

FORMATION OF THE YOUTH AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The future of any and every great institution in the world, largely depends on folks who fall within the age bracket of those regarded as youths, who undisputedly are the leaders of tomorrow, whether or not they are prepared for it. The youths no doubt are a very important class of any nation, since their resourcefulness, skills, strengths can no doubt be beneficial in sustaining any nation's development. They bring in a kind of vitality and enthusiasm that can drive any nation to the zenith of development and self-reliance. But more often as we see; especially in developing nations, not much regard is given to youth formation, in a bid to prepare them for their future role. The consequence of which is, being plunged into the future with absolutely no formation and preparation, they also fail to maintain the standards already set in place. This study is therefore, posed towards understanding the importance of youth formation and its implication in attaining sustainable national development. It shall also establish the extent of interaction between formation and national development; the challenges of youth formation and the role of major stakeholders. A qualitative, critical and analytical assessment of these issues will help us to arrive at the shores of the objective of this study. This piece, discovers that, in other to situate the youth of today strategically for national development, we must put into consideration the demographics of youth as well as their corresponding formation. This remains the task of every major player saddled with the enterprise of promoting national development.

Keywords: Formation, Youth, Youth formation, Development, National development.

Introduction

Every nation of the world, strives to attain an all-round growth. And undoubtedly, the future of any nation rests on the shoulders of the youth. They eschew age long out dated mentalities, the values they hold and the qualities they possess, can inevitably bring development to any nation. The knowledge, skills and principles which they have acquired over the years would be used as tools for the development or otherwise of the nation.

Youths can bring social reform and improvement in society. We cannot do without the youths of a country. A nation requires their participation to achieve her goals and help in taking the nation towards progress.

Indeed, the youths are the movers and shakers of the nation. Without them, the nation has no future, remains moribund and faces extinction if care is not taken. The development of any country requires active participation from the youth. We must make all the youth aware of their power and the role they have to play in nation-building. As well as contribute our quarter to their proper formation. There are many ways in which we can help the youth of our country to achieve their potential. For that, the government must introduce programs that will help in fighting off issues like unemployment, poor education institutes and more to help them prosper without any hindrance.

But today what do we find? Ill formed youths, who cannot cater for their own well-being less talk, the well-being of a nation. Can this situation cannot be blamed totally on the youths? This write up, attempts at presenting a brief insight into the crisis concerned with youth formation and briefly state how their proper formation can aid them to contribute effectively to national development.

Conceptual Clarifications

Formation: Formation can be referred to as the act or process of value adding. This value may be social, religious, an ethical. It is the process of giving a form to a person, or an act of taking form.¹ It has to do with character development, value orientation and moral integrity. It is a process of breaking and shapening, breaking out deformations and molding forth a transformation.

Youths: Many definitions of the youths are often done with age classifications. And these categorization differ from place to place. Generally those who fall within the age bracket of 14-35 are often regarded as youths. In some cases, the age range can be up to 40. It usually is a period between childhood and adulthood, between dependence and moving towards independence. The definition of a

youth is a young person who has not yet reached adulthood and refers to the time period before you become an adult.²The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 as youth.³**UNESCO further notes that: Youths have the creativity, the potential and the capacity to make change happen – for themselves, for their communities, and for the rest of the world.⁴ Simply put, youths have the vitality needed to transform any society. Pope John Paul II affirms this youthful vitality when he avers that:**

Youth is the age of hope, of promise, of enthusiasm, of plans and of ideals. Youths do not want to give up in the face of difficulties. Youth does not want to put up with the short comings of the status quo. Youth believes in a better world and is determined to do something to help bring about it.⁵

Youth formation: Youths are the building blocks of every developed nation. Youth formation is the process of preparing the young for the future act of becoming leaders. The youthful stage is a formative age, which enhances the youth and makes him or her contribute meaningfully to national development. Youth formation is a duty for all, social agents - the family, the church, the government, parents and youths themselves. The energy and vigor of the youths act as catalyst for national development. That is why, countries which utilize their youth in positive direction are more developed. Youths can constitute both a challenge and an opportunity for development.

The need for formation is vital, because the youths of this century live in a dysfunctional world, with so many contradictions, unprecedented changes. A world torn apart by a complexity of conflicting value orientations, divergent worldviews and competing ideologies.⁶

Within the black continent, youths bring out the potentiality for Africa's development. Youths could be a source of labor inputs as well as human capital in production, which would improve total factor productivity in a region of the world where capital formation is limited. When employed, youths could be a reliable source of demand for the economy through their consumption activities. Especially in the African continent, the youths of Africa could be critical for the development of a new class of entrepreneurs that African countries need to prosper.⁷

Development: Development is generally used to denote growth or progress. It is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and

demographic components. The purpose of development is a rise in the level and quality of life of the population, and the creation or expansion of local regional income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment. Development is visible and useful, not necessarily immediately, and includes an aspect of quality change and the creation of conditions for a continuation of that change.⁸

National Development: National development is a constructive process of engaging all the people of the country in building political stability, social unity and economic prosperity of the country.

