

# **ROLE OF POLITICAL EDUCATION IN SUSTENANCE OF NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.**

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## **Abstract**

*The premise of this paper is that there is an urgent need for political education in Nigeria on account that Nigerian democracy is expected to accelerate national development. The reason for this submission is that Nigerian democracy has failed to meet the expectations of the masses. A number of indicators x-ray the lapses of the Nigerian democracy. They are: inability to provide the masses with good leadership, ethnicity, corruption, election crises and inadequate logistics, enthronement of mediocrity at the expense of meritocracy, violation of fundamental human rights of the citizens and other rape of democracy tendencies. To address these problems, the role of political education for political re-orientation of the citizens cannot be over-emphasized. The paper found that inadequate political education remains the bane of Nigerian democracy. That adequate political education to the citizenry will enable them have knowledge of the fundamental human rights. This will help them respect one another; shun ethnicity, corruption, favouritism and other acts capable of opposing democratic governance. The study recommended that government at all levels should organize political enlightenment programmes for the citizens towards the sustainable democracy for national development in Nigeria.*

## **Introduction**

In Nigeria, democracy and national development aspiration need to be sustained through political education of the citizens. Political education according to Akude (1991:166) is, “a process of mental liberation which breaks down apathy and the culture of silence of the vast majority of Nigerians, and empowers them to participate effectively and meaningfully in the process of nation building”. This simply means that if political education is properly conducted, it will enable citizens to play their parts towards the development of the nation, as well as possessing the information essential for intellectual reflection on issues of the day. It is this kind of orientation that would make people think of what to do for their country and not what the country would do for them. Political education in its ramifications would help Nigerian citizens to participate positively in Nigerian democracy towards national development.

Democracy is a system of government that allows the citizens the periodic opportunity to elect their leaders as to provide social services to the people or face impeachment or recall if they fall short of the expectations of the citizens. Nwokolo (2010), sees democracy as a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials, and social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office. On the contrary, democracy in Nigeria seems to be a practice where the opinions of few wealthy or influential individuals are taken on major issues affecting the country. However, Asobie (2007) explains that democracy in Nigeria, is practiced mostly by those who are not exposed to or who have no knowledge of the science of politics, nor being trained in either the academic discipline or the practical professions....

Situation like this in a democratic system demands urgent solution. Hence the need for political education for the politicians and the citizens in general. Without practical or ideal democracy, there may be no political stability, and national security, and perhaps no social and economic development. It is only ideal democracy that can pave ground for national development. National development is entrenched on such basic tenets of ideal democracy such as sovereignty of the people, respect for human life, respect for the rule of law, equality and liberty of the individuals (Held, 1993 and Enemu, 2005).

The citizens of Nigeria need good political education to understand the principles and practice of democracy, if the goal of national development will not remain a mirage. National development is the qualitative and quantitative advancement in all sectors of the economy. It is overall improvement in the political, economic and socio-cultural spheres of life of the people of

the country. Ogbuka (1991:82) sees national development as, “the progressive change from lower to higher level of growth, performance and achievement both quantitatively and qualitatively on wider political community rather than individual or sectional scale”. This implies that national development may not be realized in a democracy where most citizens do not know their rights, cannot respect the rights and human dignity of others, practice thuggery and cannot think rationally. Similarly, Awolowo-Browne (2011) noted with regret that, Nigeria is plagued by a number of bad cultures. In Nigeria today, there exist problems of ethnic sentiments, tribalism, spates of bombing and terrorist attacks by a group of agitators called the Boko Harams, politics of rancour and elimination of political opponents and myriad of others. This unhealthy situation calls for political education so that the citizens of the country would learn to avoid unhealthy practices in the polity.

This paper therefore, addressed the role of political education needed to strengthen Nigerian democracy. The successive parts of this paper are arranged into the following sub-headings:

- ❖ Conceptual Overview of Political Education and Nigerian Democracy
- ❖ Need for Political Education in Multi-Socio-Cultural Groups
- ❖ Problems Facing Political Education in Nigeria
- ❖ Role of Political Education in Sustenance of Nigerian Democracy
- ❖ Implications of Political Education for National Development
- ❖ Conclusion and recommendations.

