

NIGERIAN YOUTHS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS ON THE SPEECH OF THE NIGERIAN PRESIDENT AT THE COMMONWEALTH FORUM IN LONDON

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Abstract

The youths are an integral part of any society and they are the focus for any sustainable development. Sustainable development comes with continuous growth, progress and improvement in every facet of human existence and the self-acquired capability for sustenance. Political parties and their existing government get involved in the business of integral and sustainable development for the sake of the present and the future looking at the realities that affect the present conditions any society finds itself. As such, the youths becomes the most important beneficiaries of these developments and yet the victims of underdevelopment which hardly translates into self-actualization that pricks youth effectiveness in relation to polity and the dynamics of Nigerian identity. If the youths are the leaders of tomorrow as popularly said then the future begins from today. This is on the ground that for a development to be sustainable and to sustain the future of the youth, then there must be fair level playing ground. This in mind, this paper did a qualitative research in a laboratory of philosophical analysis in response to a question where the Nigerian President has cause to talk about Nigerian youths at the Commonwealth Business Forum in London. In so doing, this paper has critically x-rayed the role of Nigerian youths in sustainable development in a contextual philosophical analysis as it pertains to the comment made by the President of Nigeria so as to accommodate divergent views and creating a more robust engagement between the youths and government in Nigeria.

Key words: Youths, sustainable development, society, Nigeria, speech and Business Forums.

Introduction

It was on the 18th April, 2018 the Commonwealth Business Forum took place in London and President Muhammadu Buhari was at that Conference to deliver a key note address and responding to a question about Nigerian youths; in which the Nigerian President said:

We have a very young population, our population is estimated conservatively to be 180 (one hundred and eighty) million. More than 60 percent of the population is below the age of 30 (thirty). A lot of them

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have not been to school and they are claiming that Nigeria has been an oil producing country, therefore they should sit and do nothing and get housing, healthcare and education free.

No doubt, from the said quotation it will be difficult to make reference to the exact text of the speech itself but listening and watching video recording on the various media platform there is no doubt of the exact words used by the President of Nigeria concerning the Nigerian youth. From the above quotation extracted it will be very difficult to clearly understand the angle the President was speaking from; and yet these comments have brought uproar in the social media and in various medium of discussion including our offices and social atmosphere (Beer Parlor).

Did the President of Nigeria actually state that the 'Nigerian Youths are lazy'? Is this statement an implied statement drawn from the response of the President? Are the Nigerian youths actually lazy? Is the President's response a determining factor to measure the lazy attitude of Nigerian youths if we go by his comment? At what point in history did the Nigerian youths develop this attitude such lazy attitude? When was oil discovered in Nigeria? Are these present generation of youths given birth to at the point oil was discovered in Nigeria? Oils was discovered in the year 1956 in Nigeria and between 1956 to 2018 is sixty-two (62) years and the midst of all these questions which this paper hope not to give adequate answers, it is appropriate to set the stage by making reference to a book written by Odumegwu Ojukwu *Because I am Involved* in relation to our country Nigeria. He said thus:

The average Nigerian looks upon Nigeria as a theatre and the entire population representing and manifesting the full spectrum of acts and actors. In this revelry, life is the theatre; the nation is the stage upon which we perform. The politicians and, very often the military, are the actors - very often mediocre, from time to time ham. When stars appear, it is more often because a play must have a star rather than because the player is possessed of some dramatic genius. We falter and we muff our lines; sometimes, our performance takes on the aspect of the grotesque - nobody takes this seriously because it is perceived as being in the nature of the play. Our people become the audience - Politics for them remain a spectator spot. It is not for them to participate; theirs is to applaud (1989: 12).

As of when this book was written, it can be interpreted to reflect the past and days of Odumegwu Ojukwu and projecting the future as it is today. The above quotation still stands the taste of time considering our socio-economic and political realities in which the President tries to blame the Nigerian youths of his time without recourse to his own past. Hence, the President's response might be partly correct but cannot be absolutely correct if from the moment the youths of the past and the present acted accordingly.

