

Ethical Issues on Youth Empowerment and Christianity

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Abstract

Youths are called leaders of tomorrow. It is believed that considering their strength, creativity, potentials and their tendencies not only will they outlive today's leaders they will outshine them. Why call youth future leaders when their today is taken for granted? This paper seeks to examine the problems facing the youths and how Christianity and other agencies can provide possible solutions to these problems.

1. Introduction

Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people including youth and adults.

Youth empowerment is often addressed as a gateway to intergenerational equity, civic engagement and democracy building. Many local, state, provincial, regional, national and international government agencies and profit community-based organizations provide programs centered on youth development.

Youths are the pillars upon which a nation's future is built. This group of young people with great potentials will be great assets to any nation if their energies and creativity are tapped and utilized.

The rate of unemployment increases every year in Nigeria. Majority of the graduates in our institutions of learning are looking for government or a white-collar job that is increasing imbalance employment.

Akanbi (1997) stated that while inflation is sometimes at an average of 50% in Nigeria annually, unemployment appears to be a major problem. On the other hand, considering their large population, strength and exuberance they could pose a great threat to a nation if their empowerment is neglected. Statistics shows that Nigeria has about 23 percent unemployment who are predominantly youths, and that our country tops the chart of countries with largest children out of school (UNICEF, 2012).

The Federal Government according to Fajimi (2004) in an attempt to alleviate poverty and to engage the unemployed youths in productive business occupation has established several youth empowerment and job creation programmes and institutions. Most of these programmes are set up to teach appropriate and marketable skills that would enable unemployed youth become self reliant, productive and able to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families. Skills taught in such training centre include: photography, carpentry and Joinery, painting and paint production, welding and fabrication, brick-laying and concreting, catering and fashion design etc, while the trainees comprise mostly of young school leavers and drop-outs from school.

It is surprising that in this part of the world very little or no effort is committed to the youth to bring the best out of them as future leaders. It is a fundamental ethical question from the Nigerian youth which has spurred Gambo (2000) to look into youth empowerment programme and how

various stakeholders (parents, the youth, government and religious institution) can work together to bring about improvement in the lives of young people in Nigeria and create a conducive atmosphere for the realization of their dreams and aspirations, which in the long run will create in them a sense of responsibility, patriotic spirit and a yearning to serve their fatherland with love, strength and faith.

2. Youth Empowerment at a Glance

Youth empowerment means different things to different people. In Nigeria it is mostly ill defined and wrongly perceived by parents, the youth themselves and the government. Parents as major stakeholders often perceive youth empowerment as the sole responsibility of the government.

In his own view, Nwaokolo (1990) submitted that the youth themselves neglect self empowerment and development, wholly depending on white collar jobs, while the government sees youth empowerment as an avenue to initiate policies and programmes although the programmes make little impact on their lives because they are soon hijacked by corrupt government officials for self aggrandizement.

Youth empowerment simply means all positive efforts are taken deliberately towards improving the lives of young people; efforts channeled towards developing the capacities of young ones to draw out the best out of them, bearing in mind that they are truly leaders of tomorrow. It embeds efforts from parents, youth and the government to develop young people attitudinally and creating conducive atmosphere for realization of aspirations which will translate into reduction in youth unemployment, criminality, human capital flight and above all national development.

Bearing in mind the benefits of youth empowerment and the adverse effect of its neglect greater commitment is called for on the part of all stakeholders. (Ebigo, 2003).

3. The Roles of the Stakeholders

Parents are head of families; a family is the smallest unit in a society. Families are blocks that make up the structure of a society. This is the very first place a child has contact with, it is where characters are molded, attitudes are formed and discipline inculcated through good upbringing. It is upbringing which forms the right basis for other empowerment. Most social vices perpetrated by youth today are a consequence of parental failure to train their children and set good examples in conduct.

Good parenting goes beyond providing food, clothes and sending children to school. It is the foundation upon which other empowerment efforts, either from individuals, the youth or government are built as observed by Arowomole & Adegoke (2000).

Trains up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverb 22:6) is an injunction.

However, it is a sickening fact that many parents send their children to special examination centres, buy results for them, bribe for admission instead of teaching and inculcating in them self reliance, honesty, integrity, hard work and diligence (Ejiogu, 1990).

