
Religious Education A Vital Tool for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Every human society craves for sustainable development and this is true also of Nigeria. In the light of the above, this paper examined the role of religious education in attaining Sustainable Development in Nigeria Education is a means through which the individual are formed and reformed through qualitative training and retraining of the Human Capital, who are agents of development. The author viewed religious education as a vital force to drive sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper used research approach which relies on logical slogism that adhere to the rule of logical slogism. The paper identifies factors / affecting sustainable development, and posits that education is a determinant factor for development of any nation or society. Again the paper found out that the right values are integrated in the educational system through religious teaching. It demonstrated that the right change of persons is through moral value which is the prerequisite for developing in any nation. As there is no nation that can rise above the quality of her education. The author concludes that Nigerian can be mobilized and inspired through religious education that drives development in the country.

Keywords: Religious Education, Sustainable development

Introduction

Religious Education has played a significant role in sustainable development of Nigeria this includes: Education, Economic and Social Political Life, apart from its moral objectives. Hence the question of sustainable development is an answer to the cravings of the Nigerian nation for all-round national development. Successive Governments of the Nigerian nation have tried in the past to foster developments in different areas of our national life. Uche, (2011) observed that Nigerian leaders have tried different developmental goals in the areas of mass mobilization for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), War Against Indiscipline (WAI), National Orientation Agency (NOA), Code of Conduct Bureau, Rebranding, Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (I.C.P.C), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (E.F.C.C) and other strives.

All these national developmental projects failed grossly because of insincerity, lack of commitment, corruption and bad implementation (Mordi, 2015). In line with this observation, Ona and Agwu (2008) averred that these developmental strategies failed to cure Nigeria of her malady for the same reason. Achebe (1983) and Uche (2010) identified corruption as the cause of the failure of the developmental strategies in Nigeria. Mordi (2015), in line with Omoregbe (1993), described the Nigeria society thus:

“...an immoral society is also a sick society. By immoral society, we mean a society permeated with corruption, dishonesty, fraud, selfishness, embezzlement of public funds and other acts.

Such a society is sick and cannot be in sound order. Its organs cannot function properly...”
(P.2)

Pragmatically speaking, any society so described cannot be said to be healthy, hence the Nigerian society is seemingly sick. However, every human societal problem has a beginning. This implies that such problems must necessarily have a possible cure; hence it is plausible to posit here that the developmental problems of the Nigerian nation have a solution which is not out of sight.

From the forgoing, this essay opined that since religion is one of the social institutions in the society and also a GIVEN, the education fostered by it, which is known as Religious Education, could be a panacea to the problem of sustainable development in Nigeria. Mordi, (2015) maintained that religion, though, a social institution, goes beyond the social realm. It is supra-sensible and meta-physical. It deals with neumena as well as phenomena realities. Through the acts of worship and communication with the divine, religion makes the power of the divine to come to the aid of man. Thus through religious activities, neumena unites with the phenomena, bringing down the power of the divine in favour of mortal beings. Religious practices such as covenant, oath-taking, moral bond, filia deity obligation and devotion add colour to the functionality of sustainable development (Uche, 2011).

Religious education promotes and sustains religion and its tenets, beliefs and practices. Religious education therefore presents Religion as that which unites the human with the divine. In the light of this therefore, the authors posit that to save Nigeria from social decay and persistence lack of sustainable development, despite the developmental strategies in the past, the social functions of Religious Education should be positively applied and harnessed to the project of national sustainable development in Nigeria as this will promote and foster development in all ramifications.

Definition of Terms

Religious Education: In its loosed and ordinary sense, religious education is the teaching of a particular religion or teachings of religion in general and its varied aspects; its beliefs, devotions, rituals, customs, rites and personal roles (<https://Wikipedia.org>. Religious education. Retrieved 19th April, 2017). Religious education implies a type of education which is largely separate from rigorous academia, which regards religious beliefs as a fundamental tenet and operating modality. Mordi (2015), averred that religious education connotes the dominant academic study, and in typically religious terms, teaches doctrines which refine and define social customs and societal norms as law. Religious education, according to Irika (2014), defines the norms, customs, ethos and the social and ethical norms of any society.

