POLITICAL EDUCATION: AN IMPERATIVE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY AND STABILITY IN NIGERIA

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INTRODUCTION:

Education generally "is the key that unlocks the door to modernization" (Abernerthy, 1969). It undoubtedly confers immense benefits to the individual and society. By imparting vocationally useful skills, which are in scarce supply, and by disseminating specific social values, education recruits people into the ruling social elite of society (Blough, 1977). It has been regarded as a critical factor in the promotion of economic and social development, income distribution and self-reliance (Court and Ghat, 1974), and for the achievement of genuine social harmony and political stability (Okoye 1987).

Consequently, whenever societies of the world are faced with problems they have always had recourse to their educational systems for solutions. Sustainable democracy and stability have been an aberration to Nigeria since her flag dependence in 1960 judging from her checkered history so far. Herein lies the relevance of political education in the nations present resolve to evolve a sustainable democratic process that would ensure stability and ordered growth and development.

The paper posits that sustainable democracy and political stability depend on an enlightened populace who are made aware of their political rights and privileges, responsibilities and obligations through a comprehensive system of political education or mobilization. The paper comprises six sections. The next section is on conceptual/theoretical issues while section three is on politician education/mobilization, sustainable democracy and stability in Nigeria. Section four appraises the situation while section five is on the way out of the problem. Section six concludes the discussion.

CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL ISSUES

Education has been variously conceptualized or defined as a process of transmitting the people culture from generation to generation (Nduka, 987). the acquisition and utilization of the past in order to be able to take part in the civilization of the present and contribute to the civilization of the future (Perry, 1952). Finally, Nwagwu (1976) sees education as a process by which every society attempts to preserve and upgrade the accumulated knowledge, skills and attitudes in its cultural setting and heritage in order to foster continuously the well-being of mankind and guarantees its survival against the unpredictable and at times hostile and destructive elements and forces of man and nature (environment).

Politics is the art or science of government. Government could be conceptualized as the organization, guidance and control of an area or a political unit (Okoye, 1998). The unit could vary from a village through an autonomous community, local government unit to a state or nation. Political education or mobilization involves three things. First, is the process of harnessing the political resources of a people, that is, their values, institutions and structures for the purpose of improving their political culture. Second, it involves the sensitization of a group of people on the need to use their God-given resources for the achievement of their political goals in terms of effective participation in the decisions that affect their lives. Third, it is the

process of inculcation in a people the cherished political ideas and ideals necessary for effective participation in any political culture (Okoye, 1997). Finally political education aims at creating a wholly new political culture that will transcend the multitude of negative factors that hitherto characterized the Nigerian nation.

The word "democracy" comes from two Greek words, "demo" which means people and "kratis" which means government or state craft. Democracy according to Abraham Lincon

(1979) is government of the people, by the people, and for the people. This definition refers more aptly to the direct type of democracy practiced in small homogeneous groups in comparison to the modern democracy conceptualized as the government by elected representatives of the people, that is, representative democracy. In this sense the majority of the people elect their representatives and give them the mandate to govern them. According to Bryco (1923) democracy is a government in which the majority will prevails. He took majority to be three-quarters of the people and yet according to Herold Laski (1952), democracy is a government which ensures social, political an economic equality.

From the above therefore, democracy could be conceptualized as that form of government in which the ruling power of the state government is legally rested not in any particular class or classes, but in the members of the state as a whole and the people exercise the power either directly (in the case of homogeneous communities such as the old Spartan and Athenian city states of Greece with restricted citizenship and ownership of property and means of production) or through their representatives periodically elected. Some of the basic tenets of democracy are freedom of expression, to life, ownership of property, etc. free process of choice (election) and above all, the rule of law.

The concept of sustainability is relatively new in development literature and it stresses the need to ensure the careful use of our resources so as to ensure for the welfare of the present and future generations. Sustainable development (ecological, socio-economic and political) according to World commission of Environment (1987) is the development which provides adequately for the needs of the present generation without denying those in the future the ability to meet their needs. As far as politics is concerned sustainability means that the institutions needed to control and administer the natural resources of a country must correspond to all other political institutions in it.

Sustainable or enduring demo-cracy is therefore a system of governance in which the cherished values ideas and ideals of representative government are well entrenched and internalized and in which the institutions and structures for orderly choice and change are will established and functional. The word stable etymologically means a situation of steadiness or firmness, not easily upset or moved or changed. Political stability therefore means a situation of steadiness and consistency in terms of political values, institutions and processes of choice and change (Okoye, 1999).