National development involves social harmony, infrastructure development and economic growth of the nation. Youths involvement in any growing economy is an essential key to development. Youths are the greatest power of the country therefore significant efforts must be established to help empower them to competently and adequately contribute towards sustainable development of the nation. National development will improve the lives of citizens with the growing economy.⁹

Challenges of Youth Formation

Many challenges exist today, which impedes youth formation. These range from lack of proper education, lack of social and basic amenities, lack of job opportunities, lack of support for creative innovations and worse still, there is the *dysfunctionalism* which is associated with the agents of socialization which in turn affects formation. George Ehusani, in *Success without Successor*, affirms this socializational *dysfunctionalism* when he avers that

The traditional agents of socialization - the family, the church and the school, appear to have lost much of their authority and pride of place in the socialization and formative process. Today the Internet, the Television, the Cinema, the Home Video and the Peer Group appear to have snatched from the Parents, the Priests and Catechists and the School Teachers the primary prerogative of imparting knowledge and values and building the character of the younger generation.¹⁰

- **Family.** The family is the bedrock of any human formation which is to be impacted into young people. When the formation which the family ought to impart is missing, it requires extra effort to get the formation of young people aright. In these times, news of broken families and failed relationships constitute no new surprise to us. But the end process of these broken families are traumatized children and youths who are left and if not by grace, would themselves become partners of broken families, thus continuing the cycle. Again many

parents are career persons, who love their jobs so much at the expense of valuable family formation of their wards. They at best leave the formation of their wards to uneducated house assistance, who have the potentiality to bring into actuality the deformation of young people.

- **Church.** Many Churches today, are but true Churches. They are advanced shrines and medium for business. Many main stream Churches, have become a reproach and abomination to God. Thus the message of Christ which ought to have a formative impact on the lives of young ones, is now being distorted for a message that preaches material prosperity and the desire for materialistic relevant miracles. Today, the pulpit is been used to advise young ones about the seemingly wastage of time on education. They only present to the young 'the miracle working God' and not the 'suffering Jesus' who carried his cross. Every line of scripture is interpreted in a liberalistic manner, and people end up fed with stones instead of bread.
- **School.** Many schools today are set up for profit making, over and above value formation. We need to try striking simple conversations with our latest graduates in order to discover the mess many youths have been entangled in. Professors who engage in nebulous acts such as mal-practice, were those who had access to quality education. Schools today have lost their influence over value and character formation. Students and parents decide what they want, and what they do not want and in a bid to retain numbers especially due to financial rewards, the schools watch the children throwaway their future, while they sit and fold their hands.
- **Unemployment.** Lack of employment destroys certain formation to be gotten from the ethics of work. When jobs are not readily available, and those available are not meant for the educated but the connected. This creeds the contemporary belief among youths that education is no longer the key.
- **Lack of Mentorship.** Lack of mentorship is another factor destroying the affective formation of youths. Youths witness everyday those who preach but do not practice; those who outline policies and principles but do not follow them. The end result of this accumulated experience never motivates but translates them into being oppressed oppressors.

- **Social Media.** The social media frenzy, has taken over the task of formation of these impeded agents of formation. From children who live in abundance but thirst from lack of attention, to those who want answers to the meaning of life, and seek means for channeling their vitality and passion in expressing themselves. The media (wrong use of it), has given young people today the illusion of a false presence, a feeling of *accepttedness*, and a fabricated feeling of satisfaction. This makes a lot of persons accept whatever is brought to the table.

Authentic Formation of Youths: Implications for National Development

Can youth formation be beneficial for national development? Yes. This is because, we cannot eliminate the important role youths play, in any nation's development. Youths could be a source of labor inputs as well as human capital in production, which would improve total factor productivity in a region of the world where capital formation is limited.¹¹ Youths are critical for the development of a new class of entrepreneurs and leaders that can keep any nation aright.

Youths spur in-depth research into varying issues confronting our collective existence. They ask questions which set researchers into motion. They challenge, oppose existing foundations, by seeking more and more to make adjustments to existing status quo. Thus only when they are adequately formed, that it would be possible for them to make ethical choices, which in the long run would be beneficial to any society.

With the new waves of knowledge attained from globalization, youths are better able to make choices that support the pursuit of educational goals and the development of life skills necessary for national and local leadership positions. For instance, youths with access to reproductive health education, services (where they are welcomed), will enable them make rightful decisions as regards their health.