### **Conceptual Overview**

#### **Political Education and Nigerian Democracy**

Political education could be broadly referred to as a process of getting the citizenry fully socialized into the prevailing political culture of the country (Akude, 1991). It is the orientation given to people in the family, churches, mosque, schools and media such as magazines, newspapers, television, scholarly articles in journals and books of readings, towards equipping them with knowledge, skills, norms, values and judgements that will make them function effectively in their body polity. It is a process through which an individual is taught the political norms, values, and aspirations of the society to be useful member of the society. Political education is akin to political socialization and citizenship education since all of them perform similar role of educating the citizens on their rights and rights of others in the society (Ibezim, 2001).

Political education is also geared towards educating the citizens about their history, political development, rights and responsibilities, educating masses on participation in public affairs. It is also geared towards educating citizens to identify with the Nigerian nation and to reject manipulations or acts which threaten the identity, integrity and sovereignty of the nation.

Notably, political education improves democracy and practical democracy improves national development. For example, Ghana, a country in Africa is well respected now all – over the World because of its democratic practices some of which include free and fair elections, respect for people’s lives and property, economic buoyancy, political stability and cultural re-orientation (Acha, 2011). Nigeria should borrow a leaf from Ghana, for Ghana is in Africa and was once colonized by the British.

Right from independence Nigerian democracy has been in a state of flux. It (Nigerian Democracy) could be mirrored through the activities of our so called nationalist leaders who were busy manipulating the populace to fight political battles against themselves. In-fact opposing the ruling class was negatively evaluated and was seen as dissention and so must be punished. Nigeria is such a State where democracy has class character and where inequality prevails. The political culture of the people tends towards monetization of election, politicization of ethnicity and sectionalism. No true democracy can survive in environment where anarchy, sectionalism, tribalism, disloyalty among others have become the order of the day. True democracy can only be meaningful on the plat-form of peace, security, unity and tranquillity, hence they are vital ingredients of democracy. It is therefore, believed that functional political education will solve the problems of democracy in Nigeria and as such moves the nation to the next phase of development.

The question now is who should be given the political education for the strengthening of Nigerian democracy towards national development? The obvious answer is that both, young and adults, educated and illiterates, leaders and followers in Nigeria need political education.

### **Need for Political Education in Multi-Cultural Groups**

Nigeria is a country that is made up of people of different ethnic orientations, origins and culture. There are over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria and more than 400 languages in the country. Nigeria is believed to be a creation of the colonial masters where people of diverse cultures, norms, traditions, aspirations, and/ or orientations are brought together. Nigeria was gotten from the colonial amorphous amalgamation of previously independent and discrete political and cultural units into a single State without due consideration of the integration of the political entity

(Omojuwa, 1998). To worsen the situation, the colonialists sowed the seed of division in Nigeria by identifying each ethnic group as tribe and worst still making each tribe feel that it is different from other tribes. Acknowledging the word tribe as a means of disintegration as well as causing division among the people of Africa, Paden and Soja (1970) succinctly note in the following lines:

*The term 'tribe' and 'tribalism' have pejorative connotations for many indigenous Africans (as has primitive) but more specifically these terms have not proved to be very effective concept for analytical purpose... 'Tribe' and 'tribalism' have also lacked cross cultural applicability. What is called a tribe in Africa is often called a nation or nationality in Europe and North America.*

As a result, there is always feeling of differences among the various ethnic groups. This feeling was sowed, nurtured and developed by the colonial masters to see that these groups never come together to fight a common goal. Consequently, arson, ethnic loyalty, thuggery, intimidation, elimination of opponents etc. became institutionalized political culture. That was why at independence, the first problem the leaders encountered was how to integrate the ethnic nationalities so that they feel they are one entity. The tribe orientation which was given the Africans that sowed the seed of ethnic sentiments in most African States, Nigeria not an exception is a colonial coinage to destabilize them. Logical deduction from the above scenario shows that there is the need for political education in multi-socio-cultural groups like Nigeria. Political education may be one of the tools that could reduce tribalism, nepotism, favouritism and other vices that threaten the Nigerian democracy thereby affecting national development.

