BUILDING A YOUTH MOVEMENT FOR EDUCATING THE NEXT LEVEL OF LEADERS: THE ROLE OF AFRICANS IN DIASPORA.

Odoziobodo Severus Ifeanyi, PhD

Department of Political Science, Enugu State University of Science & technology Enugu, Nigeria.
E-mail: severus_odozibodo@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The social forces of democratization and globalization have brought into fore, issues concerning young people. This derived from the recognition that the youth is unarguably agents of social change. The youthful age is a very important period in the life of the individual and society at large. Youth is a season of hope, enterprise and energy to a nation as well as the individual. If people at this period of life are harnessed properly, there is every tendency that the society will be the better for it. Unfortunately, in many African nations, this period of life is wasted for lack of proper attention. This paper therefore explores one of the different ways through which the leadership problem of Africa can be tackled, namely, intervention on the youth, the greater tomorrow. The youth mirrors the fear, anxiety and expectation of the civil society. If we catch them young with the right values, we have solved the problem of leadership in Africa. The theoretical framework adopted is Almond’s structural functionalism which hinged the survival of any society on the functional prerequisites of the structures composing it. The paper concludes that one role which Africans in Diaspora can play for Africa is to cause the formation and establishment as well as the funding of an African youth movement. The objective of this body is to harness the African youth by organizing conferences and workshops and training for leadership.

Keywords: Africa, Diaspora, Education, Leaders, Youth

Background

The formulation and implementation of a viable youth development programme is not only a moral responsibility but also an imperative for any well meaning organization working for the progress of Africa. Intervention on the youth is urgent and critical at this material time in the historical development of the African continent. This is because the realities on ground are clear indications of the fact that the older generation of Africa has failed the continent in terms of leadership. There is leadership crisis in virtually all African countries so much so that the leadership question has become a recurring decimal in discourses of the Africa continent. From Nigeria to Ghana and from Ivory Coast to Liberia, etc, leadership is a problem. According to Dele Seteolu (2004). “The governing class has been a target of pillory, vilification, condemnation and disdain in view of the pervasive and persistent socio-economic and political crisis. The economic domain has been characterized by huge external debt overhang, capital flight, disinvestments, collapse of social infrastructure, food crisis and insecurity; over-devalued national currency, pervasive poverty, homelessness and underdevelopment, unpopular, repressive and alienating economic policies. The socio-political space is riddled with the collapse of social values, kleptocracy, political corruption, and transition crisis, the manipulation of electoral process, unstable, weak and vulnerable political structures and institutions, as well as brigandage”.

Even with the dawn of democratization in most Africa states after the holocaust of military intervention in politics, the leadership problem still looms large. New dimensions of the problem are rearing their ugly heads day in day out, the greatest of which is corruption and unbridled quest for material wealth and primitive accumulation of wealth. One other leadership problem worth mentioning is the sit tight syndrome whereby leaders do not respect constitutional provisions stipulating their tenures of office. All these and more have left the African continent underdeveloped and yawning for good leadership.

However, a light in the end of the tunnel continues to point in the direction of the youth, the greater tomorrow. Suffice it to say that, the only hope for continued survival is the youth. There is the need to address the issue of how best to harness
the creative energies and dynamism of youth for overall national development. There is the need to examine the range of problems faced by the youth, anticipate the challenges that are likely to confront them and outline appropriate policies, programmes and implementation plan which will be put in place so that they can be empowered to take their destinies in their own hands. The overall aim is to prepare them for the onerous responsibilities of taking over the piloting of the political and economic fortunes of their respective nations in the near future.

Youth development and underdevelopment are critical issues to the development of any nation. The youths are veritable reservoir of energy, resourcefulness, creativity and dynamism for a nation. If this is the case as it is, it therefore goes without saying that if they are correctly guided, adequately educated, seriously mobilized as well as fully integrated into the fabric of society, they are then prepared towards taking the nation to greater heights developmentally. On the other hand, if the youths are left to drift, abandoned to their fate with unemployment being their lots, they could constitute a dangerous threat to the stability and even survival of the nation.