POTICAL EDUCATION, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND STABLITY IN NIGERIA.
Pre-Independence Era
According to Scott (1938) the primary purpose of colonial enterprize was "one of exploitation and development for people of Britain". The curriculum content of Nigerian education during the colonial era was dominated by colonial needs and interests were primarily geared towards the development of general literacy among the local resources for the benefits of metropolitan Britain. There was nothing in the curriculum that promoted the cherisec democratic ideals, ideas and values such as nationalism, unity, patriotism etc. Even though the Northern and Southern protectorates were amalgamated in 1914, the same Britain vigorously pursued the policy of separate development of the sections. While the Southern traditional socio-cultural, religious, judicial and political institutions were being speedily modernized those of the north were left intact. The obvious structural imbalance inherent in the regional structure did not attract the attention of Britain - the oldest democracy in modern world. The same Britain bequeathed to Nigeria a national anthem that promoted ethnicity and disunity "... Though tribe and tongue differ in brotherhood we stand...". Thus colonial Britain may did not give Nigerians the proper political education or orientation for the operation of democratic governance. She rather sowed and nurtured the seeds of instability in Nigeria before handing over the fragile democracy to the nationalists.

Parties as agents of interest aggregation and articulation in a democracy educate the

populace via two principal ways or methods. First, is the general mobilization of the electorates through their ideologies as contained in their election manifestoes with which they inform and educated them during their periodic campaigns for votes during elections. Second, leadership training of candidates for electoral positions within the party and in government. Pre-independent parties were primarily protest parties whose major pre-occupation was the sensitization of the people against the evils of colonialism and the urgent need for freedom. Secondly, they were ethnic parties, which provided the ethnic leaders the platform for mobilizing the support of their people political pre-emmence of their group. Apart from the N.C.N.C., which started a national party but later became dominated by the Igbos, the A.G. and NPC were offshoots of ethnic/cultural organisations.

Their education/mobilization strategies were faulty abinitio and did not promote the noble ideals of unity, patriotism and nationalism. First, they were ethnic and promoted ethnic consciousness rather than nationalism, disunity rather their harmony. Second, they ere elitist and urban based and left the rural majority grossly uninformed and in most cases misinformed about the politics of the nation. This was the situation at the time Nigeria gained her flag independence in 1960. Consequently, even though the pre-independence 1959 general election was relatively peaceful and apparently fair, nevertheless the battle was fought along ethnic lines by ethnically-based parties and leaders and not on issues. Little wonder the first post-independence 1964 election spelt doom for the nation and triggered off the spate of crises that culminated in the military intervening in the country's politics in January, 1966.

POST INDEPENDENCE ERA.
Nigeria became an independent nation on October 1, 1960 with a fragile democracy bedeviled by the twin factors of ethnicity and ethnic leadership. There was a general low level of general literacy among the people. The curriculum content of primary and secondary education was very narrow. In the South in particular, the Christian religious groups still dominated secondary and primary education delivery. Subjects like government, social studies, economics etc. that provided political education of a sort to children while in school were not part of the most popular grammar school curriculum. The ethnic cum regional parties owned and managed most of the print and electronic media and they effectively used these organs to propargate bitter ethnic hatred and rivaly among the literate groups while their agents at local/ward levels used vernacular, local institutional resource to indoctrinate and even intimidate the rural majority into accepting ethnicity as a veritable instrument of national politics.

Against the backdrop of the above scenerio almost all-national political issues were seen through the eye of ethnic rivalry and bitterness. First, was the 1962 national census which was so politicized along ethnic lines that it had to be cancelled and a fresh one ordered for 1963. The regional ethnic groups beyond the bounds of reason deliberately inflated the 1963 census figures. Chief Awolowo, the father of ethnic politics in Nigeria, frustrated by the trend had turned to conspiracy and after a celebrated trial he was imprisoned.

Before the 1964 general election the pattern of traditional alliances had changed significantly. There was massive incidence of pre-election irregularities, increasing amount of thuggery and intimidation. At the last minute the progressive Alliance leaders lost their nerve and boycotted the election, giving their opponents landslide victory. Crises loomed but had to be averted meanwhile. Finally, in 1965 came Western Regional election, which proved the election to end elections. The crisis generated by this election brought the military into the nation's political scene on January 15, 1966.

