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Youth empowerment and value re-orientation: The road map to strong and peaceful nation

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Abstract

Youths are the most active segment of any society imbued with relentless energy, vigor, drive and the major catalyst for development in any given society. The paper is of the view that when youths are effectively, adequately and constantly empowered and re-orientated with acceptable values, this will go a long way in developing peaceful and strong nation. Besides, a strong and peaceful society helps in promoting national image, national security, respect for human life and properties, corporate values, imbibe the culture of hard work and productivity, wealth and job creation among its citizenries. The paper gave a highlight on the concepts of youth empowerment, value re-orientation and challenges associated with empowering youths. Recommendations proffered among others includes; employing sustainable training and retraining of teachers in entrepreneur (empowerment) skills and acquisitions of value re-orientation skills, introduction of value re-orientation skills as a course of study in schools where every student needs to pass through before graduation.

Keywords: Youths, empowerment, value re-orientation, road map, nation

Introduction

The level of political decay, socio-economic, and other social vices such as prostitution, teenage pregnancy, ritual killing, kidnapping, robbery, corruption, militancy, falsification of election results, thuggery, etc have reach an alarming stage and posing great challenge to the peace, growth and development of our nation (Nigeria). Unfortunately, the youths are the worst hit and are used as machineries for achieving these evil acts.

Youths are the future leaders and backbone of any nation as the progress and future development of the nation depends to a large extent on them. This is why most nations have designed meaningful programmes for their youths knowing fully that the place and importance of the youths in a society cannot be overemphasized. Youths are one of the greatest assets that any nation can have because they are legitimately regarded as the future leaders, they are potentially and actually the greatest investment for a country's development (Abdullia, 2003)^[1]. They serve as a good measure of the extent to which a country can reproduce as well as sustain itself and the extent of their vitality, responsible conduct, and roles in society is positively correlated with the development of their country.

In the recent past, the Federal Government of Nigeria came up with laudable programmes tended towards youths' empowerment: the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in 1987 and National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 1999. Also, in 1999, the Federal Government established National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), which aimed at bringing about economic reform, growth and development through developing all the various sectors of the economy. However, in spite all these programmes organized by government, quite a good number of Nigerian youths are yet to benefit from them either because of inadequate sensitization and promotion by government or the youths lack the will for value orientation as most of them nowadays have developed negative attitudes toward good values, virtues and hard work. Laziness, lack of respect for parents, elders, the law and leaders in authority have become the order of the day in our present generation and society. The Nigerian society today is characterized by high level of distrust, suspicion and everybody has become a suspect of misplaced value. Immorality and lack of sanctity of life have increased as murder and kidnapping have become daily occurrence that pervaded the society with infanticide, fratricide, patricide, matricide and suicide in pursuit of materialism.

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In addition, the malady of corruption has polluted the character and personality of every Nigerian, specifically, the youths. It is worrisome, in that those who dare to criticize the ugly trends are faced with open harassment or veiled security. It is regrettable that vices have taken the place of virtue and merit is scarified (Njoku, 2015) ^[11]. These and other similar negative values have taken the place of positive values needed for the development of strong and peaceful society or nation and to a large extent, the youths are worst hit. It can therefore, be asserted that Nigerian youths may be ignorant of the dangers of accepting and practicing negative values in the society or do not have good value orientation from homes. The need to re-orient and empower Nigerian youths with useful skills and knowledge that will enable them develop strong and peaceful nation is thus paramount.

Concept of Youth Empowerment

Youth empowerment means to empower, engage and create value so that young women and men can contribute to the economic, social and cultural advancement of their families and countries and to their own fulfillment (Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment, PAYE, 2006 & 2015). In other words, youth empowerment is an act of acquiring skills and ideas for the sake of creating employment for ones-self and also for others. Youth empowerment is also perceived as indispensable tools used in meeting the nation's social, political, moral, cultural and economic aspirations. They are those useful tools that helps inculcate in the individual knowledge, skills, dexterity, character and desirable values that will foster national development and self-actualization (Ajayi & Afolabi, 2009) ^[3]. Youth empowerment leads to the development of small, medium and even large scale businesses based on creativity and innovation. The success of these businesses in turn helps in building up the nation. Youth empowerment also reduces poverty rate with visible increment of employment rate among youths and effective maintenance of value (Oviawe, 2010). Youth empowerment has the potentials of providing practical applications to students, inculcates innovation spirit, targeted at the youths, and creates avenues for people to manage innovations, manage entrepreneurial process and develop their potentials as managers of creativity in given fields as well as boosts job creation and crime reduction. A well planned and properly executed youth empowerment programme also helps in curbing youth menaces due to youth unemployment and restiveness.

Young people are empowered when they acknowledge that they have or can create choices in life, are aware of the implications of those choices, make an informed decision freely, take action based on that decision and accept responsibility for the consequences of these actions. Youth Empowerment can also be seen as act of creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than at the directions of others.