There is therefore the urgent need to intervene on the drift into the abyss, which has become the lot of the African Youth. There is the need to catch them young and inculcate the right values in them. There is the need to build a youth movement for educating the next level of leaders in Africa. The African Diaspora is called upon to assist in this regard.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theories are useful set of logically related concepts for explaining the occurrence of any phenomenon. In both the physical and social sciences, theories are indispensable tools at the beck and call of the researcher in shedding more lights on the possible relationship that exist between various variables that apparently appear to have no logical connection between them. Theories therefore provide spring board for the researcher’s critical analysis of a phenomenon as well as for data collection. A theoretical framework will therefore aid our study in its relevant perspective thereby directing us on what to look for and the standard against which to analyze the data collected.

For the purpose of this study, our analysis will be anchored on structural functionalism as postulated by Gabriel Almond. The major understanding of structural functionalism is that the society is a system with inter related parts. According to S.P Varma (2003), a system is defined as an entity made up of inter connected and interrelated parts. In this theory the society is understood to be an entity with different parts which has functions to play. These parts are called sub-systems by David Easton and structures by Almond. In the thinking of Almond, each structure has a function, a role to play, hence structural functionalism.

According to Suleiman (2006), “the basic assumption of the theory is that, for a social system to survive and maintain its going concern, a certain degree of order and stability is required. To achieve this order and stability, the theory maintained that every functional part of the social system must perform its role. It is this functional prerequisite that serves to connect the various parts and this integrate the social system as an organic system. Thus, Haralambos and Heald (2003) opine, that from the functionalist point of view, “the social system has certain basic needs which must be met if it is to survive. These needs are known as functional prerequisites. The function of any part of the society is its contribution to the maintenance of the society”.

Juxtaposing this theory with our study, it becomes apparent that the youth is a part or structure of the society and as such, they have a role or function to play for the overall stability or maintenance of the society. Almond in postulating this theory maintained that in any political system, there are four input functions which are performed by the non-governmental system, by the society and the general environment. These include political socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation and political communication. (S.P. Varma 2003).

In the views of Suleiman (2006), contemporary articulation of the role expectation of the youth fit into these functional categories and should be treated as informed responses to the social forces of democratization. Given their energy, character and orientation, the youth constitute the object and subject of political socialization. Organized youth movement which has received a boost in the wake of democratization process has also provided a platform for interest aggregation and articulation. Political communication provides the information flow that determines the character and orientation of a political system. For a continued survival of the society, the youth who are the greater tomorrow need to be recruited into leadership and they need to be prepared very well for this role.
YOUTH AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

It was Hegel (1975) who said that young people exist “in themselves” and seldom “for themselves”. No doubt, youth does not have a generally accepted definition. As such, researchers are wont to warn on the fussiness and ambiguity of the concept. However, youth is both a biological factor and a social classification. According to UNESCO (1968), a young person is any person considered as young by the society. It is perhaps for this definition that it was observed in the National Youth Policy (2001) of Nigeria that the way in which a nation defines its youth is related to the objective conditions and realities that exist on the ground especially historical and contemporary socio-economic and political issues that need to be addressed.” Defining the youth as, all young persons of ages 18 to 35 who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Policy notes that this category represents the most active, the most volatile and yet, the most vulnerable segment of the population, socio-economically, emotionally and in other respects.

Youth, according to Augulu-Sani (1999) is a period of complex change which is characterized by rapid physical change and development, intellectual change and awakening, mental alertness and a search for truth, development and upsets, resulting in sudden change in mood and behaviour. There is also a change from childhood to adulthood and a feeling of growing up with all the assumptions (right and wrong) of what it means to grow. These complex changes make the youth unstable and insecure. They are attached one day and detached the next, but they are active and adventurous”.

