

ROLE OF FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION IN YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND CURBING RESTIVENESS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In the present decade, Nigeria has witnessed unprecedented youth restiveness in many parts of the country, as is being experienced in Kano, Yobe, Bauchi, Borno, Plateau, Niger delta, etc. Some of the factors responsible for these destructive tendencies include: religious sentiment, dilapidated educational structures, bad leadership, erosion of the right-type of moral values, high level of poverty and the effects of paid labour/industrialization on family structures and socialization process. This has plunged the nation into the abyss of stagnation and near anarchy. This paper has assembled the views of stake holders (oral interview), and secondary data analysis, and concluded that; a functional education is needed to promote creative skills and develop achievement values in Nigerian youths, rekindle parental socialization of youths into role specificity to bring about moral reorientation for self and national development. The paper is structured into: youth empowerment, youth restiveness, and ways of curbing it, the role of functional education for skill development, and value reorientation, conclusion and practical recommendations.

The National youth policy (2001) saw the youths as the foundation of the society. Their energies, inventiveness, agility and orientation define the pace of development and security of a nation; through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant stride in socio-economic and political development; in the dreams and hopes of the youths, a nation finds her motivation; in their energies and enthusiasm, the nation builds her vitality and purpose; and with their aspirations, the future of the nation is assured (Anasi, 2010).

From the youth development policy statement, we can deduce that; peace, security, growth and development of a nation / society lie with the youths, the same way as the instability, disorderliness, violence and destructive tendencies also lie with the youths. The youths must be moulded, motivated and guided to imbibe and develop positive moral values that will be harnessed in achieving the desired peace, security, socio-economic and political development for the good of all and sundry. This is necessary because, according to Anasi (2010), the youths are the owners and leaders of tomorrow, they are the most active segment of the population, their numerical strength is greater than that of the aging population, and the major ‘determiners’ of peace and stability in the nation/ society. The extent of youth responsible role and conduct in the society is positively correlated with development of a country; the youth therefore need to be empowered, motivated, guided and refrained from restive tendencies to contribute their quota to national development.

Youths Empowerment

Youths’ empowerment is an attitudinal, structural and socio-cultural process of instilling in the young people the ‘will-power’, authority and means to make, and implement decisions for a positive change in their own lives and that of other people – youths and adults (Fletcher and Vavrus, 2008). Youth empowerment is often addressed as a ‘gate way to inter-generational equity, civic engagement, and democracy building’. Local, state, federal governments and NGOs, non-profit community based organization, as well as international monitoring government agencies need to provide programs centred on youth empowerment. This may be done through: Youth-led media, youth rights movements, youth councils and activism; youths involvement in community decision making, youth politics-political parties need to have statements, and actions supporting youths empowerment-instead of recruiting them as political ‘thugs’ for destructive activities.

In Peru and elsewhere, by 2006, “the Quota youth Act” was adopted. It requires at least 10% of the young people on the list of every political candidate as a way of promoting youth participation. Also known as ‘youth tithe’ is now a public policy that seek to strengthen the democratic system with effective youth involvement at all levels of governance-where decisions are made , public administration, implementation, to encourage youths participation in government . For the youth to be effectively empowered and contribute to national development, they need to be guided away from the paths of lawlessness and destructive tendencies, by putting in place such schemes as; ‘youth work’ (as floated in Britain and Cuba)where the community support activities and projects aimed at getting the “older children”(from adolescents) to work at different services and institutions that engage the youth in informal educational activities, such as centre- based works, schools-based works; crafts, vocational works, recreational, socio-cultural and economic. Youth work means a planned programme of education designed for purposes of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of youth through their voluntary participation (Jenkinson, 2000).

Youth Restiveness

It has been said somewhere in this paper that youths are the greatest asset and “human investment” for any society’s sustainable development and future. That is why it is universally acknowledged that “they are the leaders of tomorrow and the vanguard of change”. But in the last decade, Nigeria has been bedevilled by youths’ restiveness and violent destruction of life and property worth billions of naira. This development exerts severe constraints on the socio-economic development of communities, and the nation in general, as exemplified in Borno, Yobe, Plateau, Bauchi, Niger Delta etc.

According to Omotayo (2005) “there is a trend of idle youths in many communities in Nigeria (secondary schools leavers and tertiary institution graduates) for reason of unemployment; just roam the villages over flowing into urban areas “aimlessly, impatiently waiting for the slightest ‘provocation’ to embark on restive and destructive acts”. Restiveness is caused by immediate and remote causes. The immediate causes includes: loss of confidence in, and patience with leaders’ lack of integrity and insensitivity to the plight of the general public particularly the youths, unemployment, endemic rural poverty, pandemic corruption etc.

