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The Role of Nigerian Youths in Rebranding Nigeria

Dr. S.M. Mepaiyeda

Abstract

Nigeria as a political entity, in recent times, has been engulfed by nefarious activities of the youths, an unarguably important segment of the society. Such vices include, drug abuse, lesbianism, homosexuality, internet fraud, religious violence, political assassination, cultism, examination malpractices, organised militancy and of course the latest immoral and unethical attempt of terrorism made by a Nigerian youth, Abdul-Mutallab.

The unwholesome activities highlighted above have greatly dented Nigeria's image among the comity of nations, hence the quest for positive transformation of her image by the Federal Government in the name of re-branding.

This paper therefore argues that the prevalence of all forms of societal decadence in Nigeria was a reaction to the corrupt and inefficient leadership as well as parental negligence of this vital segment of the society.

Introduction

Various questions have been agitating the minds of people in relation to the good intentions of the Nigerian Government towards the re-branding project. It seems the project lacks clarity

in its definition. People ask, "Is Nigeria a brand? Is it the brand (viewed as container) that needs re-branding or the content"?"

The simple illustration deduced from the above questions is that if Nigeria is a brand then it implies that it can be likened to a 'container'; and what will be the purpose of a container without the content? Therefore, should Nigeria be the container, it invariably means that Nigerians are the content. The biggest question that arises from this theory is that; are we interested in re-branding the container or the content? The reasonable answer that this paper establishes is that there should be a total overhaul of the content in a process of a true National mental surgery. This process therefore will result in psychical reorientation of all the segments of Nigerian society in order to achieve the desired transformation.

An Overview of Nigerian Situation

The pathetic decadent situation of Nigeria is attributable to factors ranging from the absence of God in our consciousness, mismanagement of public fund to greed. Prof. Adelowo¹ identified lack of fear of God and non application of the ethics of profession as part of the factors responsible for underdevelopment in Nigeria.

He stressed further that the youths' indulgence in untoward activities is the effect of unemployment, because the hand that lies fallow is the devil's workshop.² Despite the huge oil revenues that accrue to the Government, Nigeria today ranks among the poorest nations of the world. What bothers our minds is that the dividends of the economy of the nation are in the pocket of a few cabal. Hence, artificial poverty sets in.

The gross corrupt practices, bad leadership, ineptitude and Nigerian factor which Rev. Fr. Megbelayin called "Nigerian attitude"³ is the cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society. While the geese that lays the finest eggs is denied the basic infrastructure that gives life a meaning, the cabal reap where they did not sow.

In addition to this is the engagement of some Nigerian youth by some political and military clouts in oil bunkering for their own

selfish reasons. Unfortunately an attempt to stop or reduce the activities of these youths in the business has led to organised militancy in the Niger Delta and youth restiveness because their eyes are now opened. Nigerian people especially the youths have their hopes shattered and perception of life eroded. Therefore, they are inclined to easy life.

Despite the high level of poverty that strikes hard across the youths in the country, a visit to enjoyment spots in the cities or even villages will authenticate this claim. Many of our youths will lavish their paltry savings in clubs and gambling. One becomes dumbfounded to see a mechanic buying ten cartons of beer and such sorts on credit to satisfy an imaginary lust of self esteem and assertion.

Oderinde⁴ discovered cultural change as a factor responsible for materialistic tendency among the youths. He observed that the metamorphosis of the Nigerian culture from a simple, collective and traditional society to a complex, individualistic and urbanized society is a menace. In the older setting, human dignity was given priority. Everyone within the society was conscious of the family name that must not be toyed with. However, in the modern setting, such value perception has been distorted, thereby materialism has pushed the moral character to the background.⁵

Another factor that really affected the youths is the lackadaisical attitude of the wealthy Nigerians to assist the young talented youths. The former have become so miserly that they would only engage the youths in dirty herculean tasks such as political assassinations and the likes. Few of wealthy Nigerians run NGOs or sponsor educational projects for the betterment of the youths. Rather, majority of the money bags fund programmes which promote nudity that debase human dignity.

Moreover, negligence on the part of the Government of all levels has led to a continuous waste of talents among our youths. The greatest problems associated with our youths are: the inability to discover their talents earlier enough and the inability to develop the talents even when they are discovered. Poor background and

the societal ill which seems to lock up only direct developmental plans for the youths from federal and state governments are contributory factors. Although huge sums of money are said to be spent yearly on youth development, but such money only end up in the pockets of those entrusted with the jobs. Consequently, a large chunk of Nigerian youths who are very talented divert such talents on unproductive endeavours.

