

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE NEED FOR EMPHASIS

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Abstract

The practice of democracy in Nigeria so far is below expectation. The failure can be attributed to the Government (ruling class) and the people (electorate). The ruling class has mismanaged the resources of the country, which has resulted to mass poverty, illiteracy, crime, flagrant disobedience of court orders with impunity, general apathy and alienation. The basic causes of mismanagement in Nigeria are greed, inordinate desire to acquire power and utter disregard for the rule of law. Political apathy leads to withdrawal of people from politics and issues of national integration and nation building. To resolve these problems and encourage active participation in public affairs, there is the need for citizenship education with emphasis on national ethics and discipline in Nigerian life. This can be done effectively only when provisions of the constitution that relates to rights, duties, obligation of the state and limits of the state authority* are inculcated in the people. This should be a continuous programme for all Nigerians within and outside the formal school system. Until this is done, Nigerians will continue to disregard constituted authority.

Introduction

During the process of decolonization, it was the aspiration of all Nigerians that the end of colonialism will usher in a free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society, a united strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy and a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (FRN, 2000:4). However, as soon as independence was achieved in 1960, the direct opposite of our hopes manifested in political crisis out of which the height then was the mindless killings of our fellow citizens during the civil war in 1967-1970 and in all elections conducted so far. These problems are attributed to our leaders and

followers who failed to obey rules as stipulated in the constitution. The effects of overt disregard for constituted authority and court orders by politicians and public officers backed by the president or state governors promoted all forms of problems-political, social, cultural and economic in the country. The problems have become so complex now, that there is the fear that the country will gradually drift into anarchy and disintegration. In as much as we are conscious of the danger ahead, there is a need to reawaken and strengthen our mind for a strong and dynamic nation to enthrone real democracy.

Our leaders at various times over the years had stressed the need for a rebirth of Nigeria for the pursuit of positive values that would in the end, produce a humane, decent, discipline and self-reliant nation. One of their pronouncements that pointed to this fact is that, for too long, we have paid lip service to the issues of remolding our society, for too often we have talked glibly in the past of the birth of a new nation while our nation continued to burn, leaving big scars on our image as a people. Now is the time to rethink to reflect and to act (Muhammed, 1975:2).

According to Obasanjo (1970), a humane society will encourage initiative and the channeling of such initiatives towards the overall benefit of society. The society which makes the welfare and the well being of one the concern of all, is a humane society, and no one demands more than the society can afford and no one receives or takes from the society more than he deserves. An inhuman society cannot, unlike any just society escape destruction. Shagari (1982), noted that, any nation that places no value on moral standard, is like a body without a soul. So, we must teach our citizens to love their nation, to respect and value their tradition; to be their

brothers' keeper, to respect duly constituted authorities, to be dedicated and above all, to be honest to themselves and in their dealings with their fellowmen, remembering always that God sees all our actions. This as noted above, the leaders did not on their part honour faith; hence we remained disillusioned on the sustainability of Democracy in Nigeria. Since 1999, Nigeria has not been able to conduct any free and fair elections. All the elections have been characterized by some of these factors and others.

According to Bregha and Ewuro (2001), these modes are adopted in Nigeria:

- a) manipulation of the register of voters to the extent that some eligible voters are denied registration especially in the stronghold of some candidates;
- b) non-registration of one or more political party;
- c) manipulation of state media (radio, television, newspaper) and other public resources to the disadvantages of the opposition;
- d) disqualification of some candidates from contesting;
- e) improper division of the country into constituencies and wards (gerrymandering)
- f) manipulation of the distribution of election materials and personnel
- g) inadequate or absence of security personnel and corruption of security officers during elections;
- h) mal handling of election materials after election;
- i) doctoring or falsification of election results and outright rejection or cancellation of opponents results;
- j) treating, that is offering of food and drinks to electorates before and after elections and
- k) thuggery, that is the use of youths and unscrupulous self-seeking and immoral adults across social, cultural, professional, class and ethnic groups to intimidate, maim and even kill opposition members before and after elections.

It is pertinent to note the dangerous dimension of electoral malpractices in Nigeria now. Elections no longer take place yet results are declared. The electoral commission merely fixes date, time and venue for elections, but on the election day, eligible voters wait in vain for electoral officers and security personnel. But to their consternation, the results will be declared; certificates of return issued and ghost elected leaders sworn in. This uncivilized act is tacitly approved by the ruling elites and the electoral body in as much as they insist that the election was "peaceful, free and fair". The party primaries was more of a charade, because, the party members at various constituencies are not allowed to choose their candidates but the "godfathers" handpicked their stooges and puppets to represent their interest and not the people. This is a great leap back.

