African Cultural Values And Youths Leadership Development In Nigeria: Challenges And Prospects

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Abstract

The deplorable state of affairs of the African nations in terms of economic, political and social development informs the worry of the authors of this paper. This underdevelopment is considered to stem a lot from leadership failures and this in turn hinges on the loss of the essential connect between Africans and their authentic ethical and cultural values as a result of the fault lines created in the African personality in the face of the clash between the African and foreign (European) cultures. The aim of this paper is to chart out paths to true leadership in Africa which is the cardinal pillar to national development. The paper adopted qualitative research while adopting the tools of analytical and deductive reasoning. The paths have been demonstrated to be a return to African cultural values like respect for life, hard work, mentorship and the likes while not being oblivious of the realities of the modern day but by evolving a synergistic hybrid that respects the truly African while imbibing the globally beneficial. The recommendations include: reconstruction of African values, adherence to a think-home philosophy and the involvements of all the agents of socialization in the impartation of African cultural values on Africans.

Key words: Culture, Values, Youth development, globalization, Westernization and Leadership

Introduction

Progress and prosperity of organizations and societies around the world, to a large extent, depend on the quality of leadership. Effective leadership, on the other hand, hinges on sound values adopted and adapted to by the society and her individuals through learning, experience and practice. Imperatively, leadership is a continuum and progressive in all its social, political and religious interactions and endeavors. According to Burns (1979), "one of the most

universal cravings of our time is the hunger for compelling and creative leadership" (p. 86). Unfortunately, this universal craving for quality and creative leadership is the missing link in most African leadership history and experience. The fundamental challenge is the isolation of African cultural values from foreign traditions, considering the potentially endowed dispositions of African rich cultural values in order to contribute to the building of leaders with African perspective, content, patriotism and drive for progress and prosperity of her citizens at all fronts. This sharp contradiction by the infraction of Westernization, foreign religions and globalization must be reversed to enable African nations harness Africa's cultural value potentials on human capital training and development which are capable of changing the narrative and ameliorating the alien culture of nepotism, corruption, dictatorship and the politics of godfatherism.

Meanwhile, achieving effective and productive future leaders of the above progressive and transformative minds in Nigeria requires a tripod of engagement of African value channels of Religion, Philosophy and Ideology. A synergy and collaboration with stakeholders of institutions such as the African tradition, education, religion and family to aid renascence of Africanized leadership, and think-home philosophy is required. This approach will necessarily affect the social, political, religious and family development of Africans. This calls for conscious and deliberate re-connection and inculcation in the contemporary youths of these inherent positive and qualitative values that made the pre-colonial African era thick.

Leadership according to Venkateswarlu (cited by Musa, 2017) is all about "competencies acquired through training in programmes; thus leaders are made" (p. 21). Great voices such as, Chinua Achebe

insisted that there is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or air or anything else but leadership. To change this narrative, African nations and Nigeria in particular must re-embrace and re-adopt her cultural values in citizenship education and youth development so as to create a balance between foreign leadership orientation and African leadership perspective as expressed by our cultural values and cosmological understanding. It is obvious that African values promote integrity, communalism, hard work, honesty, good deeds, good name and contentment. To Onwuejeogwu (2007) "the most satisfactory way the coming generation of Africans can best serve Africa and the world as a whole is by first understanding the cultural content which constitutes the total superstructure of their personality" (p.xxiii). This indeed holds a great promise in reconstructing values for Nigerian future leaders in African way and training enshrined in traditional African mode of education of which Moumouni (cited by Fafunwa, 2012) said " is intricately interwoven; they are not divided into separate compartments as in the case with the Westernized system of education" (p.3).

The aim of this paper is to examine the content and the place of African traditional values to youth leadership development amidst leadership challenges in Nigeria and as well argue its relevance in the modern drive for African true independence, especially as leadership is the pillar to national development.

Concepts Clarification

The key concepts of African cultural values, Youth development and Leadership are herby clarified in order to help for clarity and greater appreciation of the topic under consideration.

