

LANGUAGE, EDUCATION AND RELIGION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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PROF. A. G. A. S. OLADOSU

Edited by
M. M. JIMBA
M. A. ADEDIMEJI
M. A. LAWAL
M. S. ABDULLAHI

.....
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THE EDITORS

Professor M. M. Jimba

Department of Linguistics, African and European Languages,
Kwara State University, Malete,
Kwara State,
Nigeria.

Dr. M. A. Adedimeji

Department of English,
Faculty of Arts,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin,
Nigeria.

Dr. M. A. Lawal

Department Arts Education,
Faculty of Education,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin,
Nigeria.

M. S. Abdullahi

Department Arts Education,
Faculty of Education,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin,
Nigeria.

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CHAPTER TEN

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

OJO OLUDARE DAVID Ph.D

Department of Arts Education

Faculty of Education

University of Ilorin, Nigeria

ojomdv@gmail.com

+2348035051586

Abstract

Nigeria is referred to as the giant of Africa when the population and the land mass are considered. The country is supposed to be a country flowing with milk and honey if the human, material, technological and natural resources could be utilized to its optimum. However, the opposite is the case because the indices of development can not be visibly seen. The problem might be as a result of the problems that is plaguing the country like corruption, violent crisis, kidnapping killings in different dimension but just to mention a few. All these are impediments to the progress and development of Nigeria. The paper therefore opined that the teaching of religious education should be vigorously pursued in order to awake the moral and spiritual wellbeing and potential of the citizens to be patriotic, focused, disciplined and have a change of attitude in order to take the country unto greater heights. The task of religious education should be to encourage peaceful co-existence among adherents and join hands to take Nigeria to an enviable height. The paper therefore recommended that ethical values of the three religions should be harnessed and interfaith dialogue should be encouraged and intensified.

Keywords : Religion, Religious Education, Development, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Religion is an integral part of every society, and its importance cannot be ignored or glossed over. It is noteworthy to state equivocally here that "experience has shown that religion exists, persists and continues to influence and determine the pace of humanity. There is hardly any part of the world that has successfully ignored religion" (Isiramen, 2010). Education is pivotal to character building (Prothero, 2010) Since this is true, education is not learning "trade" but learning to be "human". That is, learning to become more of ourselves and transform society through others, hence, the place of religion as it is known as an agent of socialization of an individual.

Religion, generally, is recognized as playing important roles in peoples' lives, attitudes and practices and therefore also in development. Tveit (2016) stated that religion informs peoples' understanding of what constitutes a "good life", their hope, their self-esteem and belief in their own dignity and rights, their inspiration for asserting their dignity and rights, and their resilience in times of crisis. Therefore, religion must be considered when discussion and issues that has to do with development and humanitarian response comes on board.

There has always been tacit acknowledgment of the functionality of religion in relation to matter which today is making headlines in the mainstream development dialogue, these include issues of morality, leadership, freedom, violence, conflict resolution and concerns about forging peaceful coexistence Enweremadu, (2001). Gwamna (2010) opined that religion can be constructively used to redirect our focus towards peaceful coexistence in the national life in Nigeria (Gwamna, 2010). It is appropriate to say that religion also serve as a resource for peace and stability,

Gwamna, observes again that religion though over the years has become an instrument of promoting conflicts and war, and also a veritable resource and easy tool for manipulation by some

politicians, elites and religious charlatans and bigots (Gwamna, 2013). Instances of these are observed during electioneering campaigns and other political activities in the present political dispensation. This is invariably that portrays religion as a negative force in Nigeria today. Several factors have affected sustainable development in Nigeria. Some of such factors, according to Jekayinfa, (2019) are population explosion, bad culture, low scientific and technological development, high rate of poverty, social exclusion, social conflicts, mismanagement of national economy and bad governance which lead to political instability and poor educational development.

Nigeria has over the years lacked peace and consequently economic growth which are important for sustainable development. Nigeria is battling with so many security challenges such as religious extremism, insurgencies, communal clashes, armed robbery, abduction and kidnapping, political violence, among others. Nigeria is seen as a security risk country to the extent that foreigners are warned against coming to the country because of the violent conflicts arising in the country. It should be realized however that some of these foreigners are supposed to boast Nigeria economy in terms of investments or business enterprise this would have increased economic sustainability of the country, but in a situation whereby they cannot come into the country they will not be able to render their own part of bringing about development due to the fact that the country is not at peace. If this type of violence and conflicts continues unabated there won't be peace and sustainable development in Nigeria.

With the emergence of Boko Haram in the North-east Nigeria, the rate of conflicts has heightened with devastating impact on the economy of the nation. The Boko Haram insurgency has affected the human and material resources needed for any credible development. Moreover, the killing and displacement of people, especially in different parts of the country, the multiplier effect is that, such areas would be deprived of veritable means of production with cumulative effect on the development of the country. Religion is therefore seen as dysfunctional to development. The problem, however, is that people are not well educated formally and informally on the possible contributions of religion to human development (Obiefuna & Uzoigwe, 2012).

Religious Education

Religious education is chiefly concerned with building the sense of sacred in man, teaching him where he comes from, why he is here on earth and where he is going (Ezanya, 1988). Religious education according to Akubue (1992:8) is "education designed to produce well ordered personalities or men of strong character for the nation". In the view of Kitause and Achunike's (2012:83), religious education connotes education that "provides morals, ethics and standards that are normative for life, living and patterns for human existence and relations". Religious education involves an organized system of learning that guides people towards moral and spiritual development. It directs people towards living a virtuous life. Religious education should develop the individual to become a contributing member to the community and not just a parasite on others.