Religion: Religion is one of the social institutions of the society. It is equally understood as predating any society hence it is conceived as a GIVEN. It could be seen as a set of belief and worship system whose aim is to unite man with the divine. In this sense, religion is understood as a relationship between man and the divine. This relationship is sustained by the acts of worship and praise, devotion and sacrifices. Uche (2011) noted that religion has two-fold functions “...a set of beliefs, practices, norms and values relating man to God and to his neighbours...” Nwachukwu (2008), in the same vein, conceived of religion as having two dimensioned relationships: the vertical relationship — between man and God, and the horizontal relationship — between man and man. Religion in its characteristic features is unique and the uniqueness of its features is manifested in its articulated belief systems, practices, norms and values, ceremonies, rituals and festivals.

Development: Uche (2011) conceived the idea of development as relative, meaning different things to different people. However, what seems common in the different meanings of development is the striving towards national interest, a competitive economy, the quest for unity and greatness. Development is a reference to the act or process of growing, or causing something to grow, or become larger or more advanced. In his analysis of the process of development, Mordi (2015) opined that development refers to innovational changes that a people experience, undergo or cause to happen in the society. Development in this context means all the activities, strategies, creative and calculated experimentations that are rationally conceived, critically analyzed and thoroughly implemented for the smooth running of the society, for the good of man and sustainable growth of the social order.

Sustainable Development: This refers to the definitive growth of the society in every sphere. For Mordi (2015), sustainable development means the process of growth in individual and socio-economic levels of progress in a given society. A development that is sustainable is understood to mean the innovational changes, growth and strategies which bring about these changes and endures the test of time.

Tool: A tool is an instrument which is used to do something. It is an item or equipment used for a specific purpose; it can be a physical object such as a mechanical tool or a technical object such as a web authoring tool or software programme. In the context of this write up, a tool is understood to mean an instrument, a vehicle or roadmap. Religious education being a tool means therefore that it is a vehicle, a roadmap for development in Nigeria.

Religious Education and Nation Building

Iwenofu (2010) argued that the goal of religious and moral education is for national developments she observed that the teaching of religious education influences peoples' lives in every time and every place. To her religious education prepare men for life a perfect man, a finished man in character. She also explains that religious education creates in man the sense of sacred and his purpose on earth and where he will end his life. Religious education helps the individual to understand him as well as their tradition and appreciates the faith and traditions of others. It builds in men spirit of contentment and faith to a discerning encounter with the surrounding culture and seeks for its transformation. Religious education is the ground work of all subjects. Adesina (1997) adds that Religious Education is informative, gives understanding the meaning of religion which helps people to know their culture, and their origin.

Religious Education is a veritable tool for nation building. This mind-set will help us to appreciate the impact of religious education in enhancing sustainable development in the Nigerian society. This is because in Nigeria, religion and religious education explain our cooperate social living and practice in all sphere of our national life. The influence of religion and religious education on the cultural, economic, socio-political and spiritual activities in Nigerian society is both pervasive and powerful. This is why the fact cannot be denied that religious beliefs and practices are fundamental to nation building, since these beliefs and practices establish a kind of link or connectedness between the divine and the human, between the mundane and the spiritual, between the neumena and phenomena, between the transient and the lasting, between the natural (material) and the spiritual. Obiekea (2015), averred that this connectedness or link can be sustained if rules and regulations, norms and values, and covenant agreements have to be put in place, so as to forestall rewards and punishment of man and his society.

Religious Education helps to train religious functionaries who discharge religious duties to their members. In this way they help compliment effort in nation building.

In pursuing religious education for national development, religious bodies establish and run schools where people are trained to take up developmental projects in the society. These schools apart from the secular education they offer also incorporate religious values and discipline which helps individuals later in the society for peaceful co-existence and national development. Religious education teaches people to be patriotic and committed to building the nation. For instance, the Christian Religion teaches civic responsibility which is summarized as serving one's country, commitment to one's society and contributing to the development of one's society.

Religious education is a means of evangelization through the media of schools, hospitals, church activities and the building of macro-business outposts, all geared toward the development of the Nigerian nation. Akila (2010), observed that those who have moved the nation in the past and some in the present were products of mission schools where religious education were upheld. Moral education has always been the goal of religious schools and this explains why some states in Nigeria have begun the process of handing over schools back to the mission churches who owned them ab-initio, in order to restore morality to our morally decadent society, which is the focus of religious education.

