Youths in Peace

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Introduction

It is a truism that youth are catalyst of development and social change. Their activities, actions and exuberances are always noticed. Sometimes their presence becomes intimidating and trenchant to those who do not comprehend their world. Therefore, it becomes extremely important that youth must be natured, tutored, guarded and trained towards a progressive ,vibrant and sustainable future.

The essence of the above is that a well-trained youth is a reflection and embodiment of concerted efforts for positive social reproduction. It is a solid and firm insurance against future social anemia, chaos, juvenile delinquency, cultism , political thuggery and misdirection. It ensures a stable and purposeful societal continuity and assured progress.

All over the world, the need to maintain a peaceful atmosphere for a robust future has dominated social discourses. The underlying fact remains that youth cannot fulfill their manifest destiny in a cantankerous environment buried in fratricidal wars and illiteracy . Obviously such a hurly-burly situation cannot engender youth with rationality and self-discovery. Invariably, such an environment will produce youth infected with the virus of injustice, bizarre life styles, and low intellectual development. They become hero worshipers and perpetually conclude that justice is in the interest of the stronger. To them, survival means waging war against everything virtuous, progressive, and abandonment of every objective endeavor. This type of youth strive more when

things fall apart in the communities and are mostly employed to make life nasty, brutish, violent, short and worthless for others. It is important to state that any society or community whose youth have resigned themselves to negative ventures, and vegetating for survival is on a fast lane of destruction.

It is against this backdrop that we appreciate the topicality and usefulness of this lecture instituted by the **International Institute For Peace Through Tourism [IIPT]**. This is timely so that we can make a proper rethink for tomorrow's progress. It is no more strange that most communities in Africa have succumbed to violence of unimaginable dimension, and in permanent turmoil because their youths have been made to hate and annihilate their environment, chased by visionless forces of death, and with minds occupied by little foxes of destruction. They are most of the time manipulated by a conscienceless bourgeois class through fake material bates that fade away with time. Africa cannot afford to have such youth who do not have self-pride and unwilling to explore their innate potentials for the benefit of

future generation

It is, therefore, germane at this point to look at the role of the youth in Peace and community Capacity Building. This will greatly assist us in re-examining our conscience, actions and utterances as youth whose greatest asset is tomorrow. First let us x-ray the world of the youth.

YOUTH AND THEIR VISION

It may be easy to compact the youth within an age bracket, between the ages of eighteen and forty. This may be elliptic, as no definite definition of youth has emerged. In the same vein somebody above our age bracket may be filled with thoughts, aspirations, zeal and visions, which are energized, by positivism and objectivity. It is also not out of place to see persons below forty years, wallowing in profound conservatism and mental imbecility. Such group of persons cannot be the youth that will salvage the continent from its political thralldom. It is not out of place to say that most of the thoughtless and detestable actions in the communities emanate from this group, because they see the world through the warped vision of others. They hardly think for themselves or subject their actions to thorough scrutiny.

This is why many people consciously believe that youth is an attitude of the mind. It is the possession of a mind that is always asking many probing questions for objective answers. Like Rene Descartes, it is a thinking mind that is conscious of his environment and immediate challenges. A mind that is free, liberal, clean and desirous of knowledge at all times. It is a mind of the Renaissance whose spirit of enquiry makes man the most important assets and agent of progressive change on earth. Any person with this knowledge – friendly disposition can be said to be a youth.

It is, therefore, not stupendous that all those who have contributed to socio-scientific and political discoveries, have this mind of positive thoughts. Let us briefly look at some examples.

Karl Marx, a German Philosopher had his PhD in Philosophy at the age of 23. His discovery of scientific socialism, and the theory of historical materialism—' ... the law of development of human history' [1], has undisputedly changed the idealistic conception of man and nature. Through thinking'[2] , he introduced a new vista of knowledge whose academic relevance cannot be washed away even today.