African cultural values

Culture as a concept is universally acknowledged, although its manifestation varies from society to society. In Africa, culture encompasses all aspects of human life and existence as well as all experiences and dealings. Definitions by scholars obviously justify the contextualizing of culture to Africa and Africans; hence culture is in tandem with African cosmological ideology. According to Taylor (1958) "culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p. 3). Malinowski (cited by Amos, Ajike, Akinlabi and Kabuoh, n.d.) maintained that "culture is a functional, active, efficient, well organized unity which must be analyzed into component institution in relation to one another, in relation to the needs of human organism and in relation to the environment. For culture is both man-made and natural." (p. 3). This is why

Emele and Ezeoke (2005) maintain that "culture is learned, shared, transmitted, accumulative, social, continuous, changing , integrated, varies from one society to another and it is gratifying" (p.163). To Dzobo cited by Kanu (n. d.), "African values are very practical and pragmatic; they are experiences; hence they are man-centered and community centered" (p. 151). This means that African values are not based on divine revelation just like the values of the Islamic and Christian religions are. They are not also based on any supposed human rationality as in the Western mind. They rather come from the flux of African life; past and present, but with emphasis laid on the past experience. Culture holds an indispensable role in defining the identity of a people and gives them distinction in the global circles. Indeed, cultural values are a sine qua non to leadership and social stabilization of family, education, religious and political institutions due to their positive

contents. On this premise, Onwuejegwu (2007) opined:

> African children cannot develop creative minds without using imagination, which cannot emerge out of emptiness, but must be built out of the raw cultural materials around. These raw materials are to be found in traditional languages, music, arts, drama, science, technology- in short, in African cultures and society (sic) that mould every part of their minds. (p. xxii).

Obviously, globalization and Westernization have created a serious gap and loss of contact to African rich cultural values in our youths' imagination and these youths will eventually take over the reins of leadership of the society in all spheres of life. To create a new mind set or a paradigm shift, we must re-establish contact with the realities of our values through education, re-orientation and promotion of African positive cultural

inheritance especially in training the youths for leadership and this must begin at the formative age.

Youth development

Youth development as a concept embodies all processes and conditions of building up young people unto maturation in mind, body, character and usefulness to themselves and the society at large. This process includes but not limited to training in skills, nurturing and exposure to socio-moral values, cultural and religious values as well as philosophy and ideologies of the people on leadership, family, social and on political matters. According to National Youth Policy of Nigeria (2007), youth development has to do with all the process and strategies of building young people for the utilization of human capital and for productivity. This intends to make Nigerian youths useful to themselves in order to contribute to National Development. Halm (2000) maintains that the National Youth Development

Programme is an approach which lays emphasis on the youth's human asset base and competencies rather than focusing on the youths as human being with problems that constitute a national deficit. It is worthy of note that the Youth Development produces young people with social, moral, emotional, spiritual, cultural and physical competencies to meet up with the challenges of life and the society.

Leadership

The place of leadership is unequivocally interesting due to its effects on followers' belief, satisfaction, behavior, political or organizational cohesion and group productivity. According to Kauzes and Posner (2002) "Leadership outcome revolves on abilities, competencies, good human relationship, to get things done, inspire in others confidence and ability to guide the entire organization towards achieving goals" (p.23). Van Linden and

Fertman (cited by Musa, 2017) maintain that:

Leadership is a function of individual thinking ability, to communicate thoughts and feelings to help followers understand the vision of the organization. When followers understand the vision of the leader, they act on their own belief, and are able to influence others in an ethical and social responsible way. (p.23).

However, McGinnies cited in Ajaegbo and Ibezim (2001) holds that " leadership involves a man's ability to take the initiative in social situations, to plan and organize action, and in doing so to evoke cooperation" (p. 50). The above assertions on leadership prime their central demand on virtues, abilities, competencies, moral and social strength of influence, defined and definite vision encapsulated and percolated in goals and purposes. More so to

leadership is the indispensability of other values such as human respect, integrity, hard-work, transparency and accountability.

