



INDIGENOUS EDUCATION FOR ETHICS AND VALUES REORIENTATION AMONG YOUTHS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACE BUILDING IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract: There has been a sharp decline in our value system in Nigeria and most African Countries. The core values and ethical behaviours that characterized traditional African societies are gradually giving way for laziness, disrespect for elders and constituted authorities, “get rich quick” syndrome and other unethical practices. This has found outlet in crimes such as cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping and political violence perpetrated by youths in Rivers State. Consequently, there has been a state of unrest in the State. Some have attributed this to westernization. Whatever the cause of this is, it is common knowledge that everyone in the state desires peace as this is the only way development can thrive. There is an urgent need, therefore, for us to return to our roots by introducing the components of indigenous education that ensured we had saner societies where youths were taught the dignity of labour, respect for elders and authorities, neighborliness and patriotism.

Keywords: Indigenous Education, Ethics, Values, Reorientation, Peace Building

Introduction

The need for peace has dominated all national discourse in recent times because of the rising spate of insecurity in Nigeria. From terrorist activities of the Boko Haram sect in the North to kidnapping, armed robbery, cultism and communal crisis in the South and West and most recently agitations of the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) in the East for secession from Nigeria. In Rivers State which is in the South- South geo-political zone of Nigeria, there has been repeated cases of cult related killings and destruction of properties worth thousands and millions of naira in different communities, which has left some of these communities deserted. For example, Omoku, Akabuka and Oboburu communities in Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni Local Government Area and Mgbousimini, Iba and Ogoni have been in the news recently for violence and cult related killings perpetrated by youths in these areas. Similarly, Rumuji, Elele and its environs in Emohua Local Government Area has also been noted for armed robbery attacks and kidnapping which has left some of these communities

deserted by indigenes and visitors alike. These activities have slowed down the pace of development and in some areas completely hampered it. This underscores the urgent need for peace building if development must thrive in the State.

It is worthy of note that government both at state and local levels have made frantic efforts in ensuring peace is restored and normalcy returns to the state. There has been the use of conventional security apparatus to suppress perpetrators of these heinous crimes which are mostly youths but this seems to work only as long as the military men remain on ground. The violence continuous once they leave. This underscores the need for a change in approach.

Traditional African families and societies are known for upholding their culture, ethics and values tenaciously. These ethics and values were sacred and could not be compromised. In fact, defying them attracted grievous consequences and in worst case could lead to a person being ostracized. These values and ethics were the core philosophy behind traditional or indigenous



education. According to Fafunwa in Adekola (2012), in the old Africa, education played a significant role as a tool for induction of the youths into the society and preparation for adulthood. Indigenous education in the old Africa emphasized social responsibility and moral values. It was an integrated experience that combined other forms of training with character building.

Unfortunately, most of these core values and ethics that characterized indigenous education are lost with modernization or westernization. With the introduction of western education, Nigerians like most Africans completely discarded their culture, belief system, values and ethics. Worst still, parents who were trained using these indigenous education methods do not transmit these values to their children because they think it is archaic or outdated. Consequently, we have youths who are not well groomed and have very low moral standards with disregard for ethics and values. This ultimately has resulted in increased crime rate, juvenile delinquency and increasing level of insecurity in Rivers State, Nigeria and other African societies. There is need, therefore, for us to return to our roots as Africans. There is urgent need for a re-introduction of indigenous education as a way to peace building in our society.

Indigenous Education

Before having contact with the Europeans, traditional African societies had peculiar means through which norms, values, cultures, skills and knowledge were transmitted from one generation to another. This is what authors have referred to as indigenous or traditional education. Yusuf (2014) noted that the concept of indigenous education is explained literally as a system of education that is indigenous to the people and community where it is given. He further asserted that indigenous education was the traditional ways of passing on culture from one generation to another. This type of education preceded Islamic or Western Education.

Fafunwa in Umar and Shagari (2013:11) sees indigenous education as “the aggregate of all process by which a child develops his abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he intend to live”. This definition like others shows that indigenous education imbued in individuals ethics and right values necessary for survival of the individual in the society.

In the same vein, Mary and Aikman (2003) argued that indigenous education emphasized the teaching of traditional knowledge, methods, models and content through formal or non-formal educational systems. The aim of indigenous education to make the

individual become a functional member of the society. According to Yusuf (2014:64):

from birth to adulthood, traditional/indigenous education prepared the individual to conform with and meet the requirements of the society for its security and progress. The requirement of moral and spiritual attainment, not excluding respect for elders and customs of the society; becoming socially responsible, having orientation for job, acquiring the required leadership skills are all that this system of education aims at achieving in the members of the traditional society.

This description of indigenous education suggests that this education sought to produce responsible and well groomed individuals who would take on various social and economic and leadership roles needed for the survival of societies.