Many Nigerians are no longer interested in political activities. This is seen from the low turnout in the presidential elections of 21st April, 2007 and rescheduled elections to fill some seats in the National Assembly on 28th April 2007. In Nigeria, political apathy exists in the following ways:

- i failure to register for elections
- ii failure to be counted during census
- iii failure to protest against rigging in elections and inflation of census figures
- iv failure to report suspicious movement of individuals or groups, smugglers, criminals, illegal aliens etc
- v failure to report cases of corrupt practices in the society
- vi failure to report unpatriotic acts as stealing public property e.g. cables, pipes, hoarding of essential commodities e.g. petroleum products, looting of public treasure etc and
- vii failure to speak out on cases of injustice and wanton violation of citizens right (DSM, 1987).

It was the intention of the Federal Government to train our students to be conscious, disciplined and ethical. To achieve this, citizenship education was introduced as

compulsory General Studies Course in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The course content is more of Political Science with little emphasis on national ethics and discipline in Nigerian life. This one topic in the course is not enough to produce leaders and followers who are morally upright to take the country to the height expected by Nigerians. Thus, with this deficiency what is to be done. There is hope for a prolong democracy in Nigeria, because no nation abandon or despairs of goals because of circumstances in particular periods of their history, for the state is eternal, circumstances are temporary. The goal of building a new democratic nation can be achieved if we adopt a well articulated citizenship education programme.

The aim of this paper is to reinvent citizenship education as a means of inculcating discipline, corruption free and patriotic citizens that will respect constituted authority. The paper adopts a theoretical approach spanning from 1999-2007.

Citizenship Education

It can be defined as the type of education acquired directly or indirectly which makes individuals to be conscious of their civic responsibilities thus making them functional members of their society to enable them produce a better vision of the future (Sidi, 2000). It enables citizens to develop positive ideals, beliefs, value system and altitude cherished by the society for the survival and development of that community. Ogbonna (1996), describes citizenship education as all those experiences, knowledge and awareness which every individual acquires in the nation in order to be a good citizen, law abiding, tolerant, loyal, obedient patriotic and nationalistic.' He puts aside all elements of selfishness, tribalism, ethnicism, religious sentiments and other vices.

Citizenship education is very important because of the goals which are;

1. To encourage citizens to support government by law and oppose unjust application of law of the land.
2. To understand and appreciate the structure, functions and actual process of government.
3. To demonstrate concern for the dignity and well being of self, family and others.
4. To enable citizens understand that civic action is essential to development and that of participating actively in civic decisions.
5. To have understanding, concern and interest in world affairs as well as national, state and local issues.
6. To provide clear understanding that the overall aim is the attainment of a national democratic society where the masses are conscious, vigilant and organized where there is justice, peace, unity and development (Adu, 2000).

Problems of Democracy in Nigeria

Political participation in Nigeria is minimal or parochial since the average individual hardly relates himself positively to politics and unaware of its existence as in the case of past voters registration exercise and the numbers that cast their votes in the past elections. However, some who participate actively do everything possible to manipulate the process and the outcome of the results. There are instances of people rejecting results of elections and resort to violence and crime. In some cases, the magnitudes of the violence instill fears in many people that gradually lead to lack of interest in public issues generally. Lack of interest in the affairs of society is political apathy. The consequences of political apathy is bad government that encourages corruption, violation of human rights, domination of government by few despots that assume power by coups or rigged elections, who rule or manage the society in their own interest that results to economic backwardness and mass poverty, mass illiteracy, intimidation of opposition groups, flagrant disobedience of court orders or manipulation of court process and others which are complete

aberration of democracy. Political leaders regard victory at election as a matter of life and death struggle and are determined to capture or retain power by all means. In the wake of the April, 2007, general elections the president of Nigeria Olusengu Obasanjo, was quoted as saying that, the election will be do or die affairs. The predictions of the president manifested in various acts of arson, killings, maiming and all forms of crime that preceded the conduct of the elections. They exhibit high level of corruption that leads to unimaginable high national debt and perpetual budget deficits. The high level of immoral life our leaders are living is imitated by the followers hence, Nigeria is currently associated with all form of social vices. The zeal to acquire wealth have placed Nigerians in a constant and random motion, colliding with one another and where necessary, employ any illegal means to muddle through, the end justify the means. The major propelling instrument is avarice. The anti corruption bodies Independent Corruption Practices Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) established by the Federal Government to inject discipline and prudent attitudes on the nations! psyche, have been accused of selective investigation and prosecution of political opponents of the president.

It is obvious that our quest for sustainable democracy arising from citizenship education will be a perpetual dream if we continue to manage the state in dishonest and overt disregard for constituted authority. We must change our orientation towards life in all ramifications. This can be done through- a well articulated Citizen Education programme with a focus on National Ethics and Discipline in Nigerian Life.