Though religion has caused much harm to the social coexistence of the Nigerian people through undue rivalry and unjustifiable religious killings and fanatical dispositions, engineered by seeming political interests, it has none the less tried to uphold and display some spiritual charisma in Nigeria. By upholding religious education which forms people into good citizens of the Nigerian nation and nation builders, religion has become an agent of mobilization in complex social engagements in Nigeria. In the view of Uche (2011), religious priesthood which is a social product of religious education functions as a nation builder by restoring peace and order between the visible and the invisible, between the spiritual and the mundane, settling quarrels, presiding over festivals and coronations. Some of them are counsellors and psychotherapists who operate faith clinic and prayer houses to help people who have spiritual and psychological problems. Mordi (2012), opined that religious functionaries, who are products of religious education are moral requisites and mediators in the society and since the Nigerian society needs leaders with such esoteric power and knowledge for national development, religious education therefore is a tool for nation building. Once these leaders are in place, religious education would help them offer explanations and solutions to the problem of the meaning of life and other mysteries associated with human existence. This is why Attah (2009), suggested that ignorance of the power and impact of religion has led Nigeria to the state of developmental backwardness in which she finds herself today.

Religious Education and Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development is the efforts at improving the socio-economic and ecological status and at exploiting and processing the environment or natural resources for the purpose of improving the quality of human life in such a way that the needs of the future generations are not jeopardized. The 'World Conservation Strategy', published by the World Conservation Union, publicized the concept of sustainable development in the 20th century. The term became more pronounced and received greater attention in the report of Brundtland Commission, which the United Nations General Assembly assigned to propose long-term environmental strategies for achieving sustainable development by the year 2000 and beyond Adedeji, (1990). The report spells out the definitions given to the concept 'development' see it as a process of change in the social structure, attitude, institution, and general acceleration of economic growth through reduction of inequality and poverty. Going through the multifarious definitions of the concept, Mohammed (2002) identifies three important facts on it namely;

- i. Increasing the availability and widening the distribution of basic life sustenance, such as food, shelter, and protection.
- ii. Raising the level of living in addition to higher income, provision of jobs, better education, and greater attention to cultural and humanitarian values, all of which serve to enhance material wellbeing, but also to generate greater individual and national self-esteem, and
- iii. Expanding the range of economic and social choice to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence.

From the above, some indices of development, which are no doubt prerequisites to sustainable development, are identified. According to Adedeji (1997), the level of human development could be measured by the Human Development Index (HDI), whose components are health, education, and income. To Mohammed (2002), the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is the total output of the economy, is a major determinant of development. Other indices of development, identified by Mohammed (2002) include: improved standard of living in terms of availability of decent accommodation, improved nutritional standards, qualitative health care and education services to the majority, life expectancy which is mainly influenced by the standard of living, availability of health services, literacy level, and income of the people. From this, it could be observed that all the identified indices of development could hardly be attained in an atmosphere of moral decadence and social vices. The Health Services, education, and Nigerians economy are jeopardized and adversely affected as a result of moral decadence) corruption etc.

Adedeji (1997) has broadly classified resources into four categories namely: common, definite, acquirable, and possessive resources. To him, common resources are resources that are common to all nations, people, and tribes which on one prevent-s anybody from being used. Such resources are air, sunlight, moonlight, rain, weather, wild animals, forest, and time, among others. Define resources, as the name implies, have terminal features, hence the need for speedy, effective, and efficient utilization. Examples of these are lifespan, target, completion, and strategy. Acquirable resources are acquired to change from one status to the other. Examples are skills, experience, and orientation. Possessive resources are obtained through exchange by customary rights and other legal forms of ownership which can be used, neglected, sold, or transferred by way of gift or control. Money, assets, technology, territory, and independence are examples of possessive resources. These resources put together are ingredients of development, which sustainability depends mostly on their effective utilization and which under-utilization and misuse could be a great loss and catastrophic. The point is that how can these resources be managed or even harnessed where moral decadence prevails. The highlight of this is that a pseudo development could only be attained in an atmosphere where religious education is used as an instrument of vendetta.

Religious education is a very potent tool for nation building. This is observably clear from the study of European history. From the period of the scholastics to the beginning of the 18th century, education and politics and other socio-cultural institutions of human endeavour were in the hands of the church. The church encouraged and promoted learning, built schools and learning centres where religious and secular education was taught. The classical and Greek philosophies of Plato, Aristotle and other oriental writers were promoted and preserved by the church. The writings of churchmen like St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, Albert the Great and a host of others are still relevant today. On the moral front, church functionaries served as both moral guides to kings and legal consultants. Bad and despotic kings were deposed and excommunicated by the church to give a sigh of relief to the masses. The church also championed technology (as it was known then), monks wrote and copied the biblical manuscripts and other ancient writings with hands and preserved them. The church equally promoted the act of painting, drawing and sculptor-ship and other artistic

ingenuities that modern technology has not rivalled.