This paper will dwell more on the root causes of the insidious social ills-youth restiveness and violence that are destroying the very fabric of the society:

- 1. The Effects of Industrialization and Paid Labour on Family Structures and Socialization Process:** The emergence of industrial and paid work brought several changes to marriage and family structures such as: individualism, family life is becoming “dangerously undermined”. The apparent discipline and stability of the 19th century family has eroded. The admired discipline of the ‘ancient’ family was rooted in the strict authority of the parents and extended family members-grandparents over their children. The way in which this authority was exercised, would be considered ‘harsh’ by today’s standards. Families maintained relationships that were embedded within the community and not clearly separated from the community as many are today. The family was an authoritarian institution and all matters concerning the family were subordinated to the interest of the parents, grandparents and other ‘older’ members of the extended family. The family institution has evolved to a group tied by close emotional bonds with high degree of ‘domestic privacy’, marked by the rise of individualism geared towards consumption rather than production. Due to increase in industrial and paid work places that are separated from the homes, several changes have occurred to the family which include: the loosening of church influence over the family due to Protestantism, a shift from rural agriculture to urbanism, necessitating education, medication, food buying etc, requiring both parents to work outside the home, with attendant laxity in the upbringing of children.
- 2. The structural Economic Changes** have also influenced specific aspects of the family. However, not all families are affected in the same way: The middle class experience such issues as “balancing time” between work and family, delayed fertility due to aspiration of higher career and education, etc. The lower class women have no incentives to delay child birth, but experience the challenges of low income which makes it difficult to provide comfort to family

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members on equal basis, creating favouritism among siblings. Those who perceive less parental love adopt deviant behaviours. There is also the issue of single parenting and attendant difficulties in negotiating and acquiring sustained child care options. Then, the inequalities involved in care-given work; husbands have not reached parity in terms of domestic work and care giving; women are saddled with more hours of house work as well as paid work than their male counterparts. Working mothers do more work and sleep (rest) less than men and with child rearing squarely put on their shoulders. These create lapses in effective parenting. Families are 'turning' out deviants/ misfits into the society than morally sound individuals.

- 3. Bad Leadership/ Governance.** Obasenjo (on twitter, 2013) decried the leadership/ governance in Africa, and Nigeria in particular. He identified lack of quality leadership as a major hindrance to Nigeria's development; the leaders at all level lack the vision, mission and character to harness the resources (human and natural) of this country to "noticeable development". Seifert (2010) asserted that:

Youth restiveness/ violence is a reaction to the failure of the government, multi-national companies, Non- governmental organisations; community leaders recruit and give the youth (militants and Boko Haram) opportunity to perpetrates violence against their opponents-be they religious or political. The youths are financed, trained, brain- washed to unleash havoc on public figures, government institutions, kidnapping for economic benefits etc. And government helplessly watch, while the average police officers die by the day, increasing the number of widows and children without fathers. The future of these young people who watch their 'bread winners' bombed to death can only be imagined. The militancy in the Niger Delta started with perceived injustices in governance and distribution of the oil wealth. When the exploratory activities have rendered the environment and agriculture unprofitable, entrenching severe poverty and squalor, the leaders hijacked the situation to amass wealth to the detriment of the youths and other people in the region.

- 4. The Dilapidation of Educational Structures and Values.** The educational institutions have an explicit mandate to socialize learners into their various and 'national cultures through built- in system of reward and punishment such as grades and teachers' evaluation as they instil the values of the larger society. With the current moral decay in the society due to the distortion in the family and school socialization process, leaders are 'turned' out of schools with an insatiable quest for riches and have no positive vision or mission to reposition the educational sector. Government at all levels have continued to "reiterate their commitment to the development of the educational sector", with excellent policies and huge budgetary allocation without their translating into practical development. The school in conjunction with parents need to shoulder the re-socialization of 'self-development' which is a critical aspect in the early years of one's life. This re-socialization should focus on critical areas of: censuring of spoken language to reflect the new need for achievement, self worth, and desire for future greatness. In the last two decades Nigerian educational system and institutions have suffered dilapidation in content and physical structures. This has dampened the enthusiasm and moral values of stakeholders. There is gross low funding of educational institutions to keep pace with the demands of the 21st century world of learning, as exemplify in laboratories, libraries, class rooms/lecture theatres that are either ill equipped, or absent. The aimlessness and laxity among students especially that of the public schools is disheartening. They have completely lost interest in learning, but have developed inordinate quest for certificates, in order to scramble for the nonexistent government jobs. There is common slogan among the youth; "degree is degree" meaning "any degree can serve". It is no longer about quality or functionality of the certificate. The quest for quick riches have also driven the lecturers to 'seek for their reward here on earth' indulging into all kinds of vices and neglecting their primary duty of imparting knowledge and grooming the youths into sound intellectuals who would take over from them. These have culminated in the youth losing interest in themselves, national development and the future greatness.
- 5. Religious Fundamentalism:** This is stemming from religious secularism when certain extremists take advantage of the ill-educated and the uniformed youths to achieve their personal vendetta against their religio- political and economic opponents through the emerging organized

youth's delinquents groups as affiliates of cultural, religious, politico-economic agendas of "geo-ethnic divisions" like OPC, Arewa Youths Forum etc. These have given birth to "area boys", Boko Haram, and other militia groups which Nigerian leaders/ politicians find vulnerable to use as violence/ vice machinations against the entire society. Fundamentalism is edged with the possibility of violence in case of Islamic and Christian fundamentalism. Examples of violence inspired by religious allegiance are experienced all over the globe. There have been violent clashes in the past decades between Islamic and Christian's groups in Lebanon, Indonesia, Syria, Nigeria, Mali and so on (Beck 2006).

