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**NIGERIA AT CROSSROADS:
RELIGION, EDUCATION AND
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Introduction

Education is adopted globally as an instrument of change and development. Today, the 21st *Century* nations are judged by their *level* of educational *development* via the world *development* index. Education is the instrument for launching nations into the *world* of science and technology and with consequential hope of human advancement in terms of living conditions and development of the environment. This is because, education, in the *life* of a nation, is the *life* wire of its growth and also the foundation of moral regeneration and *revival* of its people. It is also the force and bulwark of *any* nation's defense and it has been observed that no nation rises above the level of its education system. Being a major investment in human *capital development*, education plays a critical role in long-term productivity and growth at both micro and macro levels. It is the same in Nigeria as in other parts of the world. According to Nigeria's policy document on education (FGN 2014), education is an instrument 'par *excellence* for national development. '

Religion is *also* expected to *always* be an instrument for change and development, since it can

shape peoples' ideas and thoughts concerning natural and supernatural matters, societal, cultural, political or even psycho-social issues and life in general. The first academy (school) which marked the beginning of formal education in the world was established in Greece in 4th Century AD and it was built by a group of religious philosophers (Onah, 2019). Islamic education came into Nigeria in the 7th century (Fafunwa, 1974) and Christian education came into Nigeria in the 18th Century. The Traditional African Religion has been there from the beginning of time. Nigeria as the most populous country in black Africa is therefore pluralistic in terms of ethnicity, multiple languages, culture and religion. It is noteworthy that all religions have their own sets of educational and moral values and ideologies which they foist on their adherents as a means of control. Religion is therefore part of their socio-cultural factors which impact on their attitudes, values, beliefs, tastes and preferences. People who share these views tend to converge as a nation or race and they share the same world view, to the exclusion of others. They develop trust for one another and feel more secure in the group. **In** fact, the general tendency is to view the 'other person' with suspicion and distrust because he is not one of them.

According to the theory of cultural relativism (Okafor, 2011), what is valued in one culture may be despised in another. **In** a pluralistic society like Nigeria, this theory comes to play and this adversely affects educational and national development (Ene, 2015). What constitutes proper education and national development to one religious group may not be acceptable to another and that can lead to misunderstanding and even violence. This was the case with the several religious crises in the northern part of Nigeria over 'Sharia' that destroyed lives and property and sent thousands of Nigerians scampering

southwards for their safety. Nigeria is at the crossroads because such ugly incidents, usually unprovoked, happen at the instance of misguided religious fanatics; Nigeria is at the crossroads because people who were denied education, who are unable to fit into the modern world become ready tools of destruction and vent their anger on innocent citizens. Nigeria is at the crossroads because even our leaders are the product of the same malfunctioning education system and the leaders have nothing to offer because nobody can give what he does not have.

Education and Development

At this juncture, it becomes necessary to consider what education means to the different religious groups in Nigeria. Education derived from the Latin word '*educere*' means to build, to lead, or to develop. This definition applies to western education as against other religious groups. This definition is also favoured by the humanist theory which argues that the function of education is to develop the natural potentialities in the child to enable him function in the society according to his abilities, interests and needs. Ugwu (2013) posits that education is exclusively used for the development of human beings in the cognitive, affective, psychomotor and psycho productive domains. It also involves a desirable approach in human behaviour through the process of teaching and learning.

Fafunwa (1974) defines education as what each generation gives to its younger ones which makes them develop attitudes, abilities, skills and other behaviours which are of positive values to the society in which they live. From the above, education is seen as the total

development of the individual child through acceptable methods and techniques according to his abilities and interests to meet up the needs of the society and for the individual to take his rightful place and contribute equally to the enhancement of the society (Amaele et al., 2011 :7). Traditional African Education sees education as a means of inculcating the right attitudes and values into the children and to enable them to become well adjusted into the family and larger society. Traditional African Education aimed at developing the heart, head and hand, that is. moral, intellectual education and physical and vocational education. In Islamic education, the ability to memorize and recite and readiness to teach the Koran forms the hallmark of education; vocational skills were mostly neglected as children mostly rely on chanting the verses of the Koran with little or no understanding of the words chanted (Ocho cited in Aguba 2006).

It is obvious that the perspectives of the different religious groups concerning education and what it stands for varies greatly and can stimulate conflict, especially when the western education being advocated is the byproduct of Christian religion. It is not a surprise then that many Muslims rejected Western education right from inception (Aguba, 2006) and later allowed western education only for a select few (Ocho cited in Aguba, 2006). For this reason, the northern part of Nigeria has remained educationally disadvantaged as well as impoverished. This shows in the number of idle youths and street urchins, unschooled, unskilled, unemployable and unemployed littering the northern landscape and constituting nuisance to the society. They earned the country the designation as the poverty capital of the world. Nigeria is at the crossroads for things like this. It is even a double tragedy that while education is not fully

accepted, the little gains made by education are being decimated by violence due to religious extremism.