In Nigeria today, religious education promotes and sustains development through the media of religious values and ethos. It is a truism that religious values have permeated the social fabrics of the cultural life of the Nigerian people. In this way, it contributes to the dynamic belief systems which preserve the awe-inspiring aspects of Nigerian cultural heritage. The teachings of taboo by religious education and its use help integrate the Nigerian integrative value system. In a complicated pluralistic society like Nigeria, human actions, conducts and behaviour could affect the wider society negatively. The negative influence it may wield on the society could hamper the growth of and endanger sustainable development. This is why religious education can step in to cohesively teach and encourage people to be morally responsible.

Religious education promotes social norms that keep the society together and review social commitment to the socially desirable behaviour, which in the long run creates sustainable behaviour in Nigeria. It also compliments sustainable development by conscientizing Nigerians to act according to their filial obligation.

In Nigeria corruption is on high gear, especially among those at the corridors of power and this poses a big challenge to both religion and religious education. If religious education must be relevant to the Nigerian nation, religious leaders must brace up to the expectations of their responsibility of providing moral guidelines and spiritual checks and balances. Religious education must articulate vividly, functional ways of addressing the immoral dispositions of Nigerians and in this way, it would be able to address the moral decadence in the Nigerian society.

Religious education conceived and understood as a powerful instrument of social change and liberation, can still transform the most criminal of all men in various societies through the teachings of religious beliefs, values, morality and ethics. Nigerian men and women could become better citizens through religious education.

Since religion is an instrument of social control, religious education in Nigeria should encourage this through the activities and pastoral duties of priests and religious functionaries. Priests are instruments of social control through their pastoral care programmes, praying for members, counselling, pastoral visitation and other pastoral activities.

Religious education is also an instrument of social order. Through the teaching and promotion of religious traditions, restrictions are made; prohibitions and peace drives are encouraged. In this way, law and order are maintained and these are essential ingredients for sustainable development. No country can develop under tension, disorder and chaos. By preaching peace and obedience to the law of the land, religious education promotes order which snow-balls into a favourable atmosphere for business to thrive. In this way, religious education helps to bring about sustainable development in Nigeria.

The provision of social welfare like schools, hospitals, orphanages, and care for widows and the poor, old people's homes are all evidences of the usefulness of religious education in Nigeria

Finally, religious education teaches and fosters forgiveness, promotes truth, confidence and commitment among people. These moral values do not only promote peaceful coexistence but are instrumental to nation building and sustainable development in Nigeria

Conclusion

Religious education is a powerful force in Nigeria with identifiable social functions. These functions could be weakened by the dysfunctional roles of some religious fanatics. However, the functional role of religious education in Nigeria is so much overwhelming that the negative tendencies of some misguided religious practitioners could be overlooked. As a force to reckon with, religious education performs the role of social control, offers social

services and teaches social coexistence, moral values and integration. Since all these are ingredients for development, religious education by implication fosters sustainable development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

In the light of what has been discussed so far, the authors make the following recommendations:

- a. Religious education should be encouraged since it is a panacea to the problem of sustainable development in Nigeria. This is because it brings growth to the society through the media of schools, hospitals, health care services and other humanitarian services.
- b. Religious education teaches social coexistence by preaching the brotherhood of all human beings, love and respect for human persons. It fosters peace and unity among people. This peace, unity and love are very essential ingredients for sustainable development in any society. For this reason it should be encouraged.
- c. Man by nature wants to know and the act of knowing ends only when one dies. Religious education teaches man what he ought to know and this is done as long as man is alive. For this reason, religious education should be allowed to thrive.
- d. Religious leaders should review the content of their religious education to reflect the present needs of the Nigeria nation.
- e. Since no religion preaches and encourages evil or immorality, religious education in Nigeria should condemn vehemently the immoral dispositions of Nigerians that are evident today.
- f. The dysfunctional aspect of religion should not be used to discredit the functional relevance of religious education in Nigeria. This is because no religion teaches violence and disorder, though some misguided and unscrupulous religious fanatics may encourage such in their confused understanding. The actions and activities of these religious fanatics should not be used to discredit the relevance of religious education and religion itself.
- g. We should create an environment that will discourage corruption at all level of life in Nigeria.
- h. Moral value should be the guiding principles of lives of all Nigerian, meet all level as the life which will facilitate all round development of the people.

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