

A COUNSELLING PERSPECTIVE OF HEALTHY FAMILY LIFE AS PRE-REQUISITE FOR CAPACITY BUILDING AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract.

This paper has taken an over-view of political and socio-cultural milieu of Nigeria, to ascertain the degree of disposition of Nigerian political leadership to formulate family health policies and implement them effectively. The over-view has revealed that, the actions of the political leadership in this direction have left much to be desired. The health policies and implementation lacked holistic approach. Instead, there has continued to be unprecedented lack of justice, equity and fair-play in the democratic process, resulting to corruption, ethnicity, graft and abuse of power. This situation of misplaced values has given rise to adoration of fraudulently acquired wealth. Mass welfare has therefore suffered. Counseling approach to include a relevant education and participation of the mass in the health care programme has finally been proffered.

The concern for national development is universal and it denotes a sustained progression to a better state of existence of citizens of nations. Issues in national development are complex. In human terms; they encompass accessibility to means of obtaining quantitative and qualitative basic human needs of food, shelter and clothing; which are fundamental to life sustenance of healthy family units. Added to health is improvement in functional education to promote acquisition of intellectual, physical and social skills to enhance individual's capacity for self and national development. Basically, development involves changes in ethical values, attitudes and enhancement of self-esteem, freedom of expression, safety of life and property (Bozimo and Ekwumelu, 1999:70-71), high standard of living of families, happiness and pride of citizens for their nation.

True national development transcends the frontiers of physical infrastructures like super-highways, sprawling cities, sky scrappers et cetera. These, per se, are mere man-made geographical features. In this paper, attempts have been made to examine the role of political, educational and socio-cultural development as launching for advancement of indigenous skills for exploitation of local resources (Anyikwa, 1989:40). Hopefully, this will effect improvement in health services, agricultural, technological and industrial development.

Political Development as a Tool for Sustenance of Family Health and Capacity Building

Political development is articulated by political parties for the purpose of canvassing support from the electorates to enable the stake holders to capture state power and put a government in place. Jibo (2001:01) citing Hodgkins, Schlesinger (1972:432) opined that political parties are organizations that articulate programmes of development, on the basis of which they convince the masses to vote and put them in power so that developmental needs of the masses would be catered for. Anikwa (1989:40) therefore sees the basic reason for existence of government as an institution to serve those needs of society, which are not and cannot be satisfied by private actions.

It is therefore unfortunate that in Nigeria, successive elected governments formulate laudable policies, but the attempts to implement these programmes are encountered with bottlenecks. It is therefore difficult to evaluate the actions of Nigerian government, and indeed that of other African states across the continents due to many reasons, among which political instability is predominant. Inept civilian rulers are overthrown by power-thirsty military rulers. The military regimes perpetrate dictatorship and abuse of power. Galadima (2001:176) recounted vividly that “Nigeria has experienced alternating circles of governance between civil and military regimes for close to four decades. In the country’s (51) years of independence, the military ruled the country, albeit intermittently (1966-79 & 1984-1999) for about 28 years”. The military, without laying a sound foundation for virile political development, change baton with their civilian cohorts, amidst further political degenerations characterized with election malpractices of rigging, private civilians without compensation.

Election rigging in Nigeria has been perfected by politicians into two broad classifications or types, which may be named as: apparent legitimate rigging and illegitimate elitist rigging. Apparent legitimate rigging operates where a political party may have an overwhelming support in a given constituency, irrespective of whether such a party may have an overwhelming support in a given constituency, irrespective of whether such a party controls the Federal government or not. One process of election is followed to some extent or may be waved in some cases. But ballot boxes and papers are placed at polling stations. There is open campaign to vote for a favoured party, and the masses do so openly and willingly. All electoral papers are signed correctly and supported by agents of minority parties. The elected political office holder who emerges holds the people of his constituency very dear to his heart may visit them freely and take

care of their welfare while in office. Illegitimate elitist rigging is perpetrated by elites of various shades of sociopolitical status. These political personalities flow with ruling parties that have penchant for clinging to power at all costs. They very often do not enjoy support of their constituencies. So on the day of election, these elites may cause the disappearance of empty ballot boxes and ballot papers and the electoral office may condone the return of these ballot boxes full of endorsed papers. In severe cases of illegitimate elitist rigging, ballot boxes and ballot papers may not be used at all, but election result may be written and broadcast to the constituencies.

An African government that is put in place by rigging of elections abandons the party manifesto. Instead of rapid development promises that were made to the masses to be fulfilled, (Anikwa, 1989:39) “mounting corruption, ethnicity, grafts, which are glaring indicators of underdevelopment persist”. And instead of constituting a panel to fine-tune the strategies of implementing their campaign programmes and promises, they may spend huge financial resources on re-election committees, before their one hundred days in office, to perfect dubious plans for further unfair elections. As a way forward, Nigerian political class should have valued clarification about politics and seek good counsel to accept defeat or victory in good faith.

Moreover, political office holders should take the welfare of the masses to be of paramount importance. Tolerance should be extended to opposition parties as they perform the important function of rousing the government from inaction. Politicians should have more consideration for mass-welfare, knowing fully well that, they cannot rule over wealth and houses built abroad, but they may only govern a people that elected them.

Nigerian Socio-Cultural Milieu: Its Effect on Family Health.

Everyone of us belong to a family unit, whose functions include (Adadu 2004) addition of new members to society, nurturing of these members and bearing the excruciating impact of destitution, often occasioned by squalor, sickness, death and misery in the family. This ugly situation of the family can only be reversed by political leadership that imbibed sobriety and social values at family levels. Bozimo and Ikwumelu (2000:128) hit these values as justice, fair play, equality, honesty, human dignity, fidelity and co-operation. Unless family units act as role models in inculcating these values, we cannot effect a sustained development.