Coupled with negligence on the part of the Government is the fact that most parents shirk their responsibility as the first group of trainers of their children. Adelowo noted that for the popular dictum at home, in the Church, in the mosque and in the society that “the youth are leaders of tomorrow” to be realised, home training or home education is an essentiality.⁸ He postulated that since a nation is not an abstract entity but a nation of living men and women including children and the youth, proper training of a child in the way of God becomes a necessity. In addition to this, he advised parents to ensure proper monitoring of the movements of their wards and periodic enquires into their lives.⁹ These will acquaint the parents, with the type of company their children keep. Qualitative education should also be invested on because any failure to do this leads to a bleak future for both the children and parents.

Many scholars have written on the parental roles in the upbringing of children. Mollie S. Smart¹⁰ describes the standard of performance of children to have been the result of parents’ roles in their upbringing. Yogeshananda Swami arguing from Hindu perspectives posited thus:

... adolescent morality is greatly (though not exclusively) influenced by childhood learning and family indoctrination.¹¹

Catherine Lee in her submission expressed that the conditions of life into which each child was born and the kind of people that care for him or her will determine his/her inherited characteristics. Ruth¹², Cohen¹³ and Gil¹⁴ are all exponents of the theory that states

that any attempt to separate a child from his/her mother at a tender age is child abuse; and that its concomitant effect is a breakdown in family structure and breaking of the bonds of affection between parents and children. Ruth specifically reflected on the evils resulting from keeping babies in boarding day care, and under-aged children in boarding schools. She termed this act as negligence on the part of the parents.

Hence scholars like Brohi¹⁴, Ambali¹⁵ and Hussein Akhlag¹⁶ maintained that although industrial revolution and complexities of life are cited by parents for taking their wards to childcare centres, yet children can only receive adequate and initial proper care and training needed to survive and prepare them for the future from their parents. The neglect of such roles because of any reason is an abuse to the child's right and portends danger for the nation.

Oderinde observed that such neglect creates in the youth intensive emotional instability and mental stress that lead them to engage in smoking narcotic drugs or consumption of alcoholic beer or wines, or any immoral or criminal acts against themselves and society.¹⁷

Therefore, it can be argued that the child/youth that is properly trained and disciplined are the leaders of tomorrow. Parental moral standard goes a long way in sharpening the lives of their children.

Biblical Daniel: A Prototype of Righteous Youth

Though it has been established that some ill-mannered acts perpetrated by some Nigerian youths which are inimical to the progress of this nation are reactions for being neglected either by the three tiers of government or their parents. Yet such is not the solution to their problems.

A study of the book of Daniel chapters 1-6 reveals the stories about Daniel and his three companions who exemplified loyalty to God, righteousness and unflinching faith in God who is able to deliver those who trust in him.

The name Daniel, according to the Dictionary of Bible and Religion means "God has judged" or "God is my judge"¹⁸. Many

scholars doubted if the Old Testament and non-biblical texts (Ugaritic or Qumran) contained an actual historical person¹⁹. They argued that the nature of the book of Daniel suggests that he was a legendary figure of wisdom and piety.

However, the accurate historical account of the Neo-Babylonian and early Persian period evident in his book²⁰, as well as Jesus reference to him as a prophet in Mt 24:15 lend credence to the fact that Daniel was an historical figure. He was taken as a youth into the Babylonian Exile in the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim about 606 -605 B.C (Dan. 1:1).

Two sterling qualities made him outstanding. The first was his resolution not to defile himself. At the command of the King that young men (Israelites) from royal family and nobility should be trained and well-fed for three years before they could enter the king's service, Daniel on behalf of his colleagues requested for vegetables and water (1:11). The text reveals that at the end of ten days of test, he and his friends looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food (v15).

Daniel rejected royal food and wine because Israelites considered food for Nebuchadnezzar's table to be contaminated given the fact that the first portion of it was offered to idols while a portion of the wine was poured out on a pagan altar. This demonstrated his commitment to remain faithful and righteous to monotheistic religion.

The second quality was his patriotic stand. Throughout the period of exile, Daniel and his friends remained loyal, not only to Jewish faith earlier discussed but to Jewish ideals and practices. A contrast to Daniel impeccable character as a youth is found in Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, described as "Sons of Belial" (1Sam 2:12). V13-17 stated how they messed up the sacrifice of the Lord and defiled themselves with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

Nigerian youth both at home and in diaspora should emulate this outstanding patriotism in Daniel. They should not find it convenient to dent the nation's image through nefarious practices.

