality. He held a contrary position to that of Kant, on the role of reason in deciding between what is right and wrong. He believed that since humans generally are sentimental beings, decisions of morality cannot be totally judged through reason, rather, humans, most times, rely on things like their feelings when judging acts as either right or wrong.

Interestingly, in contemporary discourses on conscience or morality, attention has shifted from reason or classical understanding of the self to scientific understandings. Psychologists have begun the exploration of empirical means in their approach to the study of morality in recent years. They now work with neurologists to address issues related to morality and others psychological concerns. Questions on morality and conscience are not only restricted to psychologists, philosophers and religious ethicists, theologians and other professionals are interested in the processes that guide human decision making, choices and how responsibility is taken for actions. From philosophical and religious writing on ethics, there are indications that the following are general moral goals that influence the decisions of people:

- i. Increase the well-being of people in general.
- ii. Act in accord with abstract moral principles such as fairness and respect for authority.
- iii. Satisfy the expectations of social groups such as family
- iv. Comply with religious standards or other moral codes.

Violations of the goals listed above lead to common negative emotions like guilt or shame while adherence to the goals leads to emotions like happiness and relief. Why do we follow these norms or goals? Why must we be moral? Omoregbe presents six interesting reasons which may suffice as answers

⁸ (Cooper, 1997)

to these questions: It is God's commandment, in order to be happy, because man is a social being, because man is a rational being, morality is the path to happiness and because of the law of *nemesis*.⁹ Unfortunately, it seems *nemesis* and the other reasons identified by Omoregbe are gradually losing their power because of the gross inhumanity humans mete on their fellow humans.

Deviation from Moral Intuition or Absence of Conscience

People worldwide have the same basic features such as blood circulation, respiration, stress hormones, body parts as well as brain areas. This similarity is regardless of colour, race, social status, education or religion. Apart from these general physical attributes, the human race also shares the same emotional traits because some things generally make people happy while others generally make them sad. For example, most people, or a good number of people cannot stand the sights of gory scenes thereby finding acts such as killing or the rape of a minor as totally appalling. On the other hand, the unfolding of a beautiful event such as success stories, near death experiences or even delivery of a baby, brings smiles to most peoples' faces. Thus, there is a great level of similarity in people's cognitive appraisal of scenes. Although there could be some levels of disagreement as a result of religious and cultural differences. This is very apt in contemporary Nigeria as the south is believed to align on issues whereas, some people in the North takes a contrary opinion, for example the issue of banditry or terrorism in the name of religion. In this case, majority of Northerners see nothing wrong in these acts, where some people claim that bandits are not criminals. Apart from this somewhat general example, there is a group of people who deviate from the general norms of right or wrong. This class of people are estimated to be about 1% of the general population, they are known as psychopaths.¹⁰ These people do not see anything wrong in what they are doing or others with similar ideologies. They can kill and disseminate body parts of another human being without blinking an eye. It is generally believed that such peoples' conscience is dead, that is they no longer have any remorse for their actions. In contemporary Nigeria, the media is awash with news on ritual killing, sell of body parts and unimaginable evils. The people involved in such acts belong to the category of psychopaths, one may wonder if they are not more than the 1% of the Nigerian population given the number of cases reported in the media.

Some factors have been identified as what may be responsible for deviating from moral intuitions and they include the following: Psychological defects, Lack of moral education, Biased moral education and Situational distortions.¹¹ Thus, just like physical defects that make it a challenge to carry out some normal physical activities such as seeing or walking, someone with a psychological defect may not have any remorse for doing a terrible act. In the

⁹(Omoregbe. 1998: 104-115)

¹⁰(Thagard & Finn, 2007: www.researchgate.net/publication/228495480)

¹¹(Thagard & Finn, 2007: www.researchgate.net/publication/228495480)

same way, when a person is lacking in some form of education, either lack of it or biased education, he/she will find it difficult to act in a capacity of human feelings, sympathy or empathy expected of him because of the absence of education. Idowu deviates from the excuse of lack of education given as a possible factor for their activities. Idowu opines that every human being who is not clearly an imbecile has the knowledge of right and wrong...everyone knows that right is not the same thing as wrong... with the Yorùbá, morality is certainly the fruit of religion.¹² This knowledge of right and wrong are the roots of morality which entails ethical obligations of people and their moral duties. There is a clear difference between ethical duties or obligations and what we call sin or taboo. The latter have grave consequences in most cases and punishments are often attached to them. The former on the other hand do not often warrant punishments *per se*, the only punishment being the violators lose the respect and honour accorded to them. Yorùbá value their names and they guard this jealously, which is why it is said: *Orúkọ rere sàń ju wúrà àti fádákà lọ*- a good name is better than gold and silver.