The youthful period is no doubt one of the most memorable periods of life. It is a period when dreams, hopes and aspirations are yet untainted by the harsh realities of life. It is a period described as the “lush season between the spring time and the summer of life”. It is the glorious and glamorous years of existence which in later years would always be recalled with nostalgia. Singing its praises, Longfellow exclaimed, “How beautiful is youth, how brightly it gleams, with its illusions, aspirations, dreams! Books of beginning. Story without end; each maid a heroine and each man a friend”. And for William Shakespeare, youths is nimble…youth is hot and bold… youth, I adore thee. But for Marcel Onyeocha, “surprisingly, the value of youth is better appreciated after it has been lost. This generally creates serious regrets”. Thus Byron says: Ah! Happy years! Once more who would not be a boy (girl)? And Joseph Conrad adds: “I remember my youth and the feeling that will not come back anymore, the feeling that I could last forever, outlast the seas, the earth and all men. And Erasmus cries: “Immortal God! What a world I see dawning! Why can’t I grow young again?” And it is said, “if youth but knew, if old age but could”. (Odoziobodo, 1991).

All the quotations above from ancient scholars cited in Odoziobodo indicate perceptions about the youth. As for their relevance for the development of any nation, the National Youth Policy of Nigeria (2001) acknowledges the fact that “youth 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 attainment. In their dreams and hopes, a nation finds their motivation; on their energies she builds her vitality and purpose. And because of those dreams and aspirations the future of a nation is assured.

The importance or relevance of youth in national development is not in doubt anywhere in the world. Beginning with the Harare Declaration on the Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (1995) through the World Youth Ministers Meeting in Portugal (1998) to the Youth Ministers Meeting in Solomon Island (2000) indications of this fact continues to unfold. (Mokwena Steve 2003). Mirroring from the views of Almond, et al (2004), these two major contending impetuses appeared to have converged to catapult the issue of young persons into the policy agenda of national governments as a compelling priority. The first is the global process of democratization, beginning in southern Europe, extending to Latin America, Asia and Africa and more recently to Eastern Europe. The second according to Suleiman (2006), is the phenomenon of globalization - a phenomenon that has seriously challenged the capacity of nation-state to govern and which according to Held, et al (1999), embodied a transformation of the spatial organization of social relations and transaction. In the views of Suleiman (2006), the combined effects of these global trends had confronted and dismantled authoritarian regimes in a decisive way, and at the same time rekindled the spirit of civil society in the political process, such as leadership. The youth is an important component of the civil society.

The numerical strength of this category of people called youth in any nation is one reason for which their relevance in national development cannot be over emphasized. The United Nations (2003) reported that 1.7 billion people, more than one-fourth of the world’s six billion people are
between the ages of 10 and 24, making this group of people the largest ever to be entering adulthood. Africa shares in this trend.

On the relevance of the youth to the total process of societal transformation, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) of the United Nations, while examining the relevance and contribution of the youth towards the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) observed that… youth are making a difference as activists, as leaders in community development, and by their record level of volunteerism. In many parts of the world, they may be perceived as apathetic or disengaged, but this is largely inaccurate. World wide, youth are by passing traditional forms of political participation (ie voting) through their activism and volunteering.

It must be observed that the youth are the leaders of tomorrow. Whatever the old people think of themselves, they must bow out and leave the stage for the youth who are imbued with enormous energy, vigor and drive and who are the catalyst for development. Every nation worth the name, works relentlessly to prepare this group of young men and women for this onerous responsibility.

If this is really the case as it is, then the question is: how far are African youths prepared to become the stronghold or rather the foundation of the society? The youth in Africa are ill prepared for these roles. It is relevant therefore to look into the problems confronting and militating against the African youth in the realization of their expectations and aspirations.

PROBLEMS OF YOUTH IN AFRICA

The major problems hampering the development of African Youth can be categorized into three, namely:

a) Lack of adequate enabling environment for proper development.

b) Defective societal values and

c) Lack of adequate attention by government.

a) Lack of adequate enabling environment for proper development:- This is about the greatest problem of the African Youth. The environment is simply not healthy for proper development. In most cases, the African youth is from a poor home where the father and mother are not educated and as a result, do not have jobs which is tantamount to being poor. In the face of poverty and illiteracy, there is lack of adequate parental care which may even translate to inadequate health care; or he may be deformed psychologically and socially if he does not go to school. Even if the youth is opportune to go to school, he may not go to the best of schools, which means poor education. The consequent result of all these is that the youth may not develop his or her full potentials in life.