Youths as stakeholders in youth empowerment have a lot to do to complement efforts from parents and the government. We should not be carried away by exuberance and the saying that we are leaders of tomorrow. Illo (2007) affirmed that leadership is earned. We need to change our poor attitude toward self-improvement and personal empowerment. Obijole (2004) observed that many youths these days spend more time on social networks chatting while their education suffers. Many graduates also do nothing to improve their own lives after school, feeling that being graduates automatically qualifies them for well paying jobs in Federal Civil Service, NNPC or other blue chip companies.

Youths are expected to ask themselves these questions: what is wrong in acquiring entrepreneurial skills that can make them self employed? Aside being a graduate what else can I do

to improve my life without having to brandish my certificate? Our nation today is demanding what one can offer not the certificate. We need to face reality. No government in the world can meet the employment needs of its citizenry 100 percent, and how much less the Nigerian government bedeviled with corruption and leadership problems.

Having this in mind will help us as youth to add value to our lives, to attract values and also embrace self improvement and personal empowerment for self-reliance to take our destinies in our hands.

Governments, as the machinery of the state for policy formulation and implementation has a great responsibility in ensuring the youths are empowered. It is no news that whether in the past or now government often uses youth empowerment programmes as avenues to enrich few Nigerians and the mass of the youths for whom they are intended do not benefit directly or indirectly from them. Youth unemployment has been on the increase as Nigeria's higher institutions continue to turn out graduates yearly without an expansive vibrant and formidable labour market to accommodate them. (Akinyele & Adu, 2003).

This explains reasons why many are frustrated youth resorts to criminal acts for survival since the government is ready to negotiate with any group of criminals in the name of democracy and for the sake of pretended peace. Youth empowerment according to Abati (1998) is a veritable way of government controlling crime and maintaining peace in a nation. With empowerment the population of jobless youths is naturally reduced.

As observed from above, the youths failed because all the stakeholders failed and from the Christian perspective, the youths need discipleship and leadership trait for their survival.

Discipleship is the process of learning to follow. Ultimately, the leader we want our youth to follow is of course, Jesus As leaders, we ourselves need to be Christ's disciples. Then we need to encourage young people to become our disciples, in order to teach them to follow Jesus. Paul said follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (I Corinthians 11:1)

This is akin to the concept of mentoring that is so popular in the business world but it goes much farther. Jesus commission was to go and make disciples of all nations.

The process of making a disciple involves sharing the values, lifestyle and priorities that we ourselves have learned from Jesus (Matthew 28:19). Leadership is what we need to show our youth as pastor, Deacon and church elders.

Olatunji (2005) believed that it is what we need to develop in our young people. Our task is to become effective leaders ourselves and train our youth to become leaders – leaders in their peer group and their community even in learning vocational skill as appropriate.

4. Benefits of Youth Empowerment

- ❖ Creating employment opportunities for self employed youth as well as the other young people they employ.
- ❖ Young entrepreneurs may more responsive to new economic opportunities and trends.
- ❖ Promoting innovation and resilience in youth.
- ❖ Helping youth develop new skills and experience that can then be applied other challenges in life.
- ❖ Helping to address some of the socio- psychological problems and delinquency that arise from joblessness.
- ❖ Less dependability on Government by youth communities.

5. Conclusion

With Nigeria currently topping the world ranking among countries with the highest number of children out of school, a clear picture of the future of our future leaders emerges and so the need for the government to take drastic actions to tackle the situation. Government should embark on

serious reforms to make our educational sector more effective and efficient. Recruitment of quality teachers with concomitant adequate remuneration, facilities needed for practical studies of science are imperatives. Schools should also be spread to rural areas and the less privileged. Entrepreneurship and vocational training should form a part of educational Curriculum.

National Youth Service Corps should be compulsory one year of entrepreneurship training and skill acquisition.

Youth empowerment will indeed be a good strategy and tool to tackling Crimes, ensuring peace and stability, and harnessing youth talents towards national development.

6. Recommendations

Religious institutions should intensify effort in promoting moral institutions so that the youth's right from the early stage of their life would have good attitude towards life.

Parents should have a great role to play towards their children upbringing. A child that received sound training from his/her parents cannot easily fall prey in the hands of those promoting social vices in the society.

Entrepreneurship should be made compulsory from primary school to institutions of higher learning.

More experts should be trained in this area of entrepreneurship education to serve as resource persons to go to all parts of the country where their services are needed. Their job will be in the area of holding Seminars, Workshop and Conferences etc.

Skill acquisition programmes should be integrated with entrepreneurship education to enhance better performance of the end of training.

The supply of soft loans or credit facilities is essential for the establishment of small scale enterprises among Nigerians who have undergone one training or the other.

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