Having a good name is an integral part of etiquette in the indigenous Yoruba society. Ayantayo says of etiquette, which is a term closely associated with ethical duties and moral obligations. He says, "Society formulates rules and norms to guide man's actions; one of such norms geared towards promoting a morally healthy society is etiquette...anyone who abides by social etiquette is respected, honoured, loved, commended and appreciated by the society while the reverse is the case for those who reject or act in defiance of social etiquette."¹³ Unfortunately, the reference and importance attached to having a good seem to be waning in the contemporary society. These days among people in authority and everywhere, it appears people are in defiance of etiquette or expectations of good behaviour from them.

Ìwà (Character), Ìwògbè Okan and Morality

The Yorùbá society is highly cultural and communal, which makes a person's affair the concern of everybody. Once a person fails in certain duties and obligations expected from him/her, the person can easily be called to order by the people around him/her (relatives and friends). This is only possible because there are unwritten codes of conduct guiding the ways of life of the Yorùbá. The Yorùbá society like many other societies is governed by ethical codes. These codes are the premises for recognizing and labeling the *Ìwà* of a person. A person with a bad character among the Yorùbá is frowned at by all and such people are called *Àrígíd'èniyàn*. The etymology of this name is *Igi* which means wood, or tree, showing that a person with bad *Ìwà* is likened to a mere tree. Among the Yorùbá, *Ìwà* is very important and in human relationships. According to Lábéodán who classifies the usage of *Ìwà* into two;

¹² (Idowu 1996: 149-154)

¹³ (Ayantayo, 2016: 2-3)

ontological and the ethical evaluative. She says, the ontological enables one to identify the quantitative existence of a person as revealed by his/her behaviour, the life style or manner of existence of the person. The ethical evaluative, on the other hand, represents a qualitative judgment of how good or bad a person's *Ìwà* is.¹⁴ *Ìwà* cannot be discussed without linking it to ethics, and morality which also, is an integral part of ethics. If ethics is closely linked to morality, then, the Yorùbá religion is a highly ethical religion. This is because it is not easy to remove morality from the Yorùbá religion because there are religious sanctions for moral breaches. Although some scholars like Wiredu denounce the fact that morality is derivative of religion,¹⁵ others like Oyeshile, on the other hand offers a practical approach to the issue of morality and religion. According to him,

Though religion plays considerable role in determining the moral norms of the Yorùbá, it is definitely not the sole origin as there are other sources of Yorùbá moral norms such as custom and habit, human rationality and even human experience. It would be wrong to claim that Yorùbá morality is exclusively dependent on religion.¹⁶

Contrary to Oyeshile's view of ethics, Idowu, on the other hand affirms its sole root in religion. Idowu puts this succinctly when he says: "morality is the fruit of religion and that, to begin with, it was dependent on it...the sense of obligation to do that which is believed to be right, is in fact, the pressure of God upon every human life".¹⁷ This position of Idowu can be traced to Plato's conviction that the source of reality must be the "form of the good". Kant later developed a type of moral argument, but he did not claim that the existence of morality was theoretical evidence for the truth of theism, but rather held that moral obligation makes it necessary to postulate God's existence.¹⁸

Another source of ethical duties and obligations in the Yorùbá religion is found in the relationships with the elders and the cult of the ancestors. According to Awolalu, "it is the responsibility of the elders to see that all social norms and ethics relating to the well-being of the community are maintained". In addition, he believes that "the elders are aware that they owe their positions to the authors of the moral values and to the ancestors who are ever present and ever watching to see that a high moral standard is maintained."¹⁹

In any discourse of morality or ethical obligations and duties it is very likely that one would encounter contradictions. This is because ethics or morality if used as synonyms is a relative concept. What is termed immoral in a society or group may not be an issue in another place. This is what some scholars have identified as cultural relativism. This is the position that all beliefs, customs, and ethics are relative to the person concerned and thus situated only within

¹⁴(Labeodan, 2006:123)

¹⁵(Bewaji, 2004: 397-399)

¹⁶(Oyeshile, 2004:149)

¹⁷(Idowu 1996: 149)

¹⁸(Evans & Manis, 2009:88)

¹⁹(Awolalu, 1972:133)

his/her own social context²⁰. This is also based on the idea that there is nothing like an absolute or ultimate standard for judging acts as good or evil, thus, every judgment of rightness or wrongness can be described as a product of the society. This makes any estimation on morality or issues of ethics subject and relative to the cultural perspective of such society.²¹ Regardless of any form of subjectivity or cultural relativism, evil is evil. It will be very malevolent to see a form of cultural support for wanton killings, maiming and kidnappings of innocent people on their own land while going about their daily activities. This deviation or cultural relativism is very apt in the current realities in Nigeria where a tribe is still insisting on open grazing in spite of the national outcry on the issue. These sophisticated weapons-wielding herders parade themselves as nomadic farmers while carrying out their nefarious activities and unleashing of terror on others. To the tribe, cattle is more important than human beings.