### **Problems Facing Political Education in Nigeria**

Nigerian governments have been making efforts to ensure that the citizens have the needed political education for the sustenance of Nigerian democracy for national development. They have introduced into the curriculum subjects like Social Studies, Civic Education, Government as a subject, as well as Citizenship education to ensure that citizens at all levels of the educational system receive political education. They have established agencies like the Mass Mobilization for Self-Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), National Orientation Agency (NOA), and a host of others. However, the above attempts did not achieve the political education need of the citizens of the country. The reason for the above contention is that myriad of factors which are political and religious in nature, that affect Nigerian unity need to be part of political education in Nigeria. In the words of Elebo (1996) there are many factors that influence ethnicity in Nigeria; these factors were responsible for the national disintegration which contributed to most

of the problems in this country. They are religious, social and political factors. Religion is a divisive factor in the social relations which alienates peoples' reasoning. A look at what happens today between the Christians and Muslims reveals that the religion does not allow people to reason. Muslims value their religion so much that they take western education as a sin. This is the basis for Boko Harams as the Muslim faithful advocated. Anywhere in the northern part of the country where a Christian is the leader, the Muslims will not like to accord him the legitimacy he deserves.

Social factors are challenges to political education. The Igbo pattern of social life idealized egalitarians, selfish and anarchic pursuit with due respect to age and tradition; the Yorubas are very diplomatic; the Hausa pattern idealized disciplined behaviour and they place premium on winning the social and political favours and friendship of others particularly those of higher social and political status (Elebo, 1990). These differences in social values affect political education in Nigeria.

Political factors on the other hand, pose some difficulties in the political education of the citizenry. Political history in Nigeria reveals a spate of personality clashes. A case in point is what existed between Awolowo and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in the National Youth Movement (NYM) in the 1940s; leadership tussles between Ernest Ikoli and Samuel Akinsanya and myriad of others.

Omojuwa (1998) outlines four problems of political education. They include the diverse nature of Nigeria as a State, lack of super-ordinating national loyalty, the definition of Nigeria citizenship which emphasizes indigeneity, and statism. Nigeria is a mistake of Lugard for the elements that make up the country are of different cultural backgrounds and aspirations and the ideas of State creation and citizenship have encouraged division more than unity and this makes Nigerian citizens have dual loyalty to Nigerian State.

In line with the above assertion, Osaghae (1987:72) opines, "while the State provides that all citizens are equal and should be treated equally, the centrifugal forces of ethnicity, religion, statism and regionalism among others produce discriminatory practices in the sub-units of the State which negates the constitutional provision by treating citizens unequally". Other challenges to political education are poverty, greed, corruption and illiteracy.

### **Role of Political Education in Sustenance of Nigerian Democracy**

Many phenomena in Nigeria polity make political education of the citizenry a needed project to be embarked upon. In the words of Ikeji, Otisi, and Utulu (2011), factors like citizen's apathy and marginalization in the public process, dysfunctional electioneering, jettisoning of

public accountability principle, enthronement and maintaining of oppressive, unpopular and illegitimate regimes, undermining of the rights and obligations of the citizenry are the monsters that ravage the Nigerian democracy thereby affecting national development. Similarly, Ogbuka (1991) posits that Nigerian democracy accepts periodic elections although these elections are often marked by crises and logistics inadequacies which affect political participation of the citizenry.

Judging from the above views, the only balm and/ or solution to the picture of our dear country painted above is political education. Ewemie (2000) and Anwulorah (2009:290) highlight what should be the main role of political education as follows:

*Political education can curb among others, the seventeen ills common in a politically turbulent nation including: illness and hunger, starvation, inflation, uncertainty, oppression, high levies/taxes, victimization, corruption, robbery, murder, fear, arson, suffering of the masses, tribalism, educational depression, retrenchment and unemployment.*

Ewemie and Anwulorah seem to have listed all the challenges facing Nigerian democracy which clog on the wheel of national development and affirm that political education is the solution. In a related exposition, Edebor (2008) mentions the prevailing illness which political education is set to exterminate to include: ethnic rivalry, misappropriation of public funds, political thuggery, relative intolerance and insincerity among leaders as well as followers. Education is more of an adaptive and supportive institution, prompted to adapt to new curriculum to meet new needs arising from social changes in society (Ogunyiriofo, 2001:89). Ottaway (1963) maintains that educational change tends to follow social change and that education is one of the last functions of society to adapt to new social needs. The social needs of Nigerians in the face of spates of election rigging, militancy, bombing, abduction of foreign oil workers, Boko Harams, and other practices that connote rape of democracy in Nigeria today is the political education of the citizenry.