In spite of all the temptations and odds against him, he did not stop from utilizing his creative potentials for the future. According to V.I Lenin, Marx .... rejected the preconceived idealist view turning to life, he saw that it is not the development of mind that explains the development of nature but that, on the contrary, the explanation of mind must be derived from nature, from matter[3]

At the age of 25, Nelson Mandela , Oliver Tambo, and others revolutionized the agenda of struggle of the African National Congress (A.N.C), through their Youth League. It was this youth group that organized the first campaign against apartheid that shook its foundation. The campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Law like Suppression of Communism Act, the Group Areas Act, the Pass Laws and Stock Limitation Laws ...,[4] started on 6 April 1952. This campaign sustained the momentum of the struggle until the unjust system collapsed in 1991.

In Nigeria apart from the Nigerian Youth Movement which never had a spectacular existence until it phased itself out in the 1941, the Zikist Movement was a National Youth Movement that provided the needed tonic for the nationalist struggle, when bourgeois conservatism, opportunism and division penetrated the ranks of the nascent Nigerian bourgeoisie.
The movement which was founded in 1946 and led by Kolawole Balogun, did not harbor any doubt   about its mission to liberate their fatherland from the

destructive shackles of colonialism. They were fired by the inspiring , firing speeches and writings of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, who in his early thirties had come to epitomize the conscience of Nigeria's anti-colonial protest.

According to Richard Sklar,

"Zik' treated the Nigerian reading public to pungent, incisive sometimes malevolent,, but always informed commentaries on Nigeria and world affairs [5] The youth shook the conscience of Nigerians by exposing the injustices of colonialism and its apologists. They called for independence 'Now" in line with the resolutions of the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester,1945. Their campaign was, therefore, revolutionary and anchored on the slogan of Mbonu Ojike also known as the Boycott King ,'Boycott all boyscottables' .According to Aswma,

Our campaign will not be limited to imperialism, but will be carried out against African Nationals and Semi-Nationals (Sic), institutions, Organizations and establishments that are opposed in any way towards immediate irredentism for the enemy is no less a danger than his ally. [6] If this nationalist movement was sustained, Nigeria would have had its independence before Ghana in 1957. But it was not surprising that this vibrant Movement was banned in 1951, and its members charged to court for treason. Unfortunately, the emerging bourgeoisie acquiesced in this injustice because the Movement exposed their opportunistic tendencies, and desire to replace the colonialists without endangering the imperialist statuesquo. But their youthful activities and selfless sacrifice to their fatherland can never be eclipsed in the annals of Nigerian political history.

We also have General Yakubu Gowon who at the age of 32, became Nigeria's Head of State in 1966, Alexander – the Great from Macedonia nearly conquered the would at the age of 33, if not for malaria attack, ken Saro-Wiwa ,the hanged environmentalist, at 26 was administrator of Bonny during the civil war 1967 –

1970 in Nigeria, Commander Alfred Dicte-Spiff was 27 when he became the Governor of Rivers State in 1967 and others.

The underlying fact here is that these people were influenced by a vision of positivism, progression, and were ready to use their natural potentials to lift their environment to an enviable height. Through their actions and utterances, they served as catalyst that turned around their immediate community.

From the above, we can surmise that a youth is any person or group of persons whose vision of society is positive, with a yawning desire to contribute meaningfully to the up liftment of his/her community, no matter the category in age. Such a person is driven by the insightful dreams of the youth, enjoys the youthful world of possibilities, brighter future, and loathes impossibilities, conservatism , sinking and excruciating statuesquo. Since the youth represent vibrancy, it is always on the move, discovering ideas, sometimes to the consternation of those who do not comprehend their world. It is creative, overtly experimental, productive and bubbling with life.

Any community that has such a youth group is on its way to providing a happy community whose creative potentials cannot be stopped by inscrutable forces. Unfortunately, our harsh social conditions have become a dangerous inhibition in our noble effort to produce   the youth of tomorrow. Some of the youth have remained backward in thinking, parochial in perception of events and comprehension of the laws of development. They have sworn never to rise beyond half-baked consciousness. It is this type of youth that become intimidating thugs for unconscionable politicians, lazy students that constitute themselves into cult gangs to maim,   become child soldiers to terrorize their people and even rape their mother. They desecrate and profane the sacred principles of University ethics, and make it un-conducive for teaching and learning. The Universities as citadel of learning and 'ivory tower' have become a myth, as they have been turned to citadels of death and collapsed towers. As for girls, they 'clean' their body to attract men who patronize them for money,

sometimes they end up contacting all kinds of dreaded diseases including HIV-AIDS. These youth cannot dream the dreams and embody the visions of a progressive community. They are the agents of backwardness, incubators of riotous situation, do not conform to anything civil, and are catalyst of destruction. They should be dreaded in extreme condition, and made to conform to the general will. In fact, they cannot be the vanguard of peace and community capacity building.