Prospects of African Cultural Values to Youth Leadership Development in Nigeria

According to Onwuejegwu (2007) "the most satisfactory way the coming generation of Africans can best serve Africa and the world as a whole is by first understanding the cultural content which constitutes the total superstructure of their personality" (p. xxiii). It is on this maxim that enquiry is needed into the cultural contents upon which African superstructure of personality lies to enable better services to Africa and the world at large. These contents include:

(1) High Value for Communalism or Communal Living

Mbiti (1969) captured this communal value when he opined "I am because we are. And since we are, therefore, I am" (p. 119). The worth of African community is well appreciated in her communal values that guide and control all social interactions cum interpersonal bonds of the people towards a common goal beyond biological affinity which Africans share in common as a people. Igboin (2011) maintains that, Africans care for one another, they are interdependent and solidarize. Whatever happens to one happens to the community as a whole. The joy and sorrow of one extends to other members of the community in profound ways. The willingness to help others for development of the community is reciprocal. This kind of value is dialectically opposed to the Western rugged individualism of which the unfortunate threat has put a knife in our communal values and the centre can no longer hold unless we de-radicalize the Western traditional shackles. The strength of African civilization, development and leadership

empathy lies on re-connection of Africans to this value.

(2) Moral Values

Morality is crucial for proper functioning of society. This is in tandem with the relationship that moral and social values share on which society can be built and developed. Morality is central to promotion of orderliness and crime-free society hence; moral values encapsulate responsibility, honesty, hospitality, accommodation, generosity, compassion, faithfulness, fruitfulness, love, dignity, diligence, hard-work etc. No doubt, moral values form the bedrock of social values and this abhors ethical egotism. Ethical egotism is a concept which holds that everybody is to pursue his or her own welfare and interest thereby promoting the culture of selfishness, corruption and ego-centric behavior. Effective leadership must embrace moral

values to aid social values by creating the culture of transparency, accountability, modeling leadership, trust, confidence and selfless service. It is in this context that Azuakor (2018) writes, "It is a truism that the lack of moral values leads to corruption and decay, indiscipline and injustice, insincerity and inefficiency" (p. 287). The preponderance of these in leadership leads to underdevelopment.

(a) Value for Human Life

Human life is sacred in Africa and of utmost importance and should be accorded mutual respect and dignity. Value for human life in Africa goes beyond nuclear family as members of the extended family, community or tribe are all regarded as brothers whose lives must be preserved and protected. Igboin (2011) opined that the notion of human value is intrinsically linked with a wide range of brotherhood, which may not be biologically based. Indeed, African brotherhood as a concept is obviously

different and beyond Westernized understanding of brotherhood and as such, ours stimulates and enthrones the spirit or attitude of patriotic response and disposition to help one another.

The potentiality of this value enables leaders and the led bring about communal living, love towards one another, peaceful co-existence and mutual respect for human life. Africa and Nigeria in particular will experience peace from terrorism, banditry; kidnapping and other crimes that lead to wastage of human lives by appeal to this African value. Undoubtedly, the unfortunate ugly ancient experiences of life abuse witnessed in several cases of inter-tribal wars, ethnic conflicts, involvement of Africa in slave trade as well as internecine wars, burials of supposed slaves and other humans alongside deceased Kings and nobles were all based on false metaphysics

and this negates our commonality of value for human life.

(b) Value for Good Name

This value is captured in an Igbo adage that says "good name is better than great fortune or wealth" (*Ezi aha ka ego*). Leadership of impact must look beyond the present as history will eventually be kind to a leader based on impacts made on lives and community development. Such people are few today in Africa and Nigeria in particular due to the abrasion of this all important value. On the contrary, Nigeria has leaders in politics, family, institutions and organizations both at the secular and the sacred levels that have no value for good name. Pursuits of wealth and power in unclean and indecent manners are the order of the day hence the consequences of kidnapping, misappropriation of public fund meant for social development, bribery and corruption as well as other crimes rampant in society. Good name is an African value

encoded and expressed in African proverbial lexicons to enthrone decency in private and public life, in leadership at all level and to create a culture of contentment and selfless service. The application of this value will positively impact accountability, transparency, development, due process, free and fair elections, justice and as well, quality assurance in Nigeria for posterity's sake.