b) Defective Societal Values:- A corollary to lack of adequate enabling environment for proper development is defective social values ranging from moral decadence, corruption, indiscipline, religious fanaticism, cultism and political manipulation of youths and youth organizations. The value system of most Africans is defective. Africans extol what civilized minds abhor. In Africa, materialism is so much that the youth are made to understand that it is next to God. As a result of this value system, people work hard rightly and wrongly to acquire as much wealth as possible. They do this through corrupt ways; hence, corruption is a hindrance to national development in most African nations. Also because of the defective value system, morality is thrown overboard in people’s dealings with others. Moral decadence among the youth therefore becomes prevalent in the society. Coupled with this, indiscipline which is a failure or refusal to submit one’s desires and actions to the restraints of orderly social conduct in recognition of the rights and desires of others “makes the society seem lawless. The rule of the jungle therefore reigns supreme. There is disorder and people cannot get what is due to them.

Equally, as a result of defective value system, people do not understand the true meaning of religion. Youths are therefore deceived about the real import of religion. Most of them get involved in religious fanaticism thereby committing atrocities in the name of religion. Youths also get involved in cultism because they are misled by the values of the society. Here they commit unpardonable atrocities against society and themselves. There are a lot of misplaced values and that accounts for the political manipulation of youths and youth organizations in most African countries.

c) Lack of adequate attention by government.

In most African countries, the government does not play the leading role it is meant to play for the growth and development of the youth. Adequate educational facilities are not provided and matters are not ameliorated by the poverty of parents. The worst crime government commits against the youth is lack of provision of employment opportunities. In many African countries, even after university education, where possible, youths still go unemployed. If this is the lot of graduates, one can imagine what happens to those who dropped out of school. The consequence is that many youths indulge in armed robbery and other crimes, in order to earn a living. A situation
where a youth does not have a job, how can he or she get his dreams, hopes and aspirations realized?

A succinct summary of government’s lack of attention to the youth was made by the Youth Development Policy (2000) thus “the nature of the socio-political and economic environment which had prevailed in the country imposed serious constraints in terms of meeting the needs and aspirations of the youth. Indeed, historically, it can be said that Nigerian Youth (nay, African youths) have suffered more neglect than encouragement, and purposeful involvement by the government contemporarily; they suffer from different kinds of socio-economic deprivations and afflictions which have been intensified with prolonged military rule and acute economic crisis. Thus, government’s efforts, when made have generally tended to be too little, too late. The institutional framework for and plan implementation mechanisms of public policy have been very weak, inefficient and ineffective, such that they hardly ever facilitated the actualization of desired policy goals”. The bottom line is that government pay lip service to youth development. They may have a youth policy but such policies are hardly implemented.

LEADERSHIP PROBLEM IN AFRICA

What Chinua Achebe (1983) said of Nigeria can be rightly said of any other African country. “The Trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian (African) land or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem (African problem) is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmark of true leadership.” Yes, things are not working well today because we have not had good leaders who would make meaningful differences. The problem has not been the system or anything else but the operators of the system. If American or European leaders are transplanted to Africa, a developed world will be created out of Africa.

God was lavish in His endowments to most African nations in terms of both human and natural resources yet the lot of the continent has been poverty and underdevelopment. Take the case of Nigeria for instance that has a quantum of oil deposit that ranks among the best in the world and yet the citizenry are languishing in abject poverty and lack of infrastructural facilities. Even the poorest of countries in Europe and America with little or no natural endowments are better off socially, economically and political as well as in terms of the welfare of the citizenry. According to Achebe (1983), the countless billions that a generous providence poured into our national coffers in the last ten years (1972-1982) would have been enough to launch this nation into the middle rank of developed nations and transformed the lives of our poor and needy. But what have we done with it? Stolen and salted away by people in power and their accomplices. Squandered in uncontrolled importation of all kinds of useless consumer merchandise from every corner of the globe; embezzled through inflated contracts to an increasing army of party loyalists who have neither the desire nor the competence to execute their contracts; consumed in the escalating salaries of a grossly over-staffed and unproductive public service. And so on ad infinitum”. This has been the lot of most African nations.

