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MOBILIZING ILLITERATE ADULT FOR DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses mobilization of illiterate adults for full participation in democratic process in Nigeria. Although the problem of these illiterate adults in the participation such as ignorance, apathy, impact of colonialism, ethnicity e.t.c, were highlighted, it is argued in this paper that methods of mobilizing them through Mass education, political education, human-centred – development (including conscientization), if properly adopted, will improve their participation in politics. This eventually will enhance their full participation in democratic process in the country.

MOBILIZING ILLITERATE ADULTS FOR DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

Nigerian people have long recognized the need for democracy as an instrument for rapid national development. This is why the anti-colonial struggle against British exploitation emphasized democratic self-government. Since independence, Nigeria has continued to operate the capitalist type of representative democracy and the capitalist economy which the British colonialist imposed on our polity. This has had many bad effects on Nigeria. The Political Bureau Report of 1987 set up to find out what Nigerians actually want, stated that capitalism has created poverty, ignorance, disease and squalor in the rank of the masses. It also noted that the masses have no voice in the decision making process in Nigeria, not even in the election of the representatives to the various sectors, since election are normally rigged.

Moreover, since the majority of the illiterate adults are located in the rural areas of our country, they are often losers in many ways: whether in terms of deprivation, domination, neglect, exploitation, oppression, impoverishment, marginalisation or subordination. Viewed against this background of neglect
and gross underdevelopment; much emphasis should be put on integrated rural development in Nigeria. This type of development deserves not only commendation but strong support from various organs of the nation such as the three tiers of government, Community Based Organisation (CBO) and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOS). These organs should make concerted efforts at bringing about real development in rural areas, in all its ramifications.

It is perhaps in recognition of the need to establish an appropriate frame for the positive mobilization and education of all Nigerians towards economic recovery and development and new social and political order, that the Federal Government established a Directorate named Mass Mobilization for Social Justice, Self-Reliance and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) presently called National Orientation Agency (NOA) which watchdog Social Mobilization.

Mobilization is the key issue in rural development and it basically involves orientation and attitude. According to Gana (1987) mobilization is the process of pooling together, harnessing, actualizing potential human resources for the purpose of development. Social Mobilization can be seen in terms of involving the people (both literate and illiterates) in taking part actively and freely in discussions and decisions affecting their general welfare. Both social mobilization and political education should aim at increasing people's level of awareness or cognition of political and other issues so that they can apply energies positively and participate actively in the social and political life of the country. Mobilization must have a clear sense of ideological direction. A solid set of principles should guide mass mobilization efforts.

In order to achieve a democratic nation, the masses should be made to inculcate in them the frame work of Nigeria's five national goals stated as follows:--

(a) a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
(b) a great and dynamic economy;
(c) a just and egalitarian society;
(d) a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizen; and
(e) a free and democratic society (Hand Book of MAMSER, 1987)
Being conscious of the above, the illiterate adults will understand the significance of democracy; and also realize that apathy and ignorance are the greatest weapons that keep them in a devastated condition in a democratic society. The paper therefore aims mainly to discuss the need to mobilize the illiterate adults for full participation in the democratic process in Nigeria.

ADULT ILLITERATES AND PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS:
A serious problem confronting the adult illiterates is their lack of participation in politics. One may ask what is political participation? For some it may mean getting registered and voting at elections; for others it may mean belonging to a political party. Both definitions are relevant in this context it will also include their proper understanding of the meaning of elections and function of political parties.

The problem of the masses especially the adult illiterates in democratization started from the colonial period. At this time, the colonial masters kept the masses away from political education because they saw it as a weapon for wrestling freedom from the colonizers. This is the reason why colonial government banned political education in schools, among civil servants and the general public. Politics was only for those in power because it is an instrument of wielding power, instrument for decision-making and instrument for domination.

Apart from this, in Nigeria as a whole, the problem of ethnicity cuts across both literates and illiterate adults during elections. But in a state that speaks the same language, people tend to vote for persons they like or who give them money or any other form of gifts, regardless of their party manifestoes. However, this is more common with adult illiterate who do not understand party manifestoes. They are very great in number especially in the rural areas where they constitute almost two-third of the national work force population. Unfortunately, the modern democratic process most especially elections as demonstrated by voting demands a certain level of literacy. At most an adult should be able to interpret and read the political parties manifestoes, slogans and other issues that would make them to be
conscientized on the political issues that concern them. When these adult illiterates are fully conscientized and educated at the first level of literacy – (reading and writing on political issues), they can vote rationally, which consequently will lead to their real participation in democratic processes.

The financial level of most adult illiterates is very low to the extent that it affects their attitudes and orientation towards elections. Attitudes towards finance are sometime disturbing. Financial problems go with the sense of hopelessness. Many adults in rural and urban areas may wish to vie for position in the political election but when they sit down and contemplate over the financial involvement, they feel weak to struggle for any post.

MOBILISING ILLIRATE ADULTS FOR DEMOCRACY
Political apathy and ignorance affect democratic process in Nigeria. This is because some citizens are not interested in who represents them, therefore they do not take part in voting. This form of apathy can be reduced if political education, mass education, human-centre development and conscientization and proper mobilisation are embarked upon.