(c) Promotion of Hard-work and Industry

It is vital to appreciate the industrial impacts and drive in Africa even before the inroad of missionaries and colonial masters. This industrial spirit was embedded in the Igbo lexicon *Nka n'uzu,* which English word expression is *technology*. Great feats made in Nri bronzes called Igbo-Ukwu bronzes, Benin bronzes, Bida bronzes, carvers of Congo masks; African healers with the use of traditional herbs; weapons and farm implements made by African blacksmiths, etc attest to African values for hard-work

and industry. Onwuejeogwu (2007) holds that "if Africans are determined to make an impact on world civilization they must first understand their own traditions and then combine them with the foreign imported traditions to produce a hybrid one with its own vigor" (p. xxii) . This assertion gives credence to African traditions' prowess and potential in social and industrial development with promise of great impact on local and foreign civilization. But unfortunately, as noted by Azuakor (2018) lack of hard work is rife in the life of Nigerians today; many do not want to study in schools and yet want to pass very well which has led to examination malpractices. Many do not go to work or work lackadaisically but still receive their salaries and want promotions. This is another way of speaking of corruption and the end result is poverty. When a society is hinged on the value of hard work but on laziness and undeserved gain, corruption ensues and the

multiplier effect is poverty. Thus for Azuakor (2015), "Corruption has led to poverty in Nigeria irrespective of the vast natural and human resources that Nigeria is endowed with (p. 152)". The incontrovertible poverty on the lands of Nigeria and other African countries is an eloquent testimony to the prevalence of corruption on the continent being that Africa prides itself as the most endowed in terms of natural resources of all the continents on earth. Yet she is so poor due in part to lack of readiness to work and then leaving its natural resources to be exploited by outsiders to her ruin and the attendant pervasive corruption.

(3) Leadership Training

Leadership training is intricately interwoven with African family culture. The oldest in the family is looked upon as a leader in the absence of the both parents. Men are trained consciously to provide leadership to the wife and children whereas girls are trained as well for family responsibilities. These trainings are designed and passed on to the young mainly by oral tradition. It encompasses all facets of life: social, economic, political and religious to enable Africans be properly integrated into the wider society and to take up without fail their respective responsibilities. Economic training most often involves apprenticeship to help gain skills and master proficiency.

Factors and Challenges to African Cultural Values

African cultural values have been seriously affected by some factors such as Westernization, globalization, indigenous lackadaisical attitude towards our traditional values as well as some teachings of the foreign missions. The effect of these factors form a great challenge on African cultural bond and its usefulness to human, social, moral, economic, religious and political developments. Nothing less can describe our state of traditional value than what was

captured by the literary icon Chinua Achebe in his work "Things Fall Apart" when he pictorially stated thus: "The centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world". The impact of foreign influences on the pride and identity of Africa has left us with shadows rather than realities with the following consequences:

(1) Westernization and African Cultural Alteration

The stack reality is that colonization left us almost with mere African cultural shell via the colonizers' acculturation of African cultures and indiscriminate transmission of their foreign culture unto our traditional society. Today, our youths clamor more for Western mode of life, training, learning, language, family, social and moral values than the indigenous values and culture. The former Tanzanian President, Julius Nyerere cited by Kanu (n.d) lamented that:

Of all the crimes of Colonialism, there is none worse than the attempt to make us believe that we had no indigenous culture of our own or that what we did have was worthless or something of which we should be ashamed, instead of being a source of pride (p.150).

The effect of this false impression on Africa and her budding generations is worrisome, hence; our cherished values such as respect, language, family values, social and political values are on a fast track to extinction. This attitude explains why most Africans attach more importance to foreign products and social values, be it political, economic or educational than ours. This challenge can only be reversed by placing premium on African way of life, mode of human and socio-moral developments, language and, as well, by building a strong affinity to our values in all facets of life.