Political education according to Akude (1991) helps to maintain political stability. However, the lamentable reality is the inability of the electorates to remove their dehumanized leaders through free and fair means (that is the ballot box) (Acha, 2011). This situation exists because most citizens do not have enough political education. All those that work as thugs, the highly placed electoral officials that abet electoral malpractices and those politicians that induce them lack political education and may not know with ease the impact of their actions on Nigerian democracy and national development.

### **Implications of Political Education for National Development**

- ❖ Adequate political education to Nigerian citizens will enhance the knowledge of their inalienable human rights. It will also help them to know when their rights are violated by others. This invariably would help to spell out corruption and its indices. This if done will sustain democracy and accelerate national development.
- ❖ It will liberate Nigerians from the shackles of ethnicity, make Nigerians know that we are one and indivisible Nigeria, and as well learn to be loyal to the country and not the tribe(s). It will equally help Nigerians know that the word 'tribe' is not of African origin but one of the instruments that the colonial/imperial masters used to sow seed of division among Africans as to be able to rule them (divide and rule ideology).
- ❖ Political education when properly given to Nigerian citizens would enable them understand democracy and its principles, as to know when it is raped and who raped it and the necessary action(s) to be taken to forestall it (democracy) towards national development. Good political education would make Nigerians vote wisely during elections as to solve the seeming leadership problem of Nigeria that affects the national development aspiration of the country.
- ❖ Political education will also make Nigerians to embrace religious tolerance. It is an eye opener that would let Nigerians know that religion should be placed aside in treating issues of national concern. It will as well let Nigerians learn that no book of God (Bible or Koran) advocates man inhumanity to man.
- ❖ Nigerian leaders would learn through political education that they are servants to the masses and not lords and that they are pointers to follow. They would also learn that they are primary role models on national values. They would borrow a leaf from the biblical Jesus Christ who was an epitome of a good leader. Political education would enable our leaders to use the national resources for the development of the nation not siphoning it to their foreign accounts for development of foreign countries. It would equally make Nigerian citizens to clamour for peace of the country, eschew dual loyalty and maintain spirit of oneness.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the foregoing, the following recommendations are proffered:

- 1) Government at all levels should organize political enlightenment programmes for those who are not privileged to have western education of any kind where they will be taught the importance of unity in diversity, peace, patriotism, respect for fundamental human rights, rule of law and equality of all citizens. This if done would improve Nigerian democracy which will in turn affect national development.
- 2) The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be adequately funded by the federal government to re-invigorate it to give more political education to the masses.
- 3) Federal government should make every first one hour of the working hours of the civil and public servants on the last Thursdays of the month to be for political education. Here, a resource person will be brought to enlighten them on their political rights and obligations, the need for unity and evil effects of tribalism, statism and favouritism on the Nigerian democracy and national development.
- 4) Federal government should organize seminars for political re-orientation of highly placed individuals in the country - business and political magnates, Governors of all the States of the federation, Ministers, Commissioners, Heads of military, police and paramilitary agencies, academics, local government chairmen and councilors for the needed paradigm shift towards overhauling the Nigerian democracy for national development.

## **Conclusion**

The role of political education in sustenance of Nigerian democracy and forestalling of national development cannot be over-emphasized. Education is an agent of change and political education in Nigeria context cannot be an exception. It is the political education that contributed to the development of the west.

Conversely, Nigerian citizens today need political re-orientation. The leaders, the led, including the religious leaders need political re-orientation at this material time when bribery and corruption, militancy, Boko Harams, religious squabbles, rape of democracy, leadership failures, and myriad of political, economic and socio-cultural challenges ravage the country. Political education with its concomitant peaceful political, economic and socio-cultural atmosphere is the need of every multi-socio-cultural group like Nigeria.

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