In *The Politics of Youth In Greek Tragedy* Matthew Shipton argues that the prominence of young people in tragedy throughout the fifth century reflects the persistent uncertainty as to what their role in society should be. As the success of Athens rose and then fell, young characters were repeatedly used by tragic playwrights as a way to explore political tensions and social upheaval in the city. Thereby, presenting to his readers that the complex and often paradoxical views we hold about youth today can also be found in the ancient society of classical Athens (2018). In *Civic and Political Engagement in Youths: Finding and Prospects* Xenia Chrysochoou and Martyn Barrett disagrees with Matthew Shiphon and argues that rather than using conventional forms of political participation, youth today are often engaged through nonconventional and civic means instead (2017:291). These scholars can be reconciled with the fundamental Aristotelian phrase "Et Social is et Homo Politicus" so as to fill in the gap for the of lack of conventional political participation which is a pitfall in youth engagement for political participation. The response of the Nigerian President in playing politics of the youth as "blame game" is a challenge for the Nigeria youth to wake up to their responsibilities they have left in the hands of a selected few. It only means that the youth must work it out this time around. This paper will look beyond the response of the President of Nigeria; to also challenge the Nigerian youths in becoming more proactive in problem solving rather than "sitting down" to allow a particular elitist group to decide their destiny if we must sustainably develop as a nation and a people.

Sustainable Development

The concept 'sustainable development' is susceptible to wide interpretations without any single definition but often used without recourse to know exactly what it means. This paper will not over heat or stress one's intellectual insight or intend to start quoting extracts from scholars on what they conceive 'sustainable development' to be. This paper will provide a working definition that suits the context and framework of this paper.

It is impossible to define 'sustainable development' without putting the past in perspective. The definition ought to involve the past, present and the future; and this is because socio-economic and political progress should cut across every strata of human endeavor. According to Brundtland Report, in *Our Common Future* it defines sustainable development as a kind of development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (1987). The question now should be who should meet the needs of the present? The present will always have recourse to the past; and the past ought to take full responsibilities of the present. What is the past? In an effort to understand our past and know what our past is, then it will be appropriate to evaluate the socio-economic realities of our past so as to understand how we got to where we are in the present.

The satisfaction of human needs and aspirations is the major objective of sustainable development. Can human needs ever be satisfied? Philosophically, this probes into the concept of sustainable development itself; but nonetheless, sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life. It means creating an enabling environment for growth, freedom and progress. Sustainable development calls for concerted efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future for people and planet. In order to achieve a genuine sustainable development, it involves three areas of interest; economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection (Unachukwu & Ijeoma 2017). No doubt, they are all interconnected for the well-being of the integral development of society.

For the purpose of this paper, sustainable development is defined as a process that is continuous in impacting positive improvement, growth and social change for the well-being of everyone today and creating a fair level playing ground by making life better for the future generation. In simple terms "as you eat today make sure you don't eat everything today but reserve for the future so that those yet unborn will have something to leverage on tomorrow".

Nigeria Youths, The Problem of definition: Who is a Nigerian Youth?

The concept 'Youth' varies from country to country and in most cases it ranges from age to age. Nevertheless, before we begin to interrogate this concept 'youth' it will be appropriate to give it a fundamental bedrock definition. According to the Webster Dictionary, a youth is defined as "the time of life when one is young" (1979:1092). According to Isawa Elaigwu in

Nigeria Yesterday and Today For Tomorrow: Essay in Governance and Society, 'Youth' symbolizes a transitional stage in the growth path to maturity (2005:76). This definition from Isawa Elaigwu broadens one's definition of who a youth is. If a youth is defined by age, then it is very possible one can be of age and not a youth at heart. The definition of a youth from the perspective of maturity involves how the mind thinks. Thus, a child might not be of age but thinks critically and better than someone who has not attained youthful age. A person might be much older and has come off age but thinks better than someone who is younger and ought to be vibrant than the older person. Youthful age comes with vibrancy, vigor, sharp thinking and not from a biological or sociological categorization. Therefore, as long as one has passed the stage of a child say from eighteen (18) years and above and in some countries seventeen (17) years and above then with the necessary characteristics as mentioned (good thinking, vibrancy, vigor, social and the ability to carry everyone along) then, such person is youth in mind at heart.