Yes, “in spite of conventional opinion, Nigeria has been less than fortunate in its leadership”, said Achebe (1983). A basic element of this misfortune according to him is the seminal absence of intellectual rigor in the political thought of our founding fathers- a tendency to pious materialistic wool ling and self-centered pedestrianism”. This trend cannot continue, otherwise we may wake up one day to find out that our nation does not exist any more. There is need to arrest the ugly trend and reverse it for the better through intervention on the youth, the greater tomorrow.

Building an African Youth Movement: The Role of the African Diaspora

The Diaspora is the Africans living outside the African continent. These are people who by birth are Africans but are today citizens of other countries and are residing permanently in countries other than Africa. We may do well to remember that there was forced migration of millions of able bodied men and women of African origin to plantations of Europe and North America. We remember that the “brain drain” has also removed from Africa, the best of Africa minds in terms of education and technical knowledge. These are people separated by hundreds of years, miles, ocean, or environmental circumstances from their own people with whom they are united through blood ties, cultural affinity and shared history and to some extent, a common destiny.

Writing on the African Diaspora, Akukwa and Jammeh (2004) noted that according to the 2000 United States Census, there are 34,658,190 African- Americans in the United States. Of the 35 million people that claimed Hispanic heritage in 2000 US Census, at least one third are likely to have African ancestry. Nearly 1.8 million people from the Caribbean lived in the United States in 2000. About 0.6% of all people living in the United States, (1,781,877) identified themselves as sub-Saharan African. Conservatively, in the United States alone, at least 50 million individuals and significant proportions of individuals in Latin
America have African ancestry. The International Office of Migration (IOM), a United Nations Agency, estimates that the African Diaspora population in France is 1,633,142 and another 1.5 million, African Diaspora live in other European countries. This is an indication that Africa has African people outside and they constitute the Diaspora.

The International Office of Migration further highlights the quality of Africans outside Africa. It provides a picture of an affluent Africa in the Diaspora. According to Akukwa and Jammeh (2004) "about 22% of African Diaspora are in the teaching, education and research professions; 20% in finance, investment and economics, 20% in Public health; 15% in engineering; 9% in agriculture; 5% in information technology; 5% in legal science; 3% in administration; and 1% in natural sciences. The 2000 US Census indicates that foreign-born sub-Saharan Africans (recent immigrants) have the highest proportion of foreign born individuals 25 years and over who have bachelor degree (49.3%) compared to Europe (32.9%) and Asia (44.9%). At least 38.2% of sub-Saharan householders in the US own their own homes. The average median household income of foreign-born households headed by sub-Saharan Africans was $36,371 according to the US Census.

For the period 2000 through 2002, the median household income for African American was $29,483 according to the US Census. Home ownership for the African American was 48% in 2003. Black-owned business in 1997, the latest period for which data is available, employed 718,300 persons and generated US $71 billion in revenue according to the US Census. Remittances by Africans in the Diaspora to their countries of origin are substantial. According to the International Office of Migration, Nigerians in the Diaspora remitted $1.3 billion in 1999 equivalent to 3.71% of the country’s GDP and 55% of overseas development assistance.

The background information given above is to underscore the worth and quality of resources Africa has overseas in the Diaspora. From the numerical strength of the Diaspora outlined and the professions they are engaged in, it is obvious that they are in a good position to help Africa overcome the development chasm that exist between Africa and the West. Thousands of African Americans are doctors, lawyers, engineers, economists, business executives, politicians etc. Many African Americans are also millionaires. Many occupy very sensitive positions in the West where vital decisions about Africa are taken. They can use their connections to turn those decisions into gold mines for Africa. They can play decisive roles in both short and long terms measures to accelerate the fortunes of the African youths, hence, Africa’s development.