A society which is replete with cheating, disrespect to other people's property, materialism, and disregard to human person may not be able to evolve a political leadership that can have mass welfare and family health care as its priority. Prevalence of disorderly struggle for power positions without due process is by and large due to lack of values clarification at Nigerian family unit levels.

Family Health Care Delivery in Nigeria: A Prerequisite for National Development.

A healthy population is an invaluable asset of a nation and it is a pre-requisite for capacity building for national development. On this notion, the action plans of Federal, state and local government towards health for all Nigerians is commendable. Emphasis was placed on provision of physical facilities and increase in medical personnel in the past. Ibrahim (2004:64) reported that by 1980, plans were targeted at provision of medical care for 40% of Nigerians, by expansion of hospital wards to accommodate 73,188 beds. To this end N760 million was to be sunk into this project.

In the 1981 – 85 development plan, the local governments which takes care of family units at grassroot were to expend N270m on health care. This plan covered;

- (a) Basic Health Clinics
- (b) Maternity Centres;
- (c) Mobile Clinics;
- (d) Infectious diseases control;
- (e) Reactivation of existing health institutions.

It was further reported by Ibrahim (2004) that this plan failed because there was acute shortage of financial supply to the local government. Moreover, the policy failed because government health plan did not take care of education of the “rural folk on basic health rules and environmental sanitation”.

A cursory observation of Nigeria socio-cultural milieu indicates that the following steps may have to be taken to augment government health plans.

1. There should be improved water supply of qualitative nature in the urban and rural areas. This should be done side by side with improved environmental sanitation.
2. The Federal government should empower local government to provide rural roads to remote villages to enable the village dwellers have easy access to better health clinics that are concentrated in urban areas.
3. Provision for diversified agricultural practice should be made. This can be more effectively done by mechanization of agriculture. By this procedure, large scale food production can be produced to curb malnutrition especially in the rural areas.
4. Economic empowerment of the masses should be facilitated by government and non governmental organizations which are philanthropic.
5. Concerted efforts should be made to eliminate ignorance among the less privileged rural dwellers. Many of the harmful health practices may be eliminated through relevant educational plans.

Implication for Education and Counseling

An overview of political happenings unveiled undue lack of due process on issues of governance due to disorderly struggles for power among the political class. Sobriety in political development has been hampered by misplaced values in society, resulting to adoration of fraudulently acquired power and riches. This situation of underdevelopment has ushered in the inept leaderships that continued to bungle the otherwise glamorous plans in the health sector.

The implication for education and counseling is relevant because there is a need for change of attitude and clarification of values in general society and family units in particular. Education and counseling are all times effective tools for behavioural change. Western countries that moved fast forward to attain their exalted positions today did so through commitment to functional education policies to effect capacity building of their citizens. Denga (1988:2) Ashi (2008:3) ascribed the task of capacity building in the area of manual skills, sound emotional state, humane disposition as well as intellectual abilities to enable the individual to harness and exploit the social and physical environment positively, to counseling. With educational advantage, the individual will be able to lift his/her family out of squalor, to be gainfully employed, acquire material possessions, and provide the basic life needs for healthy family life.

Counseling should be centred on coherent family relationship so as to emphasize apprehension of stress as most families live struggling lives. Denga (1996:55) posits that “a struggling life is the best conductor of stress”. Denga (1996:56) continued that “A person experiencing stress may feel vaguely weak tense, restless, slow and general tired without pointing out what is exactly happening to him”. Such a stressful individual may not be able to contribute to national development. Factors that escalate stress in Nigerian society should be targeted by counseling. These are economics deprivation of the masses, political unrest, religious crises, ethnic conflicts, land disputes, et cetera some of which cause loss of lives and property of family members. Apprehension of psychological disturbance by stress will usher in a state of mental health for family units.

When society is stabilized, physical health can be attained by counselors, government agencies and non-governmental organization to ameliorate the situation of health care delivery for families. Counselors, Health workers and social workers may collaborate to educate the masses on government intentions and mode of implementation of health policies. Emphasis should be on prevention and control of physical ailments and communicable diseases.

Areas of main thrust are insurance of clean water for household units; production and intake of nutritious foods, clean environment to wade off disease vectors like mosquitoes. Counsellors can rouse communities to the need of economic association to effect self-empowerment. Community efforts should be emphasized to work on road constructions, culverts and local bridges, sometimes with use of local materials.

Academic Scholarship

More importantly, ignorance should be tackled through general education and adult literacy education geared particularly towards knowledge of hygienic living. A cue should be taken from education sector, where parents-teachers association at primary and secondary levels is a success story. Hence, family health-related associations can be formed to assist in health programmes implementation.

These and other relevant associations may be formed:

- (a) Clean Environmental Water supply committee.
- (b) Local food products committee.
- (c) Village environmental sanitation committee
- (d) Malaria and tuberculosis prevention committee et cetera.
- (e) Rural roads construction committee.

These committees can be established and empowered by legislation at local, state and national levels.

Conclusion

In this paper, an overview of health care delivery system has been taken and found to lack holistic approach. This is from the reference point of World Health Organization that views a healthy person as one who is free from mental, physical and social infirmity. In Nigeria, the collaborative effort geared towards enhancement of disease free, hunger free, poverty free and stress free society is lacking. The approach can only be possible in a humane, sober and committed political or social environment, which has value for worth of human life. This can be possible through re-orientation of value system with a shift from materialism to humane consideration.

Lastly, education and counselling suggestions to involve government and local communities in health care project has been put forward.

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