For the purpose of this paper, a Nigerian Youth is one who has the maturity for good thinking, vibrancy and vigor and is very much able to display a good sense of wisdom in matters that concern life; and this includes the less privileged and the physically challenged irrespective of the age, tribe, political party, religious affiliation, geographical provenance and social extraction. Therefore, being a youth is not limited by age but vibrancy and vigor; one can be physically challenged and still be vibrant. As a matter of fact, youthful stage of life has vital function for society and constitutes an important segment of our contemporary society.

The Speech of the Nigerian President: Setting the Stage

The Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari on the 18th April, 2018 was in London to attend the Commonwealth Business Forum in London, United Kingdom. President Muhammadu Buhari was quoted to have said that "many Nigerian youths want everything free without doing anything". The President was speaking on the topic: *Making Business Easier Between Commonwealth Countries* and these statements have since brought about all forms of interpretations and criticisms. President Muhammadu Buhari has only reiterated and reaffirmed the realities that exist and can exist anywhere in the world. Crime rates in the world are usually committed by youths who might be looking for an easy way out of poverty and sufferings. Was the President making a statement of generalization to mean all Nigerian Youths? No doubt, there are so many Nigerian youths out there looking for an easy way of life and this is what makes them go into all forms of crimes rather than contributing to

national development. According to Chidozie Ekeji in *Poverty and Crime among Nigerian Youths* he asserts:

There are so many ways youths can contribute to national development. They can do so by working hard in any field they are involved in, be it in education, farming, trading, in the civil service etc. However, there is still a public concern and sociological interest in the way that youth is changing. Matters of safety and security are topical issues in today's society. Lives have now become precarious in today's world. This is evident in media reports of happenings in the world today. From one part of the world to another or one part of the country to another; we hear of various criminal activities perpetrated day by day. These crimes range from kidnapping, armed robbery, vandalism, prostitution, cybercrime, car theft, terrorism and so on (2010:1).

Did the President of Nigeria actually say anything new? It is fundamental to understand the dynamics of society and its operations to know that it is only vibrant and vigorous minds that commit crime and the youths are always involved. But, the socio-philosophic question will be why are the youth potentials for crime in the world and in particular Nigeria where the crime rate is very high? What has been the policy framework for youths in Nigeria to be part of nation building and sustainable development? What did the past leadership in Nigeria impact on economic policies that can improve and create employment for the average Nigerian youth? Did we ever have Nigerian youths from independence or when oil was discovered in Nigeria till date? Who were those at the helm of affairs and what impact as youths did they make in stabilizing our country Nigeria to be a better place than they left it? Until these questions are answered what we have today goes beyond shifting blames but the real issues must be addressed.

Nigerian Political Class and the Failure of Leadership in Nigeria

It was Chinua Achebe who has been popularly quoted to have said that the problem and trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure in leadership (1984). Matthew Hassan Kukah has argued not to justify bad leadership on the Nigeria youths but sees the Nigerian political elites who shifted their attention away from the ordinary people whose lives they had set out to improve, to themselves... Rather than dealing with the problems of the welfare of Nigerians, government resorted to endless and mindless expenditures (1999). Nigerian leaders have refused to act to deal with the

problem that is anti-thetical to sustainable development in the past and the present. The reason for this according to J. Obi Oguejiofor is that public institutions have refused to be functional due to bad leadership. Hence according to him, such functionality is premised on the preparedness of sufficient number of key holders to do the right thing for the sake of doing it, not for money, and not on account of coercion (2009:21). This is why the average Nigerian youth have suffered endlessly to the point of no option but to result to crime. There is a significant relationship between bad leadership and crime rate and this is why many at times the Nigerian youths have been shortchanged in so many ways and have become victims of circumstances.

Despite this abysmal failure in leadership, so many Nigerian youths have defied the odds of the society to become the best abroad and contributing enormously to the economy of other nation; and this has resulted to brain drain in which our best doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, architectures, philosophers, theologians, entrepreneurs etc are abroad making waves for a viable society that is not theirs. Yet, they are a Nigerian youth who despite bad leadership always wants to make a difference to enhance their life for better living. It can also be very much obvious that those who have this opportunity to be abroad are beneficiaries of a corrupt system and bad leadership. They could also be the children of high profile public servants and business men and women who took advantage of a system that bad leadership allows for irregularities to thrive at the expense of morality and professionalism.

