

VIABLE EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY, PEACE AND UNITY IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

Democracy, which derives from the Greek word demos or people, is defined basically as government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representative governance usually involving periodically held free elections.

Expressed succinctly, democracy refers to a form of government in which people freely choose their leaders by voting. Or in the memorable phrase of President Abraham Lincoln, democracy is government of the people, by the people and for the people.

Democracy is a political system by which every free citizen has the opportunity of participating through discussion in an attempt to reach consensual and voluntary agreements as to what shall be done for the good of the community as a whole. As a matter of fact, democracy is both a form of government and a way of life. Democracy abhors the application of coercion and imposition in government. It is a political system that is opposed to any form of arbitrary use of dictatorial authority and tyranny in the management of the affairs of the state or society. It is opposed to the exploitation of the weak by the strong. In a democratic political system, the citizens are protected by the constitution. Such a system voluntarily surrenders sovereignty to the people. To a large extent a sustainable democratic way of living is the result of man's faith in himself, his being free and self-reliant, his respect for truth, his wisdom and courage to make rational decisions, and his ability to accept or respect the views of others. Another attribute of a democratic culture is the ability to resort to discussion rather than the use of force or coercion in the resolution of issues. A man has faith in the opinion and position of other people for the promotion of the general interest of the society. Thus, democracy as a way of life is built around man's implicit confidence and faith in himself, in being free and self-reliant, in respect of truth, having confidence and courage about one's convictions and yet being ready to accept the opinions of those who differ from his point of view.

Evolution of democracy is not sustainable if we are not prepared to hear the other side. We shut the doors of reasons when we refuse to listen to our opponents or having listened, we trivialize their opinions or contributions. Democracy means discussion. There is no place for violence in a democratic set up. Tolerance is necessary for the success of democracy. A significant democratic virtue is humility because humility is the sine qua non for tolerance. But there is one tenet which is antithetical to the Democratic culture and that is injustice.

The bedrock of democracy is freedom of speech, association and the press; otherwise the democratic personality of a citizen cannot fully blossom. Democracy demands that all sections of the people be taken into confidence as far as practicable. Dialogue is the essence of democracy. In giving power to the people we must engage in the most extensive process of consultation. Individual liberty is the essence of democracy. This liberty includes the freedom to freely and without fear express views in a public or in newspapers and other literary media. Man as a gregarious animal, must be guaranteed the freedom of association to mobilize public opinions on all matters of public interest.

Democracy depends upon a literate, knowledgeable citizenry, unfettered access to information which empowers the democratic individual to participate as fully as possible in the public life of society and to criticize unpopular or oppressive government officials or policies. Citizens and their elected representatives recognize that the sustainability of democracy depends upon the widest possible access to uncensored ideas, reliable information and opinions. Governance within a democratic culture must ensure that people are free to express themselves: openly, publicly and

repeatedly in speech and in writing. Democracies thrive best on the principle that government exists to serve the people. In other words, the people are citizens and masters of the democratic state; not its servants or subjects. The state in turn protects the rights of its citizens, while the people surrender their loyalty to the state. Under an authoritarian system, by contrast, the state demands loyalty and service from its people without any reciprocal obligation to secure their consent for its acts.

Democracy and Education

The National Policy on education in Nigeria includes five main national aims and objectives which have proven to be the necessary foundation for building the country's future. The policy provides for the long-term development of the education system in the country. The five national objectives of education in Nigeria (NPE, 2014) are to build a:

1. Free and democratic society
2. Just and egalitarian society
3. United, strong and self-reliant nation
4. Great and dynamic economy and
5. Land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

For the democratic culture to flourish in any society there are some basic conditions that must be in place. First, is the implementation of a functional mass literacy programme. This is because education is the agency through which the people can be made aware of their rights and duties. All the countries of the world that have developed effective education programmes have equally been able to evolve an effective democratic culture in line with the national educational objectives. For Nigeria, as a highly pluralistic and heterogeneous society, the role of education in the enthronelement of a sustainable democratic culture is of great importance. The advanced countries of the world where the democratic system of governance has been perfected today has largely been due to the provision of effective mass literacy programmes for their citizens. Education is a vital and indispensable component of any society, especially of a democracy. There is a direct correlation between a viable and progressively pragmatic education and democratic values. In all mature democratic societies educational content and practice support the basic tenets of democratic governance. Thus, educational transmission process is vital in a democracy because effective democracies are dynamic and evolve forms of government that demand independent and rational thinking by the citizenry. The opportunity for positive social and political transformation rests squarely in the hands of the citizens. The primary objective of any democratic educational process is to produce citizens who are independent, inquisitive, yet deeply familiar with the precepts and practices of the democratic culture.