The military came into the Nigerian political scene on January 15, 1966. The Head of State, General Ironsi introduced a unitary system of administration ostensibly to deal with the twin evils of ethnicity and regionalism. That move was a healthy one towards the evolution of nationhood. Ironsi was greatly misunderstood, crisis and pogrom against his ethic kinsman

(Igbos) broke out and deepened culminating in the death of Ironsi, the cessation of Biafra and the outbreak of shooting war on July 6, 1967. The civil war raged for thirty months and ended in January, 1967. The military stayed in power till October 1, 1979 when the Second Republic was ushered in without the military addressing the nagging issues of ethnic nationalism, and regional inequalities in political education and mobilization between the core (cities) and the periphery (countryside). Consequently, in the pre-Second Republic election, in spite of the fact that the nation's geopolitical landscape had been seriously restructured from four regions in 1963 to nineteen states in 1976, the pattern of voting was basically not different from what obtained in 1959 and 1964 respectively. Old political parties resurrected under new names but basically their leadership remained ethnically based and unchanged. Political education mobilization was still the old ethnic mobilization for unhealthy rivalry and betterness at the centre.

That was the situation throughout the Second Republic. The only significant development in the nation's political system was that thuggery, electoral violence and corruption were institutionalized and accepted political values and norms. On 31st December, 1983 the Second Republic was abruptly terminated and the military returned to politics under the leadership of Buhari and his able deputy Idiagbom. The resilient pair correctly diagnosed the ills of the nation and addressed them squarely. They tried to reorient the nation and addressed them squarely. They tried to reorient the nation on the right path. Their main areas of emphasis were corruption and general indiscipline and during their brief period the nation was sanitized. Children sang the national anthen and recited the national pledge every morning before starting classes. The War Against Indiscipline (WAI) was becoming a part of our national culture when Babangida struck on 25* of August, 1985 and terminated the dynamic regime.

On coming to power Babangida attempted to evolve a national programme of political education and mobilization when it set up the political Bureau to go round the country and seek the people's views on how the country could be governed. The Bureau toured the whole country and produced a blue-print in which it recommend, among other things the setting up of a national agency to mobilize and educate the people on political, social and economic development. Following the recommendations of the Bureau the Federal Government in 1987 launched the Mass Mobilization for Self-Reliance, Recovery and Social Justice (MAMSER) with the principal

aim being; "the eradication of all those features of our behavour in the past which made our society a by — product of disharmony, dishonesty, distrust, and disservice and a heaven for those who prefer to embrace and promote/their conduct, (in) the least alternative human behaviour" (Times International, August 10, 1987).

Again, the Bureau toured only the state capitals and major urban centres and made no serious attempts to reach the vast countryside. Even when MAMSER came into being it concentrated its activities in the urban centres and made no efforts to reach the countryside where the majority of Nigerians live. Consequently, in spite of Babaangida's MAMSER the ills noticed in the 1983 elections still surfaced boldly during the 1993 elections. As usual when Abacha came into power in November 1993, MAMSER was replaced by the National Orientation Agency (NOA) which liked its predecessor was urban based.

As a result of the annulment of the 1993 presidential election, generally believed to be won by Abiola by Babangida, the nation was thrown into spates of violent crises. Abacha came in and in order to establish his legitimacy and contain the crises turned himself into the most devilish, murderous, monstrous and barbaric dictator of our time. For almost five whole years people lived in great fear and uncertainty of the safety of their lives. On July 7, 1998 Abacha died and Abubakar took over the realms of power and within a period often months successfully reintroduced democracy in the country and handed over the an elected democratic government headed by Obasanjo on 31st May, 1999. Even though corruption and buying of votes were rife during the pre-Fourth Republic election, nevertheless, it has come to stay hopefully because the worst democracy is preferable to the "beat" military regime.

APPRAISAL OF THE EFFORTS

As a matter of deliberate policy Colonial Britain did not prepare Nigerians for sustainable democracy and national stability before their departure on October 1, 1960. Rather, resurrected under new names but their ethnic geography and leadership still remained unchanged, viz., Chief Awolowo's Unity Party (for the Yorubas), Dr, Azikiwe's Nigerian People Party (for the Igbos) and the National Party of Nigeria (for the Housa - Fulani), Ethnic rivalry was still rife. For instance, the national housing programme introduced by the NPN - controlled federal government was stoutly rejected by the UPN controlled Yoruba States to the point that the houses already constructed by the federal government in these states were by physically knocked down.

The rivalry came to a head in the 1983 election, which featured, large - scale malpractice ranging from intimidation, thuggery, vandalism and use of fake ballot papers etc. For example, overNIO million worth of property was destroyed in 736 cases of arson reported in Ondo Sate, which saw the worst of election crisis in 1983.

