

Citizenship Training for National Integration: Implications for Socio-Political and Economic Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of the citizenship training programme for national integration. Since national integration forms a fundamental base for the advancement of any human societies, it has become imperative to highlight how citizenship training can further enhance national integration in Nigeria. The paper looks at the responsibilities of the citizens as stated in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution which have been accepted as the content of the citizenship training programme.

Constraints that hinder effective citizenship training have also been identified and discussed while the role of the state in ensuring an effective citizenship training programme is articulated.

Introduction.

Socio-political and economic development are variables for progression. As every human congregation strives for advancement, certain fundamental impetus are required and generally these have to do with the unity of members and the specific responsibilities carried out by them. Accordingly, chapter one of the general provisions of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, article one states, categorically the supremacy of the constitution to all parties to the Nigerian state in achieving this purpose. The provision is a binding force on all authorities and persons.

Basically, the provision of this article agitates for greater national unity and integration. This is particularly so, as the resolve of the Nigerian state is to foster unity and harmony which is the most relevant impetus for socio-political and economic development. Encapsulated in this desire is the apparatus of nationalism, which Wilmot (1994) sees as the

consciousness of the primary and inalienability of national interest.

In the economic sphere, nationalism is the consciousness of the inalienable rights of the nation to control the national economy in the interest of the people of the nation, while in the political sphere, it is that of national power and sovereignty. Consciousness for national interest thus has been pervasively induced for development purposes.

The indices of national consciousness which have been embodied in our national ethical scale include; discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self-reliance and patriotism. The Nigerian Constitution (1999) thus states that it shall be the duty of every Nigerian citizen to:

- (i) abide by the Nigerian Constitution, respect its ideals and its institutions, the National Flag, the National Anthem, the National Pledge and legitimate authorities:

- (ii) help to enhance the power, prestige and good name of Nigeria, defend Nigeria and render such national service as may be required;
- (iii) respect the dignity of other citizens and the rights and legitimate interests of others and live in unity and harmony and in the spirit of brotherhood;
- (iv) make positive and useful contribution to the advancement, progress and well-being of the community where he/she resides;
- (v) render assistance to appropriate and lawful agencies in the maintenance of law and order; and
- (vi) declare his/her income honestly to appropriate and lawful agencies and pay his/her tax promptly.

Training along these variables for members of the Nigerian society is therefore imperative if progress must be achieved. The civic responsibility programme which hitherto was

taught in the Nigerian schools has been incorporated into the Social Studies curriculum. This is, perhaps, most suited for the younger Nigerians of school age. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) has been used as a mechanism for arousing the consciousness of the older Nigerians to imbibe the virtues of good citizenry and cultivate the desire to participate in activities which are perceived can bring progress and advancement for the Nigerian state. Perhaps, it can be stated that if the lofty ideals of citizenship training have been imbibed by Nigerians, most of the problems currently experienced would have been greatly minimized.

This paper, therefore, sets out to examine the constraints of effective citizenship training and its implications for socio-political and economic development. Finally, the role of the state at ensuring effective citizenship training for socio-political and economic development is also highlighted.

Constraints on the Effective Citizenship Training Programme

There are constraints that hinder effective citizenship training that include:

- i. Citizenship training has not been systematically incorporated into the cultural education of the traditional system. Through cultural education, social value systems are taught to the young while they are reminded of their obligations to the society. Zerbo (1977) states that culture helps to regulate man's existence in society. Every individual is a product of a particular culture. Fafunwa (1983) argues that the aim of cultural education is to produce the individual who is honest, respectful, skilled, cooperative and conforming to the social order of society. Cultural languages, folklores, proverbs, music, dance, rituals and festivals have not been adequately explored to achieve citizenship consciousness. The

consciousness of individuals is raised faster when it is induced from the base. It does manifest that a gap exists between our citizenship training efforts and our cultural education in the traditional systems.