In order to arrest further drift of the African continent, into the abyss of poverty and underdevelopment, orchestrated by inadequate and purposeless leadership, the African Diaspora is invited to undertake a deliberate programme aimed at arresting the wide range of problems facing the African youth, with a view to preparing them adequately to face the challenges of leadership in the continent. To quick start this move, the African Diaspora can cause the formation of a youth movement whose aim will be to organize the African youth into a body known as the African Youth Movement with branches in all countries of Africa. The major focus of the African Youth Movement will be on youth empowerment, youth education, training and socialization as well as youth recreation/sports, youth employment and youth organization. The movement will prepare a blue print aimed at a purposeful, focused, well articulated and well directed effort of educating the African youth on leadership principle. The movement will be so structured that it will be involved mainly in advocacy and capacity building. The movement will mobilize resources including personnel and funds within and without Africa so as to tackle the fundamental problem of the African youth, namely, employment.

Yes, the major focus of this movement will be to create employment opportunities for African youths. Poverty has been the major problem of Africa and this has a debilitating effect on the development of the youth. If employment opportunities are created for these youth, they can earn their living and thus, meet their hopes and aspirations. A jobless man is a hopeless man in the sense that there is no way the person can be productive. It is only when the youths are provided with gainful employment that education for leadership can follow.

Equally, the African Diaspora through the instrumentality of the African youth movement can sponsor programmes aimed at arresting the poverty level of the youth. One of such programmes is to mobilize funds for sponsoring entrepreneurship development programmes whereby the youths can be given soft loans to engage themselves in one business or the other when they had been trained on their areas of greatest competence. This programme will intervene on the youths who are not educated to higher school level.

In order to achieve this objective, the African Diaspora will help in strengthening the capacity of existing institutions that provide training for skills and entrepreneurship development in African countries. There is the need to make use of what is available because starting from the scratch will be tedious and
counter productive. Therefore, strengthening already existing institutions is the most viable way of realizing the goal of empowering the youth. Empowering civil society groups to complement government institutions in the area of training and skill development for gainful employment is also necessary. In addition, creating and equipping additional institutions that can provide special training for youths with disabilities as well as soft credit facilities for trained ones to enable them start out on their own, is important as well in this effort to empower the youth.

In developed countries, government operate social security programmes whereby youths who cannot gain employment for no fault of theirs, get government financial assistance for a specified period during which they are looking for employment. Through advocacy, the Diaspora using the African Youth Movement can cause governments in African countries to create this programme as it will go a long way to cushion the effects of unemployment on the youth. The essence is to prevent them from anti social activities like armed robbery and other crimes which unemployment leads youths to.

One other important role which the youth movement will play in educating the next level of leaders is in the areas of reorienting the Africa Youth. When they have been trained and empowered through gainful employment, reorienting their minds will be the next work of the youth movement. The value system of most Africans is defective. African leadership is in a rat-race for primitive accumulation of material wealth and the youth have been imbued with this mentality. The mentality gives the youth a false sense of security because they have been made to understand that existence is only defined in the context of material acquisition. To change the orientation and value system of the African youth, a lot of training in citizenship and leadership are needed. The youth movement will therefore organize series of workshops, seminar and conferences to educate the youth on real values and leadership principles.

CONCLUSION

The formation of a viable youth movement in Africa is a desideratum for the purposes of political socialization of the youth. By political socialization we mean the way in which political values are formed and the political culture is diffused in the society. This process determines how individuals form their political attitudes and thus collectively, how citizens form their political culture. (Almond, et al, 1963). Apart from the general problems of the youth, with regard to unemployment and the insensitivity of government to the welfare of youth, people are generally apathetic to issues of politics. This is as a result of the way politics is played in most African states where it is regarded as a dirty game. Yet politics is important.

Against this backdrop, it becomes necessary to streamline the political socialization of the youth since current trends and tendencies in the democratization process in most African states have seriously challenged the sensibilities and potentialities of the youth. The older generation has played their part and the verdict is abysmal failure. The only hope lies on the youth.

Government pays much of lip service to the issue of youth development even though the ability and capacity of the youth to contribute to national development is not questionable. If the development problem of Africa must be solved, the youth must be trained adequately for leadership tomorrow. One way of doing this is by building a youth movement. Since most African governments lack the political will to pursue the well being of the youth, the Africa Diaspora who are Africans living outside the African continent must brace up to the responsibility of saving the continent from further decline into the abyss of poverty and underdevelopment by intervening on the youth who are the greater tomorrow.

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