(2) Globalization and African Cultural Distortion

No doubt, globalization has some inherent positivism to socio-economic developments; however, its drive to world homogeneity by the most powerful nations portends danger for re-colonization cum imperialism. Unfortunately, the outcry of some scholars and African positivists against its objective aim of one market economy, one religion, one liberal democracy and ultimately one Westernized cultural heritage has not been understood by many. The outcome of this plot on cultural heritage will be disastrous to already dying African cultural heritage, thereby completely destructing our peculiar identity in the comity of nations. Ogunjim and Na'Allah (2005) opined that the unique Nigerian cultural values such as language are continually being eroded by the pop culture which is an accompaniment of globalization; norms of greeting, cooking norms, appearees (appearance and dress),

customs, religion, cultural components and occupations are giving way to acculturation, which is the suppression and subjugation of African culture. Of course, this is tantamount to a tragic phenomenon that is speedily decimating the original cultural tone and complexion of not only the budding generation but also of even the adults.

Obviously, the pathetic admittance of Western culture in the name of globalization to the detriment of highly valued heritage that gives us distinctiveness is not without consequences.

(3) African / Nigerian Attitude to Cultural Values and Youths Development

Family, school and religion are all part of the custodians of cultural values as they play vital roles in using them for human capital development in Africa. Unfortunately, the ongoing erosion of core African values has had its grips on these institutions and their

stakeholders as a result of inglorious treatment and neglect of these values by the indigenous peoples themselves. This has left our youths to strange contacts and values. This attitude negates the principle of achieving home-grown contents, which implies generation of leaders with African mind set rooted in African philosophy and ideology. As a result of this, lamenting on the state of our youths, Oni (2005) holds, "Nigerian youths are rapidly losing touch with cultural values and this could be seen in the alien culture which they portray; their bizarre dressing, dancing and language and so on which invariably affect other aspects' of social life" (p.15).

Conclusion

Influence is a powerful tool in changing a man and his society. This holds true to leadership which depends on the influencer; that is, the values passed on at the formative and developmental stages of would-be leaders hence, you train up a child in the way he or she should go and when he grows up, he will not depart from it (Proverb 22:6). African cultural values have passed through persecutions by internal and external factors. Notwithstanding, Africa's indispensable virtues cannot be denied in human capital development as they hold great promise in redefining African leadership perception amidst moral and social leadership challenges in the 21st century. This calls for cultural value "think-home philosophy" in producing leaders with local content and perception without neglecting the global values that are tested to be productive in aiding effective leadership. Achieving this requires comprehensive overhauling of our approach to education without contents abrasion, but in reflection to African touch via moral and social values to give it hybrid quality and distinction since education remains a pillar in raising and developing

leaders of all sectors at both formal and informal levels. More so, is the need for collaboration and synergy by African leaders and elites in the area of policy making to enable collective force both in implementation of cultural values inculcation and in reconstruction of African values by African scholars in tandem with the realities of the 21st century. Achieving this will create relevance in training people in both socio-moral dimensions, in political and in economic developments as well as technological development. This move and approach must involve family and religious institutions as functional outlets and bedrock of development in any society, nay African society.

Recommendations

Since leadership is beyond occupying positions of authority or being the figure head, but entails achieving results, the lacuna in raising African youths with African cultural values and perception can be bridged and a new dawn be heralded by implanting the following recommendations:

(1) There is need for reconstruction of African values, especially, the socio-moral values so as to have relevance and impact the modern educational system at all levels and in all disciplines in Nigeria. This will in turn have the required influence on society especially in the area of leadership.

(2) Parents and other stakeholders such as political and religious leaders must be jointly integrated in promotion of African values through enlightenment, teaching, policy making and in practice rather than copying foreign traditions.

(3) African think-home philosophy must be encouraged and promoted in youth citizenship education as well as in all socio-economic, cultural and religious activities/productivities.

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