Peace Building

Peace is not merely the absence of wars as it is often described; but, in reality, a condition characterized by peaceful, harmonious conduct of human relationships with a view to securing all-round sustainable development of the people in the communities. Peace building is an intervention that is designed to prevent the start or resumption of violent conflict by creating a sustainable peace. Peace building activities address the root causes or potential causes of violence, create a societal expectation for peaceful conflict resolution and stabilize society politically and socio-economically (Coning, 2013). This view was supported by Sambanis (2014) when he defined peace building as an attempt after a peace has been negotiated or imposed, to address the sources of present hostility and build local capacities for conflict resolution. Fundamentally, whatever should constitute a peace building process should attempt to identify the root causes of conflicts and empower the actors with necessary skills and knowledge that will eventually bring a lasting solution to conflicts.

Values

Values are deep seated beliefs that influence people’s actions and the rules by which they make decisions within their society. Values determine attitudes which in turn influence behaviour. It has been documented that value ascription is a motive force that drives positive achievement. It is therefore essential that every individual, group and indeed the entire nation must have core values which serve as the driving engines of development, growth and progress (Igbuzor, 2013). Ossat in Adekola (2012) described



values as things considered worthwhile, desirable, right or good and thus craved for and applied on daily basis to enhance co-existence by people. Values also tell us which behaviour is more important and accepted in a particular situation and time. Psychologists see values as what people in a given society hold as right, true and acceptable. They include religious beliefs, moral attitudes, philosophies of life, political ideologies et cetera which help in sustaining a society and its culture (Umar and Shagari, 2013).

Ethics

Etymologically, the word ethics is derived from an Ancient Greek word “ethikos” which means “relating to one’s character”. This Ancient Greek word was also gotten from another Greek word “ethos” which literally means “character”, “disposition” (Hoy, 2005). Several definitions have been given for the concept ever since. The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy asserted that ethics have generally been used by many to mean “morality”. In a narrow sense, it was defined as the moral principles of a particular tradition, group or individual. In the same vein, Omoregbe in Adekola (2012) viewed the term ethics as a part of philosophy concerned with the morality of human actions. It deals with discourse on moral concepts such as good, bad, right and wrong.

The Need for Peace-building in Rivers State

There has been a rise in the rate of insecurity in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria since 2014 and Rivers State has been found to be one of the flashpoints. According to a report by Fund for Peace (2015), in Rivers State like most other areas in the Niger Delta and Nigeria at large cult related violence has taken on various criminal, militant, communal and/or political dimension based on the situation at hand. This report revealed that in July, 2015, there was a major clash between two rival cult groups known as “Deywell” and “Deebam” in Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni Local Government Area which led to the death of dozens of people. Similarly, there was a report of another clash between rival cult groups in Degema Local Government Area. These were called Icelanders and Greenlanders. Between January and April of 2015 these cult groups whose members were all youths were used for political intimidation in Port Harcourt, Andoni and other Local Government Areas in the state (Fund for Peace, 2015).

Cult and other related kind of violence perpetrated by youths continued and became widespread in Rivers State. Communities like Iba in Emohua LGA, Akabuka in ONELGA, Barako, Bomu Nweol in Gokana and most recently Mgbousimini in Obio/Akpor

LGA were at some point deserted by indigenes due to widespread killings and destruction of properties.

As a major move to restore peace in the state, the Rivers State Governor Nyesom Wike inaugurated a State Amnesty Programme in September, 2016 to grant amnesty to repentant cultists on the condition that they submit their weapons. In spite of the perceived success of the programme which saw about 7,369 arms surrendered including rifles and pump action guns, the spate of violence continued in the state (Punch, 2016).

In the same vein, the Governor of the state has declared on different fora how he has assisted the security apparatus in the state with all that is required for effective policing. It has been noticed however, that peace lasts only as long as the police and other security forces are on ground to suppress the activities of these youths. This underscores the need for a lasting approach towards peace building in Rivers State.

The root cause of this and other related kind of violence is the fact that there has been disregard for ethics and those core values Africans are known for. This view was shared by Adekola (2012) when he argued that because of urbanization in Nigeria most youths have lost their sense of responsibility and accountability for their actions. He noted that “these behaviours are further complimented by the messages the adults and the elite consciously and unconsciously send the youths by what they admonish them to do and how they do the admonishment.”

Indigenous Education for Ethics and Value Reorientation among youths: Implications for Peace Building

There is a consensus among authors, leaders, teachers and the general public on the need for ethics and value reorientation among youths in Nigeria. According to Igbuzor (2013), “the lived experience of Nigerians is quite different from the constitutional provisions on ethics and values for the country. There is a lot of indiscipline in every facet of life in the country. Integrity is no longer cherished by many people. The get rich quick syndrome and pursuit of easy money has reduced the dignity of labour. There is high level of religious intolerance and the love for the country is waning. Many Nigerians have no respect for our institutions and national symbols. There is therefore a great need for value re-orientation”.