Ìwògbè Okan, a Self-Conscience in Yorùbá thought in Relation to Human Behaviours and the view of Òfún Méjì in Ifá Divination

Ìwògbè or *Ayègbè*, otherwise known as *dígí* is a self-reflective object called mirror in English. It is an object that reflects a true image that is in front of it. It is made of glass with a flat or curvy surface²² Mirrors are not only used for reflection or for appearance, they are also used in many technological and scientific components such as lenses in telescopes and microscopes that allows scientists study objects that are exceptionally small or too far away from people to see²³. In a nutshell, mirror reflects or reproduced object placed before it. *Ìwògbè* is used in different forms in Yorùbá thought system. As a descriptive object, *Ìwògbè* is used to describe the position of the father to his children in an expression like *Ìyániwúrà Baba ni dígí* - mother is gold or golden and father is a mirror. This expression relegates men to the bottom line as not so important in the life of a child while it places mother as indispensable object in the life of a child or her children. That is, the suffering or responsibility of the mother over children is unquantifiable as compared to the father. Whereas in reality, this may not be true, the way we see useless and insensitive fathers in every society so are completely unreasonable and insensitive mothers who do not care about her child/children more than the day she gave birth to the child/children.

Again, in comparing man with *Ìwògbè* in the life of his children, and mother as *wúrà* - gold shows that man is less valuable like a mirror that is not expensive and important that one can do away with without the blinking of an eye or that can be broken to pieces without a second thought of its worth as compared to gold that is treasured and often kept in a vault to avoid it been stolen. In another form, *Ìwògbè* is compared by the Yorùbá to individual *Òkàn*-heart or conscience that monitors and reflects all human activities. *Ìwògbè Òkàn*

²⁰ (Glazer, 1994: 1)

²¹ (Diamond, 1974: 110)

²² (n.a, 2021: <https://glassdoctor.com>)

²³ (n.a, 2021: <https://sciencing.com>)

therefore, is believed by the Yorubá to be the invisible police and a gauge that monitors and gauge every action of man. It is an active object that does not sleep even if man sleeps and it sees more than anything else on earth of which the real mirror cannot be compared with. Consequently, *Ìwògbè Ọkàn* sees everything clearly. Thus, it is this *Ìwògbè Ọkàn* that is either lost or broken in Nigeria society today that makes corruption, nepotism, kidnapping, banditry, insurgency, and every other social vices thrive. It is this *Ìwògbè Ọkàn* that is broken or lost in religious circle that makes prosperity preaching the major focus of most churches in Nigeria, the reflection of which is not seen in the life of individual members of these churches. Rather, only in the life of a few. Most of these religious leaders are so insensitive to the plight of their members that they ride in big and expensive cars and private jets to the detriment of members suffering situations forgetting that Christ did not come to the world because of bread and butter. They even sometimes in their preaching told their converts that their situations remain the same because of their undefined sins. The loss of *Ìwògbè Ọkàn* has sent righteousness parking in almost every country around the world particularly in Nigeria. Otherwise, there would not be killing, kidnapping for ransom, banditry and insurgency etc. Praying camps abound in Nigeria, yet there is no joy on the streets. We see great men of God moving about with retinues of security personnel's, an indication that Holy Spirit or angels can no longer guide them.

There is no justice in the land because those who supposed to give justice are corrupt. They take bribe in lieu of sound judgment. As judges are taking bribe, so the law enforcement agents are taking. Kings, chiefs, and civil servants are not left out. No one is living a just life. There is no love lost within neighbours. Otherwise, there won't be insurgency, kidnapping for ransom, banditry, arm robbery and stealing.