There is a big gap between politics and morality in Nigeria and this has continuously affected the thinking of an average Nigeria youths who begin to see leadership as a means to gather wealth for themselves. It is very much unthinkable how majority of Nigerian youths applaud these politicians who come from their geographical jurisdiction and never see anything wrong with squandering public funds. Unfortunately, in Nigeria today wealth is the standard for measuring hard work irrespective of where the wealth is coming from and the only criterion valid for the measurement of success. According to Odumegwu Ojukwu,

The Nigerian must wear the most expensive clothes, drive the most expensive cars, build the most expensive palaces, patronize the most expensive clubs, send his children to the most expensive schools, drink the most expensive beverages, throw the most lavish parties and mate the most mercenary mistresses(1989).

This is the very reason an average Nigerian leader is not interrogated or questioned as to their means of funds when they are in office. A political leader in Nigeria is convicted of crime on so many count charges and serve jail term and yet such persons is still celebrated and even seek to be elected in political offices or even given appointment. Yet, such a leader is even applauded by Nigerian youths on the grounds of what Odumegwu Ojukwu calls 'addict of privileges'. More so and unfortunately is the fact that even the constitution has a very deep lacuna in addressing issues of morality in public office and political leadership. Nigerian lawyers seem more to defend corrupt officials than making sure we have a sanitized constitution in Nigeria with a great deal of moral ingredients. This is where we are as a nation and as a people looking for a development that ought to be sustainable so that our professionals, technocrat and expertise can translate into problem solving. Nonetheless, our leaders are pseudo leaders; our intellectuals, pseudo intellectuals; our professionals are pseudo professionals; whilst our occupations are pseudo occupations. Our middle class is pseudo-middle class; our elite are pseudo-elite, our socialist, Marxists, liberals and even our conservatives, are very often pseudo, no matter the appellation they sport (Ojukwu:1989).

Foundation Once Destroyed: What Can the Nigerian Youths Do?

The Nigeria youths are almost helpless and hopeless in an atmosphere where the powerful elites strategically use policies and laws to deprive the ordinary Nigerian youths the privilege of unleashing his/her potentials for the sustainability of our development. This is because, according to C.C. Mbah:

Those who possess enough capital are at advantage to hijack the major political parties (sic) operating in the political system and by logical extension, political decision making process which is usually in the interest of the ruling class, mainly the bourgeoisie and the comparadorial (sic) bourgeoisie. These capitalist (sic) when they are not in direct control of state affairs are operating as Godfathers with Godsons and daughters in representative positions (2006:142).

The socio-economic and political environment in Nigeria poses a great challenge to the youth and this is partly because the country has not been able to create an environment for high value-added economic activities for youth. Hence, the problems and challenges of the Nigerian youths is traceable to a poor educational formation, unstable political environment, bad governance, a poor orientation of youths, insecurity, and other vices characterised with developmental retardation. If the youths must become viable and productive

for economic growth and total excellence, then it is important they are prepared and empowered for their roles and responsibilities as full citizens (Elaigwu 2005:75). Until the very foundations of the economy is built on preparing the grounds for the future generation, then it will be most unfortunate for the Nigerian youth.

Despite this anomaly as Nigerian youth we cannot continue to cry over spilled milk but we shall have to learn how to raise our own cows in the midst of these difficulties and hardship that has befallen this generation of Nigerian youths. The task becomes more enormous for the Nigerian youth to also run away from blame game and avoid continuously putting all the problems on the political elites; when as Nigerian youth it is possible to rise above the situation and most especially with the passing of the “Not too young to rule” bill passed by the National Assembly. This is where our hopes and aspiration lies as citizens of Nigeria to express ourselves and become recipient of a people oriented government that values the dignity of the human person irrespective of age and gender. According to B.A.C Obeifuna in *Democracy In Contemporary Nigeria: Lessons From Igbo Culture-Area* he admonishes thus:

The primary characteristic of democracy is that it is people oriented. Every other thing that is essential for the establishment, growth and sustenance of democracy must be centered on the human person and the desire to bring out the best in him (her) and give him (her) the best; and to give him (her) the best in order to bring out the best in him (her). It aims at that which is the essence of the human person. It respects human life and human right (2009:228).