In December of the same year the Second Republic was terminated abruptly and Buhari took over. Like Mohamed Buhari initiated laudable programmes to educate and sanitize the nation but by the time these programmes were about to take root he was ousted by Babangida on August 25, 1985. For eight years Babangida dribbled the nation and in the end wrecked the economy and plunged the nation into a spate of crisis that seriously threatened the corporate existence of the nation when he annulled the 1983 presidential election believed to have been won by Abiola.

With the exit of Babangida Abacha came and in order to contain the crisis and legitimize his stay turned the worst and most brutal dictator in modern times and in the process globalized Nigeria's crisis and stability. The country was suspended from the Commonwealth and other forms of

sanctions imposed on her by the superpowers on July 8, 1998 Abacha died and Abubakar hurriedly returned Nigeria to democratic governance on 29 May, 1999.

For thirty-nine years on nationhood the military had been in power for twenty-nine years while civilians ruled for only ten years. During the period the country witnessed the worst of crisis and instability ranging from the 1962/62 census debacle, 1962 Western Regional crisis, the 1966 coup, and subsequent pogrom and death of Ironsi in 1966, the war of 1967 - 70, the short-lived Second Republic, aborted Third Republic to the death of Abacha and Abiola in 1998. Under such a situation enduring or sustainable democracy was entirely out of the question. It is only by God's grace that Nigeria is still intact as a nation. The Fourth Republic is jest months old and we are watching with cautious optimism.

Crisis and instability had persisted in the country all these years because since before and after independence there has been no comprehensive, well-articulated and sustained programme of political education/mobilization of the Nigerian populace to imbibe and cherish the sacred democratic values of honesty, accountability, nationalism, patriotism, transparency, etc. up till now the average Nigerian does not know the meaning and significance of the voters card. To him it is a property that is normally sold to the highest bidder. Politics is still seen as a means of getting rich quickly, not as a means of service to the nation. Political leadership is still interpreted in terms of the ethnic geography of the aspirant.

The attempts at political education/mobilization of the Nigerian populace have been haphazard, and hoc, sporadic, uncoordinated, hanging and indoctrinating in nature. During the Second Republic there was Shagari's Ethical Revolution which was terminated in 1983 and replaced by Buhari' WAI Launched in 1984. In 1987 there came Babangida's MAMSER which was replaced by Abacha's NOA in 1994. None of these programmes was allowed to take root, be appraised before being discarded because of chronic political instability in the country and the personalization of programmes by their introducers. Second, the spatial impacts of these programmes have been severely limited as they concentrated mainly in the urban areas leaving

out the vast countryside, where the majority of Nigerians live.

THE WAY OUT OF THE SITUATION

The fourth Republic has just been inaugurated and everybody is desirous that it endures. But judging from our experience since independence and what happened during the elections that ushered in the new republic we are not yet out of the woods. To this end, the following suggestions are proffered.

First, there should be a comprehensive, enduring and well - articulated programme of political education of the Nigerian populace on the cherished ideals of democracy such as nationalism, patriotism, accountability, honesty and the fundamental issue of rational political decision making.

Second, such a programme should be made to reach effectively all the nooks and crannies of the country. The programmes of political/social mobilization so far tried in the country have been urban based and their impacts spatially limited and they have therefore proved ineffective.

Third, such programme should be embodied in our formal and non-formal education curricular at all levels. Government and politics of Nigeria from the colonial period to date should be made a compulsory course at all levels of our education system (formal and non-formal).

Fourth, the nation's adult and non-formal education programme should be developed such that the level of illiteracy among the nation's population will be greatly reduced because democracy cannot thrive where there is mass illiteracy, superstition and ignorance.

Fifth, the local institutions and structures of education, governance and communication should be effectively used for political education/mobilization of the great majority of rural Nigerians so that they will be able to understand what politics is all about and participate effectively in the game according the rules.

Sixth, the Nigerian political class should be disciplined and responsible enough to play the game according to the rules. Money politics should be stopped because it is inimical to progress and stability. Thuggery and all other forms of electoral violence, corruption, embezzlement and politics for self-enrichment and not service should be fought against, killed and buried. Honesty and transparency should be the criteria for selecting leaders. Politics is service and leadership should be by example. When the members of the political class are seen to be disciplined and responsible their followers will automatically follow their foot - steps.

Finally, corruption, the bane of our national life, should be fought against and eradicated if we are going to succeed this time around.

CONCLUSION

The discussion posits that political education is an imperative for sustainable democracy and stability and for success of the Fourth Republic. This is true because it is only through an well-articulated political/mobilization programme that we can change our national character and psyche for the better and ensure enduring democracy and stability.

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