High poverty rate: Many Nigerians have continued to live in a condition of deprivation and absolute poverty. About 55 million Nigerians or 45% of the country's total population live below the poverty line and about 37.2 million in extreme poverty. The Human Poverty Index (H.P.I.) compiled by UNDP (1999) showed that Nigeria's H.P.I. was 41.6% which exhibited the pervasive nature of poverty in the country. Till date, poverty has continued to threaten the educational process of the country. This certainly is adversely affecting citizenship training of Nigerians. People need to be empowered to

appreciate the ideals of citizenship training programmes.

Poor welfare services: The condition of life of many Nigerians has been deteriorating even under democratic rule. The current condition of life of the majority of Nigerians is characterized by limited access to health services, poor and inadequate housing, limited access to safe drinking water, quality education and good roads. The condition of life of many Nigerians is fast becoming solitary, brutish, nasty and short. Since adequate provision of welfare services is usually an important means for inducing performance in society, any citizenship training programme will certainly not succeed if majority of members of society do not enjoy some minimal provision of welfare services. These welfare services include better access to improved health care, best quality housing conditions, quality diet and safe drinking

water which can be enhanced by commensurate wages.

iv. *Illiteracy*: The literacy rate in Nigeria stood at about 57% (Guardian, September 3, 1999). This suggested that a significant percentage of Nigerians is illiterate. Illiteracy deprives the citizens of the necessary knowledge and skills to assert their rights, embrace their responsibilities and participate effectively in public life. It impedes the inducement process of individuals to raise their consciousness for national integration and service.

v. *Leadership style*: The style of leadership in the Nigerian polity does not appear to encourage citizens to contribute to the development of the state. Many citizens are thus alienated by the exclusive leadership styles adopted by the leaders. This weakens the effort by the society to raise the needed consciousness for development. This point is further

appreciated by the multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria.

The Role of the State in Ensuring an Efficient Citizenship Training Programme

In order to achieve a sustainable citizenship training programme, the state has a responsibility to its citizenry. The citizen's consciousness can only be raised where steps are taken to perform these responsibilities. These responsibilities as contained in Chapter II Section 17 of the Nigerian Constitution include:

- (i) every citizen should have equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the state law;
- (ii) the sanctity of human person shall be recognized while human dignity shall be maintained and enhanced;
- (iii) government actions shall be humane to all citizens despite their social status background;

- (iv) avoid the exploitation of human beings in any form whatsoever;
- (v) the state shall ensure that its citizens without discrimination should be given opportunity to secure adequate means of livelihood as well as secure suitable employment;
- (vi) ensure that conditions of work are just and humane, and that there are adequate facilities for leisure and for social, religion and cultural life;
- (vii) that the health, safety and welfare of all citizens in employment are safeguarded and not endangered or abused;
- (viii) that there are adequate medical and health facilities for all citizens; “
- (ix) that there is equal pay for work without discrimination on account of sex, or on any other ground;
- (x) that children, young persons and the aged are protected against any form of

exploitation as well as against moral and material neglect.

Since the state is expected to achieve group or organizational goals for the Nigerian society, it is pertinent that the means are articulated and pursued, Okoro (2002) opined that efforts of individuals should be streamlined along a workable strategy. Like the case in most human societies, the Nigerian community is characterized by people of different interests and aspirations. Some group members have antagonistic interests either to or another or to the state. These are usually anchored in social, economic, religion and political interests. The state is thus, well positioned to harmonize the various individual and group factors and inclinations to achieve the state's objectives for national interest.

Incontrovertibly, therefore, national integration is only achievable where the state performs its responsibilities to the citizens in which case, the citizens will reciprocate by

participating in activities that promote and stimulate national development.

Conclusion

The Nigerian state has a responsibility to ensure that its people live in unity and harmony and as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation. This of course is depended upon the veracity of the state in wholesomely attending to these responsibilities. Where these responsibilities are significantly played by the state, the consciousness of its citizens in attending to their roles will be aroused, hence national integration and economic development.

It is imperative to underscore that the incessant cases of human social conflict are manifestations of defects arising from mal-administration. This is where the state fails to address the issue of class conflict in society. Some of the social vices resulting from this situation include armed robbery, theft, corruption, arson, antagonism and insubordination. These

vices are inimical to the efforts for national integration as a condition for development.

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