Youth empowerment is very essential in every society this is because it renders help to youths in all ramifications. Empowerment also keeps youths away from criminal activities that is, it decreases crime rate among youths in the society. Through youth empowerment, effective development takes place, and sustainable peace is achieved in the society. It is a process of increasing capacity of individual or group to make more choices and to transform these choices into desired actions and outcomes (WHO, 2006). Thus, empowerment is essentially a liberty in political, economic,

and social sector and having awareness on different issues especially on their right (Arshad, Malik, Nawaz & Farid, 2014) ^[5]. On the whole, youth empowerment aims at laying a solid foundation for sustainable poverty reduction, employment generation, wealth creation and value-reorientation.

Concept of Value Re-orientation

Reorientation in this context means re-positioning of citizens to where they ought to be in the future. Thus, the reorientation of value system is a conscious development of human resources through ideological appeals, planning, training, productivity and efficiency in achievements through corporate culture (Njoku, 2006) ^[13]. The core of every human culture or ethos of any culture is a mark of its fundamental values. Every society has its own rules that governs or guide the way each individual(s) behaves in that society. In other words, in every society there are certain values that are fundamental to all its citizens. The satisfaction of some desires and interests inform the values we placed on things or experiences that arise from them (Njoku, 2006) ^[13]. Consequently, value implies acceptable standards, ideal way of doing things and living virtuous life in society. Value can be positive or negative (dominant or recessive). The positive, dominant or acceptable values in the Nigeria societies include strong respect and honour accorded to authority, leaders, parents, elders, men and women of honour, love and protection of the family and family name, hard work, truthfulness, honesty and friendliness. It is therefore no exaggeration so state that years back the Nigerian youths had great sense of respect and honour accorded to parents, elders, the authority and those in leadership positions. Youths in those days had love and passion for their families and societies, as such they try by all means to protect family's name (Njoku, 2015) ^[11]. Lives of chastity, temperance, peace, justice were also maintained by the Nigerian youths. Hard work and productivity were highly respected; truthfulness, honesty and friendliness were virtues that were transmitted to children and the youths. There was an overwhelming respect for sanctity of life and hospitality in the life of every Nigerian. Besides, even during inter-ethnic wars in the past and the civil war, Nigerian youths were generous to one another. Unfortunately, all these good virtues and values deposited in the Nigerian youths appear to have greatly declined in the present society. In fact, a society that was founded on positive values has given way to negative values which calls for value re-orientation in contemporary Nigerian society.

The Place of Youth Empowerment and Value Re-Orientations in Nation Building

Youth empowerment and value re-orientation are key to building strong and peaceful nation. Obasanjo (2012) ^[14] noted that youth empowerment and value re-orientation promotes social and group relationships. It trains individuals to relate to and interact meaningfully with others in the society and to appreciate the importance of effective organization for human progress. As such, a strong and peaceful nation is that nation that has enough manpower and each person occupies his or her rightful position so as to enhance the growth of the society (Afolabi & Loto, 2012) ^[2]. When youths are empowered and effectively given the right and needed orientations, this promotes mutual co-existence among the different individuals in a society or community, develop strong and positive attitude towards one another, leaders and elders or government of the day (Armstrong, et al 1981) ^[4].

In addition, youths who are well empowered and have good values relate and experience good working relationship with others outside their community and compete with outside groups with minimum friction and this goes a long way to promote national unity and peaceful co-existence which leads to national development. Youth empowerment and value re-orientation provides a setting within which youths flourish and learn appropriate patterns of interpersonal relations as they meet with other youths from different social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Empowerment and value re-orientation also promotes the culture of productivity by enabling individuals to discover the creative potentials in them and apply same in the improvement of the existing skill and technique of performing specific tasks, thereby increasing the efficiency of their personal societal efforts (Obasanjo 2012) ^[14]. Empowerment and value re-orientation enables individual or youth to be useful to themselves and the society they live. It makes them become productive and discover their creative abilities and use this to perform specific tasks to attain self-actualization. Empowerment and value re-orientation also develops in individuals those values which make for good citizenship, such as honesty, selflessness, tolerance, dedication, hard-work and personal integrity, all of which provide the rich soil from which good leadership potential is groomed.

Recommendations

The following are some of the possible ways, strategies or roles in which parents, government, NGOs, religious groups, media, education can play to build a strong and peaceful nation:

Good Parenting Style and Guidance:

The family unit is the primary focus of value re-orientation informed by parental roles, goals, values and manners that influence the children's moral and social behaviour (Bull, 1980) ^[7]. Parents are responsible for effective and adequate teaching and training of their children. This can be done by monitoring and guiding their behavioral patterns at home and adopt gradual and systematic process to sensitize their children's initiatives as well as develop in them self-control in the absence of external authority. Parents need to apply mild physical punishment and withdrawal of love, emotional appeals or threat of disapproval to develop in their children self-imposed discipline and obedience to rules and regulations.