Youths occupy a prominent place in any society, for apart from being the owners and leaders of tomorrow, they have energy and ideas that are society's great potentials.¹² The National Youths Development Policy asserts that: Youths are the foundation of a society. Their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides in economic development and socio-political attainments. In their dreams and hopes, a nation finds her motivation; on their energies, she builds her vitality and purpose. And because of their dreams and aspirations, the future of a nation is assured.¹³ The

statement above acknowledges the role of the youths in the peace and security of a nation.

Youths depending on how they are employed, can be agents of peace as well a instruments of war. They no doubt can play the role of peace mediators. Ozohu-Suleiman avers that: as [an] active segment of any society, youths are the major determiners of peace and stability of a nation.¹⁴ Conversely, the degree of disorderliness and instability in society is also determined in part by youths. Peace is a precursor of development. The absence of peace means that no meaningful development can take place.¹⁵

Youth Formation: A Task For All

To our already existing identity as victims of bad government, today, we all are potential martyrs (whether we are ready or not), and also potential victims of kidnap, potential victims of wrong medical treatments, potential victims of collapsed buildings, potential victims of human inhumanness.

The formation of the youths remains an absolute task for everyone interested in the well-being of any nation. As faulty foundations can lead to collapse of structures, same can be said for any nation which pays little or no attention to youth formation cum development. Everyone must put in whatever it takes to give a better foundation for the youths. There must be a revival of the agents of socialization. The creation of enabling environment for family life. The creation of job opportunities and incentives for the youth. The admittance of youths sufficiently formed into the political and economic structure of society.

The political society itself, is an important agent of the formation of the youths. The quest for an all-round character cum moral value formation for young people must have a place in any government's policies. Leaders are to be aware that they must be role models and not pharisaic in nature. Government must set up effective youth policies which must move from the level of being an act of government to the level of honest implementation. Furthermore, equal opportunities must be provided for all irrespective of caste, creed, gender, race, religion and more. There are various issues of nepotism and favoritism which eats away the actual talents of a nation. This must be done away with.

Since those found in the society are those found also in the Church, it follows that if the youths in the society are damaged, the youths in the Church would also be damaged youths. Given this fact, the Church must rise up and contribute her quota to the formation of the

youths. She must play her role as an agent of the formation of youths. As George Ehusani notes:

Church based programs and projects for youth development should include not only spiritual, moral and doctrinal education, but also (especially in our economically distressed environment where many youths have dropped out of school and are without skills) to include vocational and basic skills training for economically disadvantaged youths.¹⁶

The youths themselves have a role to play in their own formation. The self is the first agent of formation. They should avail themselves of any and every such opportunity provided for their growth and wellbeing. Many youths today seem lackadaisical in affairs which should help their self-growth and aspirations. They are lured into all kind of life style which would lead to their unproductivity. If youths do not open and dispose themselves they cannot be formed and cannot eventually contribute to national development. At best they can just be noise makers on social media platforms.

Youth Formation in Nigeria: Issues and Concern.

Youths have a vital role to play in building this nation. They are spurs to facilitate Nigeria's economic greatness and instigate developmental strides. But the youths of this country have not had a soft bed on which to land on. They are plagued on all sides many factors which are within and without. From lack of adequate formation to absence of infrastructural requirements for right living. Some of these issues as well as the resulting concerns are highlighted below.

Socio-Economic and Political Environment: The socio-economic and political environment in Nigeria poses a great challenge to the youths. Economic and social statistics present a somber picture that leaves much to be desired. Almost half a century after flag independence, the economy continues to be dominated by the primary sector – agriculture, oil and minerals. This is partly because the country has not been able to create an environment for high value added economic activities. There is low domestic capital formation and declining direct foreign investment, with the exemption of the oil and gas sectors, until recently very heavy indebtedness, high unemployment and the informalisation of the economy where the majority of its people live in poverty.¹⁷

Nigeria performs very poorly in terms of global economic competitiveness. The country lacks basic social and physical infrastructure. As a result, most people on the country have no access to basic services such as potable water, electricity, good sanitation, roads and

healthcare. All of this is coupled with a high illiteracy rate. The country's underdevelopment has been reinforced by authoritarianism, political instability, ethnic and religious conflicts in the last decade.