Citizenship Education: The Need for Emphasis

The importance of Citizenship Education for national ethics and discipline in Nigerian life need to be emphasized. Some of the reasons why it becomes necessary are discussed below;

Citizenship Education is the process of developing civic spirit and loyalty devoid of all forms of bias, learning of behaviour inimical to freewill. It aim at the development of a belief in the values of democratic institutions and a sense of preserving, refining and initiation into the skills and concepts required for active participation in political affairs. It focuses on the notions of loyalty in learning to live together with a sense of identity and cultivation of political awareness to react appropriately when need be.

It enables people reason objectively and be able to give critical analysis of political, social and economic events within and outside their environment. It enables the people to know and appreciate the path of political development the country has post through. This helps to broaden the people perception of the mistakes and corresponding consequences with the view to correcting them.

It enables the people to know the limits of the government authority and also the procedures to seek redress in case of violation of rights of the individual.

It enables rulers acquire rules of proper behaviour within the limit of law.

It enables individuals think of what they will contribute towards the developments of the society he lives in all forms but not what he will get from the society (Eregha, 2002). It will also lead to the attainment of a real democratic society where the masses are conscious, vigilant and organized and in which social injustice, poverty, election fraud, crimes and foreign domination of our economy are totally eliminated.

To realize these lofty goals, there is the need to create a new national political culture, which would facilitate the establishment and consolidating of an integrated and viable democratic order in the Nigerian society.

Methods of Citizenship Education

Citizenship Education content consist of past and present events and issues that are likely

going to shape and reshape the lulu re of Nigeria. Therefore, it should be emphasize in the school and outside the school. The curriculum should be designed with the objective of changing people attitudes and values for the better so, it should be handled as a special and compulsory public education programme which would involve the use of modern instructional technology both in the electronic and print media. The content of the programme should embrace a wide spectrum of human life with emphasis on the need to live an honest and responsible life. The language of communication should be simple, clear and translated into many local languages. Also, the curriculum should be flexible to accommodate new issues, events, ideas and innovation in the country (Argungu, 2000).

The programme should be design for all classes of people; schools, traders, public servants, politicians, judges, police, soldiers, professionals and must be exposed to important aspect of our national life as stated in the fundamental objectives and directive principles of government. As stated in the 1989 and 1999 constitutions, (chapter two "sections 13-24) it shall be the duty and responsibility of all organs of government, and of all authorities and persons, exercising legislative, executive or judicial powers, to conform to, observe and apply the provision of this chapter of this Constitution. That;

1. The Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a State based on the principles of democracy and social justice.
2. It is hereby, accordingly, declared that
 - (a) Sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria from whom government through this Constitution derives all its power and authority;
 - (b) The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government; and
 - (c) The participation by the people in their government shall be ensured in accordance with the provisions of this constitution among others.

Special focus should be directed towards adults since they may no longer have the opportunity of going through formal education in the regular school system. The focus on adults should be more of rural base than urban because majority of Nigerians live in the villages Towards this end, the government should reorganized all forms of education programmes in the country to accommodates citizenship education as a compulsory course just as English language. All ministries of information and other government" agencies responsible for public enlightenment should develop means of disseminating the contents to the public. Above all personnel responsible for teaching propagating the programme should not be subjective, bias or realistic while carrying out -their duty. Transparency in implementing the programme will determine the extent to which its -objectives will be realized.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The paper discussed the need for . emphasis of citizenship education in Nigeria. ; This becomes necessary because of lawlessness exhibited by Nigerians especially the governing , authority and public officers backed by politicians as godfathers. The paper is of the -view that all Nigerians should be trained on the need to live a disciplined life at all times and respect constituted authorities. This can be achieved through citizenship education" at all level and all ages. This can be effectively done if we adopt these recommendations.

1. All citizens of the country must be regarded as equal in all ramifications.
2. All citizen must be given opportunity or encouraged to participate actively in the political system and perform their civic responsibilities.
3. The state must recognize that it owes the citizens an obligation to provide the fundamental material needs and recognize, respect and protect all human rights.

4. The state must respect the power and sovereignty of the people. It must discourage the emergence of any form of power, which is not derived from the people and their accepted norms and values.
5. The state must preserve the culture of using the ballot box (democracy) as the true symbol of freedom, liberty, equality and the basis of the improvement of the society for the benefit of the people.
6. The state must discourage sharp class division among the people and the use of money to prevent the citizens from ascending to power in the political system.
7. The state must uphold its sovereignty in all ramifications and prevent the leaders from being subservient to foreign interests.
8. The supremacy of the constitution must be upheld so that other law making institutions do not amend the constitution against the interest of the majority.

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