Role of Education

- A. Teachers (education) are expected to function as role models; they need to nurture and entrench values positively in children or learners (Somy, 1999; Maheshwari, 2009) ^[15, 10].
- B. Teachers need to acquire intellectual competence, emotional stability and unquestionable moral standards as well as commitment that help in building peaceful minds in their pupils.
- C. Introduction of Value Re-orientation Courses: Curriculum planners need to introduce value re-orientation skills as a course of study in schools where every student needs to pass through before graduation.
- D. Curriculum planners need to make national character reorientation an integral part of the curriculum of teacher education as this will help teachers to internalize values that will help in building learners' or children's ability in value reorientation. The fact remains that good teachers

build enduring foundations that make good schools and a good nation.

- E. Sustainable Training and Retraining: The educational system needs to employ sustainable training and retraining of teachers in entrepreneur (empowerment) skills and acquisitions of value re-orientation skills.

Role of Government, NGOs and Individuals:

- a. **Financing researches:** The Government, corporate organizations, non-governmental, agencies and individuals should encourage and finance research development, inventions and mass production of invented products to encourage hard-work and productivity among students.
- b. **Awards and rewards:** The government at all levels and corporate organizations should provide meritable awards and rewards to outstanding individuals and researchers who have exhibited high sense of capabilities and responsibilities in their various fields of study as a way of instilling creativity as well as discouraging indolence and examination malpractice among students.
- c. **Constant funding:** There is the need for all education stakeholders to actively, adequately and constantly partake in the funding, procurement, maintenance, rehabilitation of physical facilities, instructional and living conditions of Nigerian schools. Besides, when conscious efforts towards qualitative and durable educational system are put in place the Nigerian youth will definitely be empowered and re-oriented (Igboke, 2001) ^[8].
- d. **Establishment of schools and skill acquisition centers:** The Government should not lose sight of schools drop-outs rather it should establish schools and skill acquisition centers in villages, slums and other isolated zones. This is because the poverty level of most Nigerians has been predicated by school drop-outs and people living in isolated areas without civilization.
- e. **Building and maintenance of linkage roads:** The government at all levels should build and maintain linkage roads to enhance economic growth of the members.
- f. **Job creation:** Job creation must be a central objective of government policy and government should provide enabling environment for private sector to develop into entrepreneurs and enhance job creation.
- g. **Formation of Effective Youth Groups:** This can be done by encouraging both youth and adults (parents, teachers, NGOs, or community and religious leaders) to support the formation of vibrant and effective youth groups. The formation of these groups will also offer young people the opportunity to discuss and suggest or bring out useful ideas on important issue that affects them and the community at large.
- h. **Build Trust between Youths and Governments:** Trust can be build between Youths and Governments when youths are given the constructive avenues or opportunities to work with local and national governments and are also engaged in activities that promote the legitimization of youths and foster their representation in local and national policymaking processes.
- i. **Promote Intergenerational Exchange:** Working with youths in isolation can lead to lack of peace in a group or community. Through partnerships with community groups and elder councils, youths can demonstrate the

benefits of their peace actions. When visions of young people and the experience of older generations are brought together, new answers to challenges are created.

- j. **Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation:** Monitoring and evaluation of youths' activities in communities or societies need to be undertaken seriously as these helps in building a strong relationship between one another. Rewarding systems such as certificates, prizes and scholarships can serve as great incentives for youth and can also inspire their peers to take action and participate in peace programs.

Roles of Religion

Religion as system of belief exerts influence in daily lives, values and attitudinal reorientation of members. The religious groups should stress those higher values in their teachings, preaching in our collective bargain to reorientation of Nigeria's value system earth (Njoku, 2005) ^[12]. Those values include truth, trust-worthiness, integrity, honesty, compassion, patience and obedience, respect for human life, faithfulness love and kindness (hospitable) etc.

Media Roles

- a. **Mass Media:** The media has viable role to play in enlightening the general public on the overall effect of negative values and need for hard-work, fair play, self-employment and law abiding citizens through advertisement, seminars, symposia and other measures. These no doubt would go a long way in repositioning the positive values in Nigerians.

- b. **Effective Information and Communication Technology:** Provision of active and free SMS-based platform through which youths can express their views on what is happening in their communities is very important in promoting peace and building a strong nation. In fact, this platform enable youths to acquire some peace-building knowledge and skills, express themselves meaningful and also participate in peace building.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper is the contributions of youth empowerment and value re-orientation in building a strong and peaceful national. The paper highlighted specific ways in which youth empowerment and value re-orientation contributes in building a strong and peaceful nation. The paper concludes that youth empowerment and value re-orientation prepares youths for smooth generational shift, assign roles and responsibilities to the youths and future leaders and thereby intensifying their leadership competence, induct them into adulthood culture and experience, enables them have objectives, value and priorities to pursue, gives them that spiritual, mental and social satisfaction and sense of belonging, enables them think toward self-actualization and enable them co-operate with government's vision, mission and set objectives for building strong and peaceful nation.

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