It is obvious that a nation develops in relation to its achievement in education. Lichman (1972:57) and Markovitz (1977) stress that a developed society is one that has succeeded in providing a source of living for the majority of its inhabitants and that in such society, premium is attached to elimination of poverty, provision of food, shelter and clothing to its members. This argument agrees with the definition of development by Todaro and Smith (2006:20-21) from the modernization paradigm which sees development as a multidimensional process which involves the sustained elevation of the entire society and social system towards a better or humane life. They identify three basic components for understanding development. These components are sustenance, self-esteem and freedom. Nigerian education has not brought us sustenance as poverty is on the increase as Nigeria becomes poverty capital and unemployment is now spiraling. Self esteem and self-respect have disappeared, when our children are being used by others as tools for their own needs, as cannon fodder and suicide bombers. Freedom is an aberration. Nigerians live in daily fear of insecurity from Boko haram, Fulani herdsmen, armed bandits, kidnappers, ethnic militia and mass murderers as well as uniformed and ununiformed terrorists. Although our education emphasizes the basic needs of life in transforming the individual in the society to self-actualization, it ends on paper. The anti development forces have taken over and are setting the clock backwards. All those who have the Wherewithal are leaving the country in drones.

Omoyibo and Agbonzeke (2010:JB4) also state that the former Secretary of United Nations Organisation, Boutrous, B. Ghali, in May 1994, issued a document

which categorizes development into five dimensions which are peace, economy, environment, social studies and democracy. Let us critically examine these United Nations development indices and see how Nigeria fares.

Development Indices

PEACE: Nigerian peace is continually threatened because of religious intolerance and religious extremism. People are massacred, churches are razed, and properties are looted by these religious fundamentalists who are basically uneducated. The Boko Haram group which has been ravaging Nigeria for nearly a decade is basically in protest against western education. They have killed and raped thousands of Nigerians and sent many into early graves or IDP (Internally Displaced Peoples') camps. Since 2015, with the ascent to leadership of a Moslem Fulani president, the Fulani herdsmen under the leadership of Miyetti Allah and the MACBAN have constituted themselves into a vocal group fighting to enthrone Islam and subdue the whole land. A house divided against itself falls. At the same time the untrained millions in the north have now thrown away their begging plates and have seized the guns. Robbery, raping and kidnapping are now their past times. Nigeria is now the third most dangerous place to live in, "in the whole world.

ECONOMY: As for the economy, Nigeria has moved from the fastest growing economy in Africa to a country that moves into recession. We haven't even got an economic team to rescue the country. In the same way, the environment is polluted and unplanned. The environment has been ruined and even indigenous ancestral lands have

been desecrated by Boko Haram and Fulani Herdsmen are razing down communities, burning down churches and looting traders. In the South-South, militants are blowing up oil pipeline. The whole environment is polluted and unsafe. Resources are wasted. We are losing from our diversity instead of gaining. Nigeria certainly is at the crossroads. All these are fall out of religious extremism and educational underdevelopment.

Education being a major investment in human capital development, it plays a critical role in long-term productivity and growth at both micro and macro levels. But uneducated people have no value to add to Nigeria in this 21st Century. The educational system provides the needed manpower for national development. It is believed that an educated polity or nation is one that has enough manpower and each person occupies his or her rightful position to enhance national growth. (Afolabi and Loto, 2010:340). Education, as an indispensable tool, assists nations in meeting their political, moral, cultural and economic aspirations. Education imparts in the individual knowledge, skills, dexterity, character and desirable values that will precipitate and galvanize national development and self-actualization.

The implication of the above is that education moulds and trains the individual to be useful in the society and to contribute positively to national development. In advanced political systems, only the best is allowed to lead after a keenly contested free and fair election and any leader whose policy fails resigns honorably. This is what obtains in high quality educational system like US, Britain, France and even China, Singapore, South Korea. Mediocrity is not given a chance.

The quality of a nation's education determines the level of its national development. A case in point in

Nigeria today is appointments made to the security apparatus of the country and all the operational heads from one religious group. The result is counterproductive as we can see the collapse of the security system in Nigeria as members of other ethnic and religious groups have become targets of the rampaging militia of the favoured religious group. So, if education is seen as 'the transmission of what is worthwhile to individuals to make them knowledgeable and contributing members of the society (Peters, 1972), it helps to create a world of happiness for all. Our country is at cross roads because we are far from the expected.

Conclusion

"Education is the heart of national development and the source of quality human capital development that will propel Nigeria to be among the top 20 economies in the world" (President Jonathan, 2011.) "The quality of our workforce is a direct reflection of the quality of our schooling system" (President Jonathan, 2010). Nigeria might as well be witnessing another destruction of human civilization in place of national development since it appears that a couple of politicians, because they are in leadership positions, are bent on setting the entire country many years backwards since it suits their religion and culture. The form of education that the country needs in this 21 st Century is one that will emphasize the development of 'New Beings' - whole newly packaged human being, whose training is based not on religious stereotypes alone but on the full integration and internalization of human and societal values and respect for one another. The Nigerian nation seeks to achieve peace, justice, equity and fair play. There is need for

change of attitude. There must be religious tolerance. There must be these and more for Nigeria to be out of the woods.

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