It is important to say at this point that African youth are facing challenges of enormous proportion that are far beyond their capacity arising from the harsh and hostile living condition they pass through on a daily basis. The civil wars in Uganda, Rwanda, Liberia , Somalia, Sierra Leone and Congo have subjected the Youth to living dead situations. They have been humiliated and abandoned in refugee camps. According to the 2005 Human Security Report, by the turn of the 21st century, Sub-Saharan Africa had become the world's most violent region, experiencing more battle- deaths, than all other regions combined.[7]

These wars and the frequent multiplication of deadly militia groups not only increase the free flow of small weapons, but reduced the whole of Africa , to a jungle of war and bunker of sorts. Small arms are a class of weapons responsible for an estimated 500,000 deaths and thousand more injuries each year. Women and children suffer disproportionately from proliferation of small arms. The spread and misuse of small arms cause prolong and exacerbate humanitarian crises around the world[8]

Stohl noted that about 120,000 African Children under the age of 18 are used as child soldiers in conflicts perpetuated by availability of small

arms. In West African sub- region, about 2 million people have died in conflicts involving SALW since 1990, and   small arms is estimated at 7-8 million with a minimum of 77,00 in the hands of insurgent groups [9.]   In Guinea Bissau which is one of the poorest countries in the world, there are 25,000 weapons in circulation, In Nigeria's Niger Delta region small arms have become a common possession among   youth and these are randomly displayed for sports and during deadly operations.. With $25-28 one can   acquire a pistol depending on the type[10]

The situation is not different in other countries. In Sierra Leone, the civil war which started in 1991 ended in January 2002. Within this period, over 50,000 people lost their lives, over two million people displaced mostly women who were raped, maimed, physically tortured, and the country assumed the toga of the worst place on earth[11] . While more than one million have lost their lives in Dafur [Sudan] due to civil war, in Angola, small arms have   reached a point that it can be exchanged for radio, meals, cooking oil and other food smuggled into   Angola by Namibian villages[.12] Since 1986, Uganda has been terrorized by Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement and later changed to Lord's Resistance Movement by Joseph Kony.   About 1.6 million of the 28 million population of Uganda have been displaced especially in the Northern Acholi districts [kitgum,Gulu,Pader] in the past ten years and majority of these   live in the 105 over crowded, poorly serviced   IDP camps. [13].   It is obvious that the existence of LRA was synonymous with ' looting of villages, random killings, bizarre rituals, and the abduction of youth and children have become the norm. More than anything, LRA   has become notorious for its child abductions which recent estimates suggest could account for   66,000 children[14] . It is therefore, not strange that African youths under these rugged and Hobbesian environment would manifest

bizarre disposition that are reserved for the savages and beasts. Indeed African Youth are under intense survival pressure.

The above scenario has made it mandatory for every community to do something to guarantee its future by paying attention to its youth.

PEAC AND COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

It has become fashionable for people to talk of Peace and community Capacity building without a through comprehension of the concepts. In most cases the people are alienated in the process, which makes meaningless the essence of any capacity building for community development. For most people, it is just another way of imposing projects, programmes and policies on the communities for personal aggrandizement. To them, the people do not matter since their psych can be manipulated at will.

This is why most of the community -directed projects of the governments have not had any significant impact on the people. They still wallow in unimaginable ash-mouthed poverty, undernourished and saddled with a huge load of depressing and harsh social realities. The people are the center of all philosophical and scientific endeavors, and any programme that does not take account of their participation, is bound to fail.