People may be born with an appetite for personal freedom but they are not born with knowledge about the social and political arrangements that make freedom possible over time for themselves and their children. Such specialized characteristics must be acquired through formal learning. Learning about democracy begins in school, continuing throughout a life of civic involvement and curiosity about the kinds of information accessible in a free society. Education is a power by itself and in any case, a person bereft of it cannot have any chance of either realizing himself to the full or making any effective or worthwhile contribution on the policies and actions of the government of his country and region. A democracy without wisdom is a potential anarchy. Training and education for democracy are of utmost importance if the conception of freedom is to prevail. The most dangerous of all forms of government is that of uneducated democratic functionaries. It has no power of criticism and is at the mercy of any demagogue and of any dictator.

One of the essential features of the government is the enlightenment of the citizens. This enlightened outlook enables the citizens to have meaningful participation in the democratic process. This participation may be positive by supporting the government in power. It may also take a negative form by protesting and opposing the government in power. As Omachi (2012) has observed, uneducated electorates are most times apathetic to political issues and hardly contribute to the growth of democratic culture. They are generally vulnerable and subject to manipulations. Education is the agency through which the people can be made to become conscious of their rights and

responsibilities. For a highly pluralistic society like Nigeria the role of education in the enthronement of a sustainable democratic culture is of great importance.

Civic Education

There is no doubt that education is a vital factor in the realization of sustainable democracy. President Rodrigo Borja of Ecuador captured this dictum when he stated during a presentation at the World Summit on Education for All at Jemtien, Thailand, organized by UNESCO (2010) that the vote is an expression of opinion and that wise decisions in choosing governments depend on a well educated public. Many institutions help develop citizens' knowledge and skills and shape their civic character and commitments. Family, religious institutions, the media and community groups exert important influences. Schools, however, bear a special and historic responsibility for the development of civic competency and responsibility. Schools fulfill that responsibility through both formal and non-formal education, beginning in the earliest years and continuing through life.

Civic education in a democracy is education in self governance. Democratic self government means that citizens are actively involved in their own governance. They do not just passively accept the dictums of others or acquiesce to the demands of others. Civic education in a democratic society is concerned with promoting understanding of the ideals of democracy and a commitment to the values and principles of democracy. Civic education, therefore, is of prime concern. It is important to develop an informed, effective and responsible citizenry. Democracies are sustained by citizens who have the requisite knowledge, skills and dispositions. The word civic is used to describe the people who live in a town or city (Hornby, 2006). Civic education represents a careful and sequential process of liberating members of a community from ignorance and equipping them with the necessary skill, good political, economic, social and administrative conscience that would facilitate and maintain national conscience (James, 2000). Civic education is aimed at creating patriotic consciousness among the citizens and the need to support government programmes and policies. In addition, it enhances the growing of effective and proactive leaders and has become an effective instrument for the training of good and patriotic future leaders in various aspects of human Endeavour.

The Technical Publication Series (2003) provides that civic education is designed to achieve the following goals to:

- introduce citizens to the basic rules and institutional features of democratic political systems and provide them with knowledge about democratic rights and practices;
- convey a specific set of values and thoughts that are essential in democracy such as political Tolerance, trust in the democratic process, respect for the rule of law and compromise and
- encourage responsible and informed political participation, defined as a cluster of activities including voting, working in campaigns, contacting officials, lodging complaints attending meetings and contributing money to the political process.

Schools and Civic Education

Education is the process of imparting and acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and experiences in institutions of learning while living at work or play. The skills so acquired are subsequently applied to sustain present and future generations in their everyday experience. It is the proper nurturing, transmission and application of such skills and knowledge that guarantees development and sustenance of the society (Abiodun, 2002). Many institutions help in the development of citizens' knowledge, skills and shape their civic character and commitments. Family, religious institutions, the media and community groups exert important influences. Schools, however, bear a special and historic responsibility for the development of civic competency and civic responsibility. The school is an institution that sees to the formal education of individuals. It is set up to systematically inculcate knowledge, values, skills and enduring attitude into its adherents. Primary schools form the core of mass literacy programme in Nigeria.