Adekola (2012) noted that the primary tool for ensuring peace in traditional African societies was the value system. People’s actions and behaviours were informed by the ethics of the society and unethical behaviour were punished by both leaders and community members as a whole. This served as a deterrent for



many who could have engaged in one crime or the other. Consequently, we had more peaceful and saner societies. Similarly, Emenyonu in Amaechi (2013:10) noted that:

indigenous education consisted of materials transmitted either by word of mouth or by custom and practice. This education had a definite purpose; to instruct the young in the principles of right and wrong. It was directed at the young and all who molded opinion and character.

The purpose of education in old African societies seemed very clear as it prepared the youths for adult life. It provided them with the right ethical standing and values expected of them to become functional members of the society. Following this line of thought, Amaechi (2013) argued that indigenous education was generally for an immediate induction into the society and preparation for adult life. Specifically, the education laid emphasis on social responsibility, patriotism and citizenship, job orientation, spiritual and moral values. Youths were involved in participatory ceremonies, rituals, imitation, recitation and demonstration. They were practically involved in farming, fishing, cooking, carving, knitting and so on. Indigenous African education focused attention on character training. J. A. Majsan in his study of Yoruba education identified character-training and religious education as the two main objectives of Yoruba education and showed that other objectives were pursued through the latter. The parents, siblings and other member of the community participate in the education of the child. Everyone wants him to be sociable, honest, courageous, humble, persevering and of good repute at all times (Amaechi, 2013).

Specifically indigenous education can be used to promote ethics and values reorientation towards peace-building in the following ways:

Non-Formal Education Systems: learning in indigenous African societies was done in informal and non-formal setting. Umar and Shagari (2013) supported this when they observed that indigenous system of education took an unorganized setting, with no classrooms and the curriculum was unstructured. In other words, the learning activities took place everywhere and every adult was a teacher to the child. Significantly, the system emphasized humanity, human dignity, respect, honesty while communalism was the basic principle of everybody in the society. Unfortunately, the much needed values and ethics are no longer

found in these adults both in the family and communities who are supposed to teach them to the youths. There is need for introduction of ethics and values through various non-formal media such as the use of Sunday school classes in churches and other religious organizations, sensitization programmes in market places, community town halls, storytelling, use of radio jingles and television adverts and programmes to reach adults both at rural and urban centres. These programmes will imbue in youths the needed values of hard work, respect for elders, patriotism and value for human life. This ultimately will begin a sustainable peace building process.

Furthermore, Yusuf (2014) asserted that everyone in traditional society has one thing or the other doing to earn a living. Indigenous education was designed then to ensure no one was unemployed, there was personal job which could be family occupation or rendering services to others for which payment or some form of reward was given. Occupations such as fishing, hunting, farming, drumming, carving, weaving, knitting, singing, dancing, wine-tapping etc are the characteristics of indigenous education. This ensured youths and adults alike were always occupied so they didn't have time for crimes and violence. This type of education can be introduced today. Parents can ensure that while growing up all their kids should be exposed to one skill/vocation or the other. This can be combined with the conventional formal education so upon graduation from either primary, secondary or even tertiary education, these youths can have a skill that will keep them busy and earn a living. This way, they will avoid idleness which makes them vulnerable to crimes.

Formal Education: With the introduction of Western Education, there has been a steady decline in our value systems. Even though our formal schools were meant to train students in character building, there are no special subjects or courses for this purpose. This informed the submissions of Adekola (2013) that ethics and values education can be integrated into the activities of curriculum of subjects in the formal school system. Though every school subjects could accommodate value and ethics; subjects like social studies, history, geography, citizenship education and biology would accommodate and disseminate more of values and ethics education, in the Nigerian context, at the primary and secondary school levels. At the tertiary level, topics, or elements of values and ethics education can be incorporated into the themes of General Studies Courses to improve the moral status of young graduates who constitute the bulk of Nigerian youths". This will



imbue strong values in these youths and keep them from delinquent behaviours that lead to insecurity situation.

The idea of peace building suggests a lasting solution to violence and other forms of insecurity and deal with the root causes of these insecurity issues. An introduction of the components of indigenous education to formal education curriculum, will lead to attitudinal changes in youths which ultimately will reduce crime rate to the barest minimum.

Conclusion

No nation or state can progress or experience genuine development when there is no peace. Investors whose activities should grow the economy will leave, businesses will fold up and ultimately the economy will collapse. This explains why in Rivers State where there has been persistent unrest in recent times occasioned by the activities of youths such as kidnapping, cult related killings and other nefarious crimes. The governor and other stakeholders have made frantic efforts towards crime reduction and peace building. In spite of these efforts, the state is yet to experience the kind of tranquility it was known for. This paper, therefore, advocates a change of approach in dealing with the activities of youths that keeps the state in unrest. Indigenous education should be introduced both in our formal schools' curriculum and non-formally through organized community education programmes that emphasize ethical behaviors Africans are known for and imbue in youth the right values.

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