Peace building is a conscious effort by the people to ensure a congenial atmosphere for the realization of their natural dreams. This effort is not time bound, it is a continuous process that ensures the stability and reproduction of the community. The basic fact behind this process is that, without peace no society, community or state can build its tomorrow and realize its manifest

destiny. Such a community will be in a Habesian situation and its youth will continue to be chasing shadows, with a life that repels glory, virtue and honor. Peace building, therefore, means respect for the laws, mores, and conventions of the land. It involves the dispensation of justice without fear or favor, strengthening democratic institutions geared towards the realization of the people's aspirations. It ensures the efflorescence of virtuous living, respect for constituted authority, and critical evaluation of any idea and creating a forum for detecting early warning signs of conflicts and violence that are capable of tearing the community apart.

It does not mean the worshiping of dogmatism, absence of conflicts and crises, but a conscious attempt to attend to social problems in such a manner that it does not deepen the foundation of violence in the community. Every peace building process assumes that conflicts are inevitable in human society, but these conflicts should not widen, expand and broaden to overwhelm and alienate man's capacity to subject it to a manageable level. The extent to which we can overcome the destructive tendencies of conflicts, and channel our energies to a better tomorrow, demonstrate the efficacy of our peace building efforts and the beauty of humanity. Perhaps, this was way Socrates who was regarded as the wisest man of his time by the Delphic Oracle warned that,

'**Man know thyself, an unexamined life is not worth living'**

Socrates was convinced that we cannot flourish as human beings without making use of our talents. Therefore, doom and disaster awaits any community that relegates this principle to the background. This was why the civilization of Athens in the fifth century fell in the face of interminable invasions. Peace building is an essential part of our daily lives, which must be sustained, nurtured

and preached at every opportunity for the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

On the other hand, 'Community capacity building is the process of harnessing the capacity and skills of the members of community in such a way that they are better able to identify, and help meet their needs and to participate more fully in society' [15.] This involves empowering the youth so that they can be self employed and contribute to the positive development of the environment. According to United Nations Development Report in 1991, capacity building simply means,1 Creating an enabling environment with appropriate policy and legal frame works, 2 Institutional development, including community participation,

3 Human resource development and strengthening of managerial systems.[16]

A community that has a capacity building mechanism is assured of tomorrow, and will succeed in subjecting the aspirations of the youth to the needs and vision of the community. This is why Austen stated that in such a community '… all members have something to offer in terms of problem solving and strategy to undertake collective concerns' [17] Therefore, ' Capacity building places the emphasis on existing strengths and abilities, rather being overwhelmed by problems or feelings of powerlessness'[18]

From the above we can see that community capacity building is the process through which the quality of life, living standard, happiness and technology of a people is positively mobilized . The essential ingredient of this experiment is development of the people, particularly the youth who are waiting leaders of today.. Any programme that does not improve or lay a futuristic foundation for the betterment of people's life, is complete balderdash and motion without movement. In other words, you may have a fat foreign reserve, good per capita income, few individual munificence and exotic edifice, but if the quality of life of the people within the community or state is below the breadline level, that community or state cannot be said to be developed Definitely, its Youth

will run amok and may not be able to solve their problems rather , they will become unwanted liabilities of the present and overwhelmed by the challenges of the future. Sadly, most communities in Africa are populated by such endangered youth .They have spent most of their creative time in Camps for Displaced people, no access to educational facilities, water and most of the good things of life. Can such a bunch of youth liberate the continent from its neocolonial bondage and challenges? Of course the answer is no. . A consciously planned community capacity building lays the foundation for all round development of the community. We have to be careful to state that it is not the development of the Western model such as Harod-Domar model in which savings and investment are the principal determinants of growth,[19] McClelland's N-Achievement to engender 'energetic entrepreneur,[20] and the modernization theory which overtly emphases the aping of Western tradition by moving from traditional or less-developed societies to those that characterized the develop ones[21].

These theories are Euro- centric and cannot be of much help to us. This was why Ake warned that 'I make a general argument for the imperialist character of Western Social Sciences as a whole … Western development studies is worse than useless' [22]. This means that we have to be critical in accepting any theory that does not take our historic specificity into account.

Okowa Opined that economic development is more than growth in Gross National Product (GNP)[23], it is not purely an economic affair, but rather an overall social process which is dependent upon the outcome of man's effort to deal with natural environment[24].