6. **Poverty:** World Bank (2005) has observed that, Nigeria has the third largest number of the poor in the world, after China and India. Nigeria's oil wealth has not been able to address the issue of poverty due to resources mismanagement, corruption etc. Consequently, the people have been impoverished socio-economically, politically and psychologically. This relative lack of access to resources and opportunities needed for a good life, lack of political culture/ agenda, voice, has created an internalized sense of worthlessness, gullible and passive submission to authority and political actors respectively (USAID, 2006:5). According to Chukuezi (2009), poverty is so entrenched in Nigeria that it has blurred the vision of everyone; created a feeling of persistent destitution and endemic hunger which has led to the state of helplessness, resulting to frustration, anger against the state; culminating into restive acts of extra judicial killing, hostages taking, arson, bombings, etc.

Ways of Curbing Restiveness in Nigeria

- i. Information: accurate, relevant and timely information is needed by the youths and sundry, to enable them to develop positive mindset that will bring about social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.
- ii. More attention and investment need to be channelled towards youth development ventures like recreational activities,- games, sports, not necessarily as professionals building strategies, but as leeway for youths to "let-off steams" and become less stressed the absence of which always precipitate a feeling of frustration among the youths; a development that predispose them to restive/ violence behaviour.
- iii. Governments should take off the challenge of reducing poverty, investing in rural agriculture through the provision of genuine and realistic incentives, social services, establish profitable and engaging agriculture based small and medium enterprise to reduce youth unemployment and aimlessness; improve basic healthcare, revamp education to cater for diverse needs of the society (USAID, 2006). Education should live up to its role of creating a functional youth that is committed to organizing voluntary social works or community development projects. Youths need to be in the fore front for the struggle against injustice, oppression and exploitation

Conclusion

The literature has established that the vital socialisation agents- family and school have been 'distorted and compromised' in their roles of breeding for the society youths with integrity; the youth no longer have respect for social values and norms- respect for the human person, elders, constituted authority, family honour, hard work, self discipline etc. The bad economic condition blamed on bad leadership- lack of integrity, financial prudence etc. has reduced the Nigerian youth to "cannibals", dissidents' restive, destructive and with no particular direction (Alabi, 2004:81). All hands must be on deck to the responsibilities of "recovering" the Nation from plunging into the Abyss of hopelessness and doom.

Recommendations

1. The school in conjunction with the family need to embark on the process of "resocialization" (not the sort embarked upon in Cambodia in 1975), but one that will recreate in the youth (from nursery schools to secondary school) the exposure to cultural assumptions regarding dignity of labour, reward for achievement. There is a dire need to rewrite children's books, television shows, stories, folklores, toys, cultural messages, to reflect the expected attitudes and proper behaviour. Children socialization should be devoid of emphasis on gender stereotypes, for instance which gender needs

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- to be tough or weak, but according to changes in the situation and social context. People must all be conscious that children observe their parents as they express affection, deal with finances, quarrel, and complain about in-laws and must therefore be careful to exhibit positive traits for children to copy
2. Since youth restiveness in Nigeria revolves around the themes of bad leadership/governance, poverty, ineffective/insincere corporate community relationship, environmental degradation/crop failures etc. amelioration would require youth capacity building-community oriented developmental programs/projects; using democratic participatory approaches of resolving issues/problems. Palliative measures/commissions cannot solve community development problems; there is urgent need for states, federal and local authorities to enter into an all embracing dialogue with various community groups- youths, women, men for them to do their own needs assessment, all groups should be effectively represented in resources allocation, project identification, supervision and investment.
 3. Entrepreneurial education should be established especially at the community level and be made interesting for the youth trainees to become job creators instead of seeking for non-existing jobs at graduation. They should be encouraged to embrace self employment, personal responsibility, self reliant, and innovativeness.
 4. There should be a legislation/policy mandating organizations to adopt friendly work places. Policies like on- the spot or nearby child outfits, crèches for parents to be near their children. School operators should make it a condition for employment of staff that has parenting instincts and interest in children not just as pupils/students but as their responsibility for instilling moral values in them. There should be a monetary reward for those staff that are seen to be complying. Youths who feel connected to their parents and school staff are less likely to develop high-risk behaviours.

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