They should promote what Nigeria stands for. This is loyalty and patriotism par excellence.

The challenge posed to our youths is that the fear of God brings wisdom while holy and righteous living brings honour. Therefore, the consciousness of God and loyalty to their fatherland as exemplified by Daniel are highly essential.

Nigerian Youths and National Rebranding

Dwelling on the age range of a Nigerian youth is not the major concern of this paper. However, it is expedient to mention that the Nigerian youths constitute the largest parentage of its society. They form the necessary link between childhood and adulthood.²¹ The advanced learner's dictionary defines a youth as "one who is young. It is especially the phase before a child becomes an adult".²² This may mean a period between age fifteen and twenty five years. It may also include adolescents from twenty five to thirty nine years.

Prof. Alana's asserted that the youths symbolize continuity, not only in physical existence but also in the transmission of the traditional values and ethos of the society,²³ the story will definitely change. This forms the premise of this discussion.

In the introduction, this paper established the fact that Nigeria as a brand or container has her image dented as a result of bad leadership and greed (the handwork of Nigerians) - the content. Therefore, for the youths to have a new orientation about Nigeria, there should be a change in leadership style. Corruption which forms the bedrock of other vices in the society must be uprooted. E. Nihinlola²⁴ posited that corruption in Nigeria manifest in different shapes and sizes "from petty bribery taken by the clerk in the office or the police man at the check point, to the grand corruption by which large project contracts are hurriedly awarded. Although anti-corruption agencies have been put in place by the government to check this menace such as Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and others, the truth remains that the hydra-

headed devil defies solution. Reason is not far fetched; the government all these years have been paying lip-service to the eradication of corruption in Nigeria. The moment a disciplined leadership us enthroned as we had it during Buhari/Idiagbon regime,²⁵ the story will change.

In addition, for Nigeria to be re-branded, moral and ethical revolution must be carried out by the youths. Determination, patriotism and optimism are keys to achieving such revolution. If the youths are patriotic then they should be determined not to contribute to the rots in the society but stand out in effecting a positive change. Optimism should be the watch word for the youths, believing that a society free of corruption is achievable.²⁶

Besides, our youths must brace up to the present situation and learn the possibilities of life. They must shun violence, sloth, greed, hatred, tribalism and even complacency. They must not live by instincts like animals but rather live a purpose – driven life. They must not ignore the fact that not all that glitter is gold. The get-rich quick syndrome without following the due-course is an aberration. Those who towed this line heap discomfort and untimely death upon themselves.

The attitude of beginning with the little they can must be imbibed. The developed nations e.g. Japan, China and Singapore all started with a humble beginning. Therefore, the youth should not consider any work as dirty if it is aimed at contributing to their progress and that of the society.

A major aspect where Nigerian youths can make their impact to be felt in the transformation of this society is their readiness to study professional courses in the area of technology, technical education, science, arts and crafts. This will make them marketable and also transform them into job creators instead of over-dependence on government for white collar jobs which are not easily attainable.

Recommendation and Conclusion

From the discussion so far, the present situation which we find ourselves in Nigeria is a show of the societal value and a reflection of what legacy has bequeathed to the youths.²⁷ Therefore, there is advocacy that the three tiers of government should embark on industrialization on a small and large scales in order to create employment opportunities for the teeming population of youths.

Secondly, diversification of the country's economy should be given priority. An identified area is the promotion of agricultural activities, the traditional economic basis of Nigeria before the 19th century. If this is resuscitated, then most of our youths can be engaged in small scale agro-based industries and farm settlement.

Thirdly, for the youths to contribute their quota in the re-branding project, the government at all levels must take a practical step to establish effective talent-hunt department to be directly under the presidency, the governor and the local government chairmen. Youths should head such departments while the National and state Assemblies must enact a law whereby the politicians will not hijack the venture for re-election purposes. If this is carried out, the youths will be encouraged.

Again, G.O. Abe²⁸ advocated that the Church and mosque should be entrusted with the administration of education. This will lead to the reduction of social vices to the barest minimum if not totally, eradicating its. He argued that in the years past when educational institutions were ran by missionaries, the moral standard of Nigerian youths was high.

In conclusion, this paper calls for all hands to be on deck in order to assist the youths fulfil their roles. Government, teachers and parents should be good examples that will change the orientation of the youths and make them believe in a virile Nigeria.

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