Every genuine development process must subdue the environment to the people's control, and cannot be imposed. It should emanate from them, based on their level of development of productive forces and need. No community or state can consider itself on the lane of development when the visions of its

youth are antithetical to that of the community. This negates the principle of popular participation. It breeds backwardness, dictatorship in the affairs of the community and stifles the capacity of the youth to stretch their natural skills to the fullest.

After all, development in its fundamental sense can only mean an increasing ability of members of a given society to harness their natural resources and manipulate nature in a way that enhances their welfare with as little foreign assistance as possible. When a nation increasingly requires foreign assistance in whatever form in order to do the job identified in the preceding sentence, then such a nation certainly lacks a fundamental element of the development process[25]

From what we have seen around, can we consider our communities developed? .This may not concern us here, it maybe discussed beyond this forum. We have looked at peace and community capacity building; do the youth have any role to play in this process? It will be odd and a historical fallacy to say that the youth do not have any role to play in this process of social engineering. In fact, for any of the process to progress and succeed, the youth must not be on lookers. They must be at the mainstream. This is because they are in the majority, with energetic potentials and aspirations, which enhances efficacious continuity. After all, as UASID noted development without including a country's youth is not sustainable[26].

Their budding energy can be employed and directed towards maintaining law and order, reflective visions, and purposive ideals through active participation in community ventures. Moderating their intoxicating impulse in such a manner that it becomes a deterrent to deviants in the community, building empowerment skills, capacities, instilling a patriotic zeal that frowns at rabid

and mindless acquisition of wealth through leadership by example and upholding knowledge as the highest good, because knowledge is power, are ways the youth can appreciate the full import of peace and capacity building in their communities. This means that the youth must not be far away from the elders so that they can share the same visions and dreams . It means … viewing the youth as assets and resources to be developed for growth rather than youth as a problem to be fixed. … Youth development is community development… and developing youths as avenues addresses many of the larger development challenges of the communities and countries [27.]In other words they must learn and learn fast. In advising the Youth League, V. I. Lenin told them that, '… in approaching the task of the youth from this angle, I must say that the tasks of the youth in general, and of particular (African Youth} and all other organization in particular, maybe summed up in one word, **Learn** [28.]

In any discourse concerning the youth, education cannot be overemphasized. This is because it is the only vehicle through which the youth can be properly assimilated in their community, contribute to its development and be sure of its tomorrow. To deprive the youth the benefit of education, is to consign them to a backward abyss and the world of wasted generations. Therefore, introducing them to the light of education is to consciously prepare them for the task ahead especially in peace building and capacity development. After all, if you do not train them, do not blame them.

According to Johanny,
Education lubricates the mind of the individual
within the organization and makes him advance
the course of social engineering
. … Education facilitates the process of capacity building
both for the organization (community) to develop

experimental skills, identify stimuli, using their meta

systems to assemble responses,

redesign their environment and attempt to

achieve a dynamic balance [29.]

As a learning process, it would equip the youth to make positive contributions to the community, readjust their mind set, intellect and direct it towards knowledge that is commutative and edifying. Learning would assist the youth to 'maintain certain norms, values and standards,´ that would help to restructure and redefine their community. As a continuous exercise, the youth must not be tired of learning; else, the community would be tired of them.

Youth should not see themselves as an insignificant extra of their community. They should make themselves relevant by ensuring at all times, that early warning signs of destructive cracks in their community are detected. This is because to allow the community to be in turmoil at the alter of brazen greed and personal differences is to distort the processes of peace and capacity building .Of course, there will be no development in any community ruled by jungle justice and the rule of the stronger. This means that as men/women of progressive intellect, youth should refuse to be carried away by indolent slogans, refuse to mortgage their conscience by picking crumbs on the table and resist to be commoditized. All these pollute virtuous rationality, and over turn the values of the community. Any youth that is determined to build peace and development in the community must circumvent these vices we have mentioned like a plaque. It was not for nothing that Plato in his <u>Republic</u> noted that the future leaders – Philosopher kings must be subjected to a rigorous intellectual training so that they could be properly equipped to differentiate between appearances and reality.