Sustainable Development

There is no single definition of the term sustainable development. A lot of researchers and opinion leaders perceive the term differently. Sustainable development according to the Brundtland convention is defined as living within the carrying capacities of the supportive ecosystem without compromising the need of the future generations. It can also be defined as a system of governance and cohabitation where any government strive to develop areas within the territorial integrity of the country so that citizens of that country can live comfortable lives and maintain the available infrastructures and resources to meet the need of today without compromising the infrastructural and social needs of tomorrow's generation, (Borger, 2008, Eneji, et al.2011). Omare, (1999) from another point of view, defined sustainable development as a process and ideologies where national governments implement and develop policies and programs that is long lasting and continuous, which is beneficial to the present generation while still being useful to the generation yet unborn. Sustainable development causes all forms of long lasting development, human resources, material, social, infrastructural, industrial and

structural development including security of lives and properties and improvement in existing social economic human and other social facilities, (Baker, et al., 2000).

Religious Education and Sustainable Development

It is the expectation of most Nigerians that sustainable development can be sustained through having a blueprint that will transform the economy, save the underprivileged, make social amenities available, provide responsible and responsive leadership. Nigeria is faced with a plethora of problems, however, there is always a way out of any problem, for instance if religion can be seen and used as a tool for character reformation thereby bringing about societal transformation there would be sustainable development.

William (1992) argued that religion and development can and do go together, and in particular that Nigeria's development as it is today cannot be divorced from the support of religion. Therefore, religious education has the potential to change people's values and perceptions about life through their teaching. In a similar vein, religious education for sustainable development is seen as a lifelong process that teaches the recipients the ability to be creative develop problem solving skills, scientific and social literacy and commitment to engage in responsible individual or cooperative actions.

Sustainable development is a process of improving the range of opportunities available, such that people will achieve their aspirations and full potentials over a period of time in social, political, economical and physical areas. There is a relationship between peace and sustainable development. Development cannot take place in any nation without peace and human security (Akamode, 2004). It should be noted that all religions preach peace and peaceful co existence. Therefore, religious education should emphasise peace among its adherents at all times because peace is a catalyst for sustainable development.

Religious education should emphasise more religious virtues such as humility, peace, love, respect discipline etc. When these are cultivated into human behavior, there would be less rancour and violence in the society. This will in turn bring about good neighborliness, peace, honesty and respect for human life, tolerance and sustainable development. Religious education has a way of regulating human behaviour and direct the individual in terms of what is good or bad and especially about the sanctity of life and the desire for peace and with neighbours and members of other religions. Ekpenyong, (2011) states that "violent conflicts disrupts the process of production, creates condition for pilferage of the country's resources and diverts their application from development purposes to servicing war". The role of religious education is to emphasise on the moral behavior of the individual in order to know what is right from what is wrong at all times.

Religious education provides that synergy for harmonious living and peaceful coexistence in the society. A nation's process of socio economic growth must entail some structural institutional and attitudinal changes that provide sustainability. Religious education can respond to people fleeing from conflict and oppressive area, teach how to respond to humanitarian needs, conflict resolution peace building and upholding the human rights of the vulnerable. According to Tveit (2019) religious education should educate the religious communities and religious leaders how to raise their voices in the context of economic injustice and rampant inequality, the misuse of political power, the ugly face of racism or of violence against women and children.

One major cause of underdevelopment is lack of patriotism which is demonstrated in several ways by Nigerians. The sense of patriotism is fundamental for sustainable development not to be a mirage. Religious education should emphasise the act of being patriotic to its adherents. This can be done or exhibited in form of doing what is required and the leaders and followers acting responsibly. There can be no progress in a country where people evade legitimate tax and levies because these are avenues through which the government can bring about sustainable development.

Sustainable development does not stop at provision and accessibility of physical infrastructure for a particular moment, but is a continuous process. Sustainable peace is not just the mere absence of war or maintenance of balance of power between enemies and dictatorship. It has to do with the

sustainability and promotion of peace always and at every time of the year and among persons and group irrespective of the tribe, ethnic nationality or religion at all given moment. Any religion that does not propagate peace remains inimical to sustainable development.

It is however discovered that without sustainable development, a country cannot grow beyond the extent of such development, since this involves a development that is sustained and continuous. Thus development can only be achieved when there is a peaceful coexistence between the different facets of the society (Uchendu, 2004 Bartolotta, 2011). Sustainable development cannot therefore be achieved since the country has been bedeviled by one form of riot or violent killing and destruction of properties, for instance the Niger Delta militants and their mayhem in the Niger delta region, the Bakassi boys in the east, robbery and ritual killing including kidnapping in the south and west, while the Boko Haram insurgence is raiding in the northern part of the country (Jando 2011).

No country therefore can grow, develop and prosper technologically, scientifically, economically and socially without peaceful cooperation and coexistence. It is on this basis that religious education should advocate for religious tolerance and political cooperation in the country. If this is done truly, then sustainable development can be achieved in Nigeria.

Recommendation

Ethical values of the different religions should be well harnessed and disseminated in the society through religious education. Interfaith dialogue should be encouraged and intensified. This will bring about mutual understanding and respect for each other's religious beliefs and lead to the much needed peaceful co existence and co-habitation. Religious education should preach peaceful co-existence, piety among their adherents, have respect for human rights, the rule of law as well as respect for international law because, these are some of the ingredients that can that brings about sustainable development and hope for the country.

Conclusion

When properly used, religion has a lot of potentials for transforming the Nigerian nation into an enviable country among the comity of nations when properly used. Therefore, religious organisations, leaders and adherents must rise to the task of ensuring that religious values, teaching and tenets are upheld in high esteem and highly respected and followed to the letter.

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