The dignity of the Nigeria youths have to be respected and their rights preserved by the government of Nigeria. This will be the foundation to build a better Nigeria and to reciprocate the efforts made by the Nigerian youth. The involvement of the youth in political participation without any discrimination is the basic foundation of democracy in Nigeria and the reason why democracy has become very unsuccessful in Nigeria is basically because the Nigerian youths have always been alienated in the past (Obiefuna 2009: 228).

Nigerian Youths and Entrepreneurial Skills for Sustainable Development

Entrepreneurial skills have a very close link with sustainable development for the Nigerian youth. So far in Nigeria there is a clarion call for skills acquisition so as to help drive sustainable development in Nigeria so that an average

Nigerian youth can become self-employed and in turn employ others. This calls for serious attention as regards the kind of education been impacted on the Nigerian youth. Entrepreneurship education is commonly defined as the process of creating a new business or creating a new idea towards self-reliance. It is also a practical step which combines resources and opportunities in new ways. It involves the application of personal qualities, finance and other resources within the environment of business success (Wokeh & Basil 2011). The Nigerian youths ought to key into this venture of entrepreneurship education with its uniqueness and should be treated proactively to meet current challenges in problem solving.

It is important to understand the fact that as Nigerian youth's entrepreneurial skills and education is a vital force for sustainable development in Nigeria. Education should go beyond the learning of facts and mastery of figures and ought to transcend into skills acquisition for repositioning into nation building. Therefore, entrepreneurship education and skills acquisition could be seen as those steps involved in teaching Nigerian youths the fundamentals, theories and process of entrepreneurial spirit, culture and methods. Unfortunately, many Nigerian youths graduate from the higher institution of learning and hopelessly carrying their curriculum vitae or resume from one company to another in search of jobs and this has frustrated so many Nigerian youths to the extent they result to so many vices. Nigeria youths cannot progress if her trained manpower does not participate in her planning and development. We have, as a nation, an unfortunate situation in which the quality of Nigerian life deteriorates every minute. It is sheer arrogance for a few to arrogate to themselves the sole right to opinion on matters affecting our entire nation. Thus, a competence-based system of education helps prepare Nigerian youths for the labour market and self-dependency and these will also make the Nigerian youth develop the ability for critical analysis of world events, matching theory with practice, development of vision for new and better society; ability to explore controversial issues and offer technical solutions.

Entrepreneurship involves discipline and morals for sustainable development. Good moral behaviour and making youths in Nigeria obey laws can help bring about sustainable development. This I agree with Jean Jacques Rousseau when he said:

If it is good to know how to deal with men as they are, it is much better to make them what there is need they should be...make men: therefore, if you would command men: if you would have them

obedient to the laws make them love the laws, and they will need to know only what is their duty to do it (1998:263).

From the above statement of Jean Jacque Rousseau, the Nigerian youths owe its country a duty and a moral obligation to make Nigeria a better country and more better than we met. It is this kind of duty Immanuel Kant describes as 'duty for the sake of duty' known as the "categorical imperative". This will help making the Nigerian youths a tool for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The economic business forum in London and the challenge before the Nigerian youths can be looked from two perspective. It is a call for the Nigerian youths to get actively involved in what concerns sustainable development and secondly for the political elites to take full responsibility of their failures in alienating the Nigerian youth from sustainable development. The Nigerian President has put before the youths the future in their hands by challenging them to put the polity into their own advantage and see education as the only viable ingredients that can foster a development that is sustainable for a better Nigeria were the youths will become stakeholders and partakers of their own future and destiny. Taking advantage of the 'not too young to rule' bill is timely and urgent for the Nigerian youths to get engage politically, economically, socially, morally and with a high sense of professionalism to create an enabling environment for sustainable development.

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