Formal Institution.

A sustainable democracy, peaceful coexistence leading to national unity cannot be attained in Nigeria where the majority of the citizenry is illiterate. Therefore, literacy becomes the first step in the call for a viable education for sustainable democracy. It is obvious that no illiterate can participate meaningfully in a democratic process. For everyone to participate meaningfully there is therefore the need for a Universal Education in Nigeria. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) becomes a necessary tool to reduce or eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria. The UBE scheme is the foundation for sustainable life-long learning that provides reading, writing and numeracy skills for individuals from pre-school, primary school to junior secondary. Formal instruction in civics and government should provide a basic and realistic understanding of civic life, politics and government. Civic responsibilities such as obeying the law, being informed and getting familiar with public issues, assuming leadership when appropriate, paying taxes, voting, monitoring and adherence of political leaders and governmental agencies to constitutional principles and performing public service should be taught. Sustained and systematic attention should be given to civic education from pre-school, primary, junior secondary school to senior secondary school, and a national curriculum should be drawn. Civics should be seen as a central concern throughout UBE programme and senior secondary school. Schools should give serious consideration to the allocation of sufficient time for civics and government.

Student participation in the governance of their classrooms and schools should be an integral part of civic education beginning from earliest stages and extending throughout the span of their formal school. Classrooms and schools should be considered laboratories in which students can employ participatory skills commensurate with their maturity. They should learn to interact effectively, as well as learn how to monitor and influence school and public policies. Every state in Nigeria should require all students to demonstrate a mastery of basic civic knowledge and concepts as a condition for securing school graduation. All students will be involved in activities that promote and demonstrate good citizenship, community service and personal responsibility.

Non-formal Education

Adult and non-formal education is pervasive and has been used in making people functional (Wordu, 2006). Julius Nyerere of Tanzania used extension education very effectively for both agricultural and political development. It is replicable here in Nigeria since democracy or any system of government is a socially learned behavior that is not genetically inherited. Thus, adult and non-formal education is able to achieve political education of adults and young people who live in rural communities and did not complete formal schooling. According to UNESCO (2010), non-formal education helps to ensure equal access to education, eradicate illiteracy among women and improve women's access to vocational training, science, technology and continuing education. Out of school programmes are central in providing adaptable learning opportunities, skills and knowledge for a large percentage of the people outside the reach of formal education (Vermuaak, 2008).

Abdi et al (2005) agree that democratic culture can be achieved through programmes such as :

1. Social conscientisation,
2. Teaching target population issues of civic responsibility
3. Teaching classes that expose target audience to their rights as citizens of the community and Country.
4. Programmes of political awareness regarding their role in development.
5. Citizenship education that teaches political processes.
6. Education that teaches acceptable political behavior.
7. Programmes designed to teach local values comparatively
8. Programmes that emphasize gender equality
9. Programmes that encourage public discussion
10. Education on the rule of law
11. Education on social and economic justice

For those who never had any opportunity of schooling or those who dropped out and could not continue, Adult and non-formal education is handy to raise their knowledge base of democratic culture. The more educated persons who possess democratic culture in any nation, the more the improvement in the quest for a sustainable democracy. Education for a sustainable democratic culture should be made available and compulsory for every adult through Adult and non-formal education.

Conclusion

If Nigeria is to achieve a sustainable democracy, peace and unity, it must be prepared to address and respond to major challenges such as providing a viable mass literacy programme. A well educated and enlightened population is the key to achieve a sustainable democracy. The introduction of civics and government at all levels of education and on the wider society will be the key to a viable education that will sustain democracy, peace and unity in Nigeria. The introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE), a mass literacy programme, is a peace induced factor and a unifying factor for all Nigerians by providing equal educational opportunities for all the citizens. The integration of ethical, moral and civic values in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme will facilitate the attainment of sustainable democratic culture in Nigeria. It is the position of this paper that when the above measures are adopted and implemented, there will be a democratic oriented people. This will enhance the growth of sustainable democracy, peace and unity in Nigeria.

As I close this Keynote address, I like to observe that at a time like this when hundreds of our brothers and sisters are trapped in the war zone of Ukraine and Russia, the need for global peace and unity becomes very imperative both locally and globally. We all need to embrace peace in our individual enclaves in order to foster world peace through the instrumentality of viable educational programmes that can sustain democratic ideals. I wish all the conferees very fruitful deliberations. Thank you for your rapt attention.

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