He warned that, they should avoid sinful, inexpedient and inconsistent stories and ventures.

…. So our properly good guardians will have the following characteristics, a philosophic disposition, high spirits speed and strength.[30]

It is now obvious that the youth are indispensable in the community. No process of change and development can take place without their effective participation, because thy have the energy to turn around their environment. Perhaps this explains the importance of many youth policies most responsive governments have initiated to harness their efforts and competences all over the world. Honestly, the odds against African youth are overbearing. Almost all African countries are under the excruciating debt burden consciously manipulated by multilateral financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. This has made them pay more attention in paying debts than providing social amenities and create empowerment programmes for the Youth. The result is that the continent is still poor , with a poverty-stricken population and a debt profile of $300b. Acceding to a United Nations Report, about 200 million youth are living in poverty, 130 million youth illiterates and 88 million unemployed and 10 million living with HIV/AIDS. It is possible that majority of these are from Africa.[31]

Although, African youth have tales of woes to tell and consigned to prolonged suffering by the their leaders, this cannot be a justifiable alibi to any youthful negativities and betrayal of natural visions and dreams. Instead, it should be a tonic that will challenge the youth to deepen its patriotic emotions, prove its mettle through pains-taking self-discovery and constant association with groups and individual of the same feeling.

All organizations, individuals and discussions whose theme is injurious to the manifest destiny of the youth should be circumvented. They pretend to offer transient palliative, but at the long run lead to a dead end.

It is against this background that we applaud the historical efforts of **IIPT** in their zeal to direct the youth to peace and community capacity development

, in spite of the harsh realities of the time. This process and zeal should be continuous and pursued with vigor.

A critical study of the achievements of men, will reveal that the height that great men attain is not gotten by sudden flight.

Let this be a spark of light that would turn around and prick the conscience of our youths towards a purposeful idea, and extinguish the forces of conservatism, violence, narrow-mindedness and selfish elements in the community. I am convinced that the journey for the socio-political regeneration of African Youth has just begun It will outpace the manipulations of base thinkers,   neo-colonial subservience and those who perpetually believe that the only duty of the youth is to engage in hero-worship and become an integral part of a rented crowd.

This is the challenge   before us, and the decision is yours.

SUMMARY / CONCLUSION

We have been discussing the youth and how they c   an meaningfully contribute to peace and community capacity building . Since the youth are endowed with inalienable dreams and talents, these can be channeled to positive ventures that will affect the quality of life of the people. The extent to which full development process can strive in a community depends on the quality of peace in the community. Youth, therefore, must ensure that peace becomes part and parcel of their daily endeavor.

Unfortunately, the capacity of the youth to satisfactorily perform their duties has been affected by the weakness and inertia of African leaders. They have not demonstrated leading examples which the youth can emulate. Instead   they have through their external collaborators shattered and blistered their dreams and exposed every body to the sharpened jaws of a mindless leadership. All these have placed a herculean task before the youth– to be or not to be.

Nevertheless, they must not betray their manifest destiny in spite of obvious distractions. They should remember that they are indelible epistles written in the mind of good men flashing stars of prudent intelligence. As Fanon stated, 'each generation must, out of relative obscurity, , discover its mission fulfill it or betray it[32].

I am confident that the African youth will face this enormous challenge with the utmost urgency it deserves. If this is expensive, I implore you to look at many war-torn communities in Nigeria's Niger Delta and African countries such as Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Burundi, Uganda and Rwanda. No effort, energy and resources invested in the training, guarding , tutoring , and mentoring the youth is wasteful. To underscore the importance of the Youth in world development , the United Nations in 1995 declared the World Programme of Action for Youth, The Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 and in 1999, African leaders produced the African Charter on the Welfare and Rights of the Child. These Instruments should be domesticated by African countries so that they would form the basis for the development of their youth.

The time has come to make a rethink and invest in the future. We should de-emphasis the mad rush for political power, and deceitful materialism. All these corrupt practices gradually gnaw and erode our pride and value as a people. No society can reproduces itself by allowing its youth to swim in Decadence. **This is our chance**.