Even almost two decades after the return to democratic rule, we witness today instability in governance- like those in governance do not have an idea about governance. We witness tribalism and nepotism, we see a government that grossly tells lies, and misleads the public, we see non-accountability of public officials, lack of transparency in decision-making, electoral frauds and the colonialisation and personalisation of the state and national resources by the political elite. This situation presents particular challenges for the Nigerian youths.¹⁸

Lack of Education: Education is very crucial to the formation of youths. In Nigeria, our educational system is nothing to write home about. The aim of education is to bring about intellectual, moral, social and psychological formation of the human person. A person who is balanced in these areas of life will make the society proud. But today we find students who are intellectual thieves, socially imbalanced, morally bankrupt, psychologically confused, emotionally imbalanced, and physically challenged.¹⁹ More worrisome is the fact that education in Nigeria today is certificate based education, rather than education for productivity. Thus we have more graduates, but less people who can distinguish their left from their right. Education also ought to help us make ethical choices, but we have today more educated illiterates, who lack value appreciation and moral ethos.

Lack of Employment. Youth unemployment poses a great threat to the country's stability and development, and if not checkmated on time, it may lead to disastrous consequences for the nation. Desperation can drive the unemployed youths into living outside the law in order to survive and as a means of expressing dissatisfaction at the apparent neglect of their very existence. Crime as a result of unemployment has adverse effect on the economy.²⁰ E. Okafor laments that: High level of corruption in Nigeria has robbed the country of developing a vibrant economic base in spite of her abundant natural resources. Massive corruption is perpetuated in every sector and has permeated the entire social structure of Nigeria. Funds meant for development projects which could have generated employment have been misappropriated, diverted, or embezzled and stashed away in foreign banks. Endemic corruption has robbed the country of the chance of developing a vibrant economy that would have created jobs for the youths in the various sectors of economy.²¹

The consequences of not fully developing and harnessing youth's potential could be dire, having enormous impact on the economic, political scientific, moral and social life of a nation. Youths are more likely to become frustrated because of legitimate grievances, including a lack of employment opportunities, low educational attainment, little participation in decision making and low social mobility. In this volatile context, greedy and opportunistic politicians could even exploit these grievances by involving these frustrated youths in creating massive instabilities that could impede the development of any nation.

We must invest heavily in our children and youth population, so that from among them would emerge better presidents, better governors, better local government chairmen, better MDs and Directors of companies.²²

If posed for a better future, the Nigerian youth, has the propensity for greatness. Being more technologically attuned and with the desire to improve on existing parameters of development, they can help push the integral part of Nigeria's socio-political cum economic growth and development. The challenge faced by those saddled with the responsibility of youth formation, remains how to sufficiently harness and channel young people's passion, energy and enthusiasm into positive outcomes.

Concluding Remarks

The task of national development of any nation requires the captainship of astute and sound personnel. Sound men and women of deep vision, with sincerity of purpose, hardworking credible persons who are self-sacrificial and patriotic. In the words of Abolade Fagbohun, Nation-building and the associated developmental issues require men and women of deep vision; sincerity of purpose; selflessness; genuine love for their country and their people; hardworking; of conscience, integrity, credibility, trustworthiness, honesty, reliable and able; people who do not think of stealing or embezzling; people who do not misuse the authority and power conferred on them, by God or Man; people who do not think that getting to positions of authority is a "do-or-die" affair; people who understand the meaning of nation building, leadership, good governance, rule of law, political emancipation, equality, human and civil rights, civility, freedom of speech, rule of law, diversity and religious tolerance; people who will shun and will not tolerate tribalism, corruption and nepotism. These are the people who can build nations and create the change we want to see.²³

If a nation believes in its youths and believes that without the youths, she can't achieve her greatness, then she should make more

investment in them, because without investing in the youths, the future of a nation will not have any returns.

The youths themselves should also be proactive, and help in their own formation. They should indulge in selfless services, and in the long run become positive change agents and role models.

The Church, family, school, the government and society at large have equal responsibility to provide the youths with an environment that is conducive to bringing about a formation for the youths. There is the need as Ehusani avers,

...to invest in our future by channeling a lot of our time and resources into the wholesome formation and integral development of our youths, because what we see as our successes today must bear fruits in future generations... because our successes today must not end with our generation. They must have a multiplier effect on the coming generation.²⁴

Also, the youths should have a responsibility to be more proactive. An ideal youth who seeks to become a leader of tomorrow, must endeavor to be honest, hardworking, thrifty, idealistic, disciplined, patriotic, compassionate, sportsmanlike, moral/religious and above all he should be capable of dreaming high and positive dreams.²⁵

In the end, youths by their very nature are transforming, and by default, under formation whether or not the society puts effort into their formation, they are being formed, the question is not whether they are being formed or whether they should be formed but that whether by default or effort they receive the appropriate formation. Whatever they receive determines what becomes of the development of any nation.

To transform the crisis of youth formation and development today, we need a paradigm shift in the structure and method of their formation, as well as the environment we provide for them, and the opportunities we present for them to grow.

Endnote

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