Political Education:— Political Education aims at the creation of a new and positive political consciousness among the masses. In line with the political Bureau, which stated that “we are convinced that a political conscious, effectively mobilized and properly motivated population is the greatest deterrent to bad governance”. Raising the political consciousness of the masses in the country will help the masses particularly the illiterate adults avoid all the vices associated with elections in the past. Political education in Nigerian context can be described as a process of mental liberation which breaks down apathy and the culture of silence of the vast majority of Nigerians, and empowers them to participate effectively and meaningfully in the process of nation building.
Therefore, proper political education programme for the masses, especially illiterate adults, in Nigeria should include the following:

- Educating them to realize that democracy is an indispensable precondition for rapid national development.
- Educating the masses about their history and political development.
- Educating them about the danger of apathy and political silence.
- Raising the consciousness of the masses to realize that their poverty derives from exploitation, domination and lack of democracy in the nation.
- Educating the masses through popular organizations such as: Labour Unions, Women Associations, Farmers Association, Community Development Association etc to take democratic decisions on public issues affecting their lives;
- Educating and mobilizing these marginalize illiterate adults against ethnic, religious and sectional bigotry and manipulations.
- Educating and mobilizing them to identify, expose and reject corruption in all facets of Nigeria's national life.

By exposing and sensitizing the masses especially the illiterate adults they will help to bring about sustainable democracy and salvage the nation from chaos.

Although today, the teaching of the principle of political education is the most critical function of the National Orientation Agency much impact has not been felt among the marginalize groups in the rural and urban communities. This is because no programme survives adequately in Nigeria after the founder leaves the seat of power. But political education is a necessary weapon for freedom and human development in any country. For example in the former colonial countries, political education for the masses has been mainly responsible for wrestling freedom from colonical masters. It will always be necessary to maintain it.
This is another factor that can be used in mobilizing the illiterates adults in participating in the democratic process. Mass' literacy is very important because a literate society is a liberated society. Well established mass literacy programme will enhance the breaking of ignorance and the culture of apathy and silence among the masses. In this case, the masses should not only be mobilised but properly organized. Although most of them do not engage or enroll with the literacy programmes in their communities; effort should be made to encourage them and make them to realize the importance and relevance of literacy to their lives; assures them that literacy represents vital key to knowing one's rights, duties and responsibilities. It is a sure way to ensuring that individual members of the communities know not only the rights but their responsibilities, obligations and the limitation imposed by certain forces in the society. The writer is convinced that by promoting mass literacy seriously and genuinely by the three tiers government Nigerian nation will be liberated from ignorance and from other liabilities which, all along, have militated against the development of our potentials as a nation, as well as the development of our resources and talents.

Literacy cannot be isolated from day to day economic, social and political activities of adults. Hence, literacy can be seen as integrating all aspects of adult life which brings about total change in the community. The concept of literacy will enable the adult illiterates get involved and participate fully in political processes -- elections, voting and understanding manifestos of political parties, - in order to decide for themselves which of the manifestos are relevant to solving their problems and increasing their standard of living in various spheres of life.

The adults illiterates can be conscientized in political process especially on election and voting through mass literacy education in different local government area of the states. In this aspect the concept of multiplier effect should be adopted. By multiplier effect we mean that the adult educator should train many other preferably illiterate farmers in the political sphere. Since election and voting are considered to be democratic instruments, only
when people are politically conscious and politically educated that they know the right thing to do. Otherwise, elections can become occasions when rich and powerful ones manipulate the masses no matter whether the system is a one-party or multiparty government.

Another way of mobilizing and integrating adult illiterates in political education is through local and national organizations like Age-grades, religious organizations, women organizations, Trade Unions, Farmer's club. The adult educators will meet the executive members of these organizations who will help to mobilize their members on the issue of democratic processes. The adult educator should be meeting these organizations often so as to establish a good cordial relationship and uphold necessary decisions based on political education. In this context, the discussions will not be based on making political speeches but in making tireless efforts to teach them; and make them to realize the important role they will play in contributing to the smooth running of the democratic process. They will be informed that the progress depend on their efforts and solidarity. They must know that there is no famous man who can take care of the responsibility of every person and that the magic hands are hands of the people. This can be fulfilled by organizing literacy and their full participation in development projects.

Political education for the masses can be very well fostered by mass media. A study carried out by the institute of adult Education, University of Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania in collaboration with Government Departments and National Institutions on Political Education using radio and study group methods indicated that adult illiterates were conscientized successfully on election and voting process which are the key organs of the democratic process. (Mhaiki 1981). The ability to read and write gives the people the power to alter their environment through individual and group actions. It gives one psychic mobility allowing him/her to be involved in situations beyond one's immediate experience.

Finally, there are some media used in achieving huma-centered development which are relevant to this paper. This include the use of posters and diaporama.
Such posters should be illustrated with captions written in the language of the local people. Even if the adult illiterates may not be able to read those captions, they may be attracted by the illustration and may ask the literate counterparts to explain the captions to them. "Posters are powerful visual medium for keeping one aware of the happening in one's environment" (Osuala. 1995).

Disporama (an audio-visual programme which combines a set of slides with a specially prepared audio cassette) can be used in depicting the problems of illiterates, in understanding electioneering campaigns and methods of voting. Scenes of political campaigns and voting (especially scenes of showing voids) contain important messages for the adult illiterates.

CONCLUSION
For democracy to be practiced efficiently and successfully in any developing country such a country must adopt the method of mobilizing the illiterate adults – (conscientization, political education, and mass education) as already discussed in this paper. As rightly pointed out adult illiterates in the rural areas constitutes up to 70% of the population (Uba 1984). Politics as an ex-Governor of one the states in this country said “is a game of numbers”. Knowing quite well that these adults are more in number, the need for conscientizing and educating them is very necessary. Their consciousness over the affairs in their environment will enhance the development of healthy democracy in their communities and the nation at large. Osuala (1995), opined that educated and enlightened adults can immediately put into practice that they learn, thus accelerating development objectives.

To support this therefore the adult illiterates, after being educated through mobilization can fully understand political programmes, manifestos, and voting methods, thereby become properly involved in the country’s democratization processes. It is also fundamental to have adult literacy programme in rural areas which should be intensive and goal-oriented to achieve the demands of modern democracy.
REFERENCES