The political class are bereaved of wisdom for proper governance. All what they are in government for is to embezzle tax payers money. They earn their salaries in millions doing nothing while those who are doing the work with good intention are not properly remunerated. Today, people kill and are killed over trivial matters. There are fraudulent dealings in businesses at will. All these put together has turned the whole society upside down and have deprived many joy, meaning and purpose of life. All because *Ìwògbè Ọkàn* is broken or lost that *Ifá* explained in *Ọfún Mejì*²⁴ where it says;

<i>Ìwọ ìwò</i>	You are Iwo (name of a priest)
<i>Èmi ìwò</i>	I am Iwo (name of a priest)
<i>Ó dífá fún Oníwòmatẹ̀</i>	Cast divination for Oniwomate
<i>Ọmọ Awòyemèrubisọya</i>	The child of Awòyemèrubisọya
<i>Wọ̀n ní Ìwògbè̀ lẹ̀bọ̀ ẹ̀</i>	They said mirror is his sacrifice

²⁴(Fafowora :2021)

Njé, bó bá nlọ sọ̀nà òréré
Gbé Ìwògbè e, wó kedere,

Ìwògbè lẹ̀bọ
Bó o bá nlọ sọ̀nà ìsòwò rẹ
Gbéwògbè e, wó kedere,

Ìwògbè lẹ̀bọ
Níbè lolOdùmarè ti nsọ̀rọ̀
talking
Bóyá o mọ́
Bóyá o ò mọ́
Ìwògbè lẹ̀bọ.

If you are going on a far distance
Take your mirror (conscience) and look
at it very well

The mirror is the sacrifice
If you are going on your business trip,
Take your mirror (conscience) and look
at it very well

The mirror (conscience) is the sacrifice
That is where Olodumare (God) is

Whether you are clean

Whether you are not clean

The mirror (conscience) is the sacrifice

As a result, *Ifá* advised that wherever we might be going, whatever we might be doing, our *Ìwògbè Ọkàn* should follow us to be our guide to righteousness and truth. As a business man/woman, pastors, civil servants, students, teachers, and every citizen, our *Ìwògbè Ọkàn* should be our guide so that the world will be a better place where there would be no war, cheating, kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery, stealing where we shall all be our brother's keeper. This is the thought of the Yorubá on *Ìwògbè Ọkàn* - self conscience for a better society and living because *Ifá* says in *Ọkànran Ọ̀wónrín*²⁵that:

Bóo sẹ́ e re, Bóo sẹ́ e re

Ara rẹ lo sẹ́ fún lo sẹ́ dè

A dífá fún Èké, omọ Alára'

Bóo sẹ́ e re, Bóo sẹ́ e re,

Ara rẹ lo sẹ́ fún lo sẹ́ dè

A dífá fún ìkà omọ Ajerò

Òtító inú ó yóni

Ó lájẹ̀kù ó jurọ̀ lọ

If you do it good, If you do not do it
good

You do it for yourself and is awaiting
you

Cast divination for Liar the son of
Alara

If you do it good, If you do not do it
good

You do it for yourself and is awaiting
you

Cast divination for Wickedness the son
of Alara

Inward truth is satisfying

Than lies

²⁵(Awodiran, 2017:122)

* Though Ifarinu is a name of a person associated with *Ifá* divination. However, the use of the name here is likened to human conscience that is a mirror that saw everything we do through the inner mind.

<i>A dífá fún Ifárinú</i>	Cast divination for Ifarinu
<i>Tí ̀somò Agbonmiregún</i>	The son of Agbonmiregún
<i>Ifárinú nìkan ní nbè léyìn tí nsebo</i>	Ifarinu was the only one at the back offering sacrifice
<i>Ifárinú, ilè ríkà,</i>	Ifarinu*, the grand saw the wicked
<i>Eni tó nse rere, Olorun mò</i>	He who is doing well, God knows

If we are guided by *Ìwògbè Ọkàn*, then truth and justice will not be difficult to prevail in the society. Therefore, *Ìwògbè Ọkàn* should be our guide.

Conclusion

Conscience, as seen in this paper, can be viewed from different perspectives, evidently this kind of conception is laden with tautologies because of the pluralistic and the subjective nature of the concept. This paper's appraisal of the current realities in Nigeria especially in the area of human behaviours brings to the fore the short comings and failures in the contemporary society. The use of the epistemic function of *Ìwògbè Ọkàn* (self-conscience) as a philosophical tool through *Ọfún Méjì* of the *Ifa* Divination System was done. The re-examination of the degradation in human behaviours in the contemporary Nigeria shows that the populace in spite of their obvious religiosity got it wrong because *Ìwògbè Ọkàn* that is either lost or broken in the society. It is imperative therefore that Nigerians should make re-examination of themselves at the personal level a priority. The same way personal adjustments are made to appearance when a mirror is looked at, *Ìwògbè Ọkàn* should lead to changes at the individual and national level.

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