

The Role of Government and Religious Institutions in Inculcating Entrepreneurial Zeal among Contemporary Igbo Youths

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Abstract

It appears that Igbo youths are becoming increasingly lazy in the recent years. Some university graduates are in wanton search for unavailable white-collar jobs. Even those who have reached the highest academic level seem to be hopeless, helpless, jobless, and at times homeless. This has a matter of fact increased the fraudulent activities ravaging the Igbo region and Nigerian nation. Following this development there is an enormous need for the church and the government to inculcate the entrepreneurial zeal among the youths. There is no doubt that young people can play a significant role in economic activities if motivated. A lot still needs to be put in place to achieve the desired and required growth among the youths. This is because the strength of any nation cannot be isolated from its hope for the future. It is expected that the church and the government should rise to the challenge of catalyzing the young people into acts of self-reliance and sustainability. The purpose of this research is to explore strategies for inculcating into the youths the zeal for hard work which will spur them towards the liberation of the nation from the shackles of poverty, obscurity and shame through entrepreneurial skills. Data were collected through personal observations, semi structured interviews and from primary and secondary sources of data collection.

Keywords: Government; Religious Institutions, Inculcation; Entrepreneurship

Introduction

In the recent years, there is a recorded massive rural-urban drift, especially amongst the youth, who feel that they can make it better economically in the metropolitan areas of the country. In consequence, the unemployed simply have to fend for themselves and grapple with this new phenomenon to create jobs independently, self-employment as it is called and this has been the trend for over two decades. It is how the youths have fared in pursuit

of economic power/empowerment (entrepreneurship) and what the church and government can do to support them that constitute the thrust of this research work.

However, the inability of the government and church to effectively harness the potentials of the youths and empower them to be entrepreneurs and self-reliant has continued to foster poverty and undermine the potentials of economic growth that is inherent in them. There are two types of entrepreneurs, namely: entrepreneurs of choice and those of necessity. The difference between the two is that entrepreneurs of choice are into business as a vocation and learn to seize opportunities in this field of endeavor. On the other hand, entrepreneurs of necessity are mostly those who are encouraged into entrepreneurship as alternative means of survival. This group comprises the dominant majority in the informal sectors who live and operate at the level of petty business/trading. Another significant difference is that the first group often comprise of business people who have received special training in one field or the other that place them in position to generate self-employment and to provide employment for other people. The second group is generally described as businessmen and women by necessity. Put in another way, skill acquisition is paramount because it is a recognized panacea for poverty alleviation as it fosters entrepreneurship and, in some cases, leads to the provision of micro-credit finance.

In another vein, Onwubiko (2010) observes that Nigerian youths have numerous business and investment potentials due to the abundant, vibrant and dynamic talents inherent in them. However, the impact of the current global crisis and its attendant mass unemployment and job losses has brought to the front burner the issue of entrepreneurship and economic recovery. Thus, as the number of unemployed graduates in Nigeria continues to increase, there is a growing need to promote youth entrepreneurship and self-employment avenues. This is because youth-run enterprises will have a direct bearing on employment if young entrepreneurs hire fellow youth, and thereby address some of the socio-psychological problems and anti-social delinquency that arise from joblessness.

In view of the above fact, Ononogbu (2006) observes that government efforts alone cannot suffice to address all the problems in the society; hence, this research work solicits for the all-hands-on-deck approach. This approach entails that stake holders in the society contribute towards tackling social problems in the public space. It also implies that if a collective front is adopted to address social problems, there will be a higher degree of success. This research therefore, builds on the strength of this premise to propose a systematic and vigorous social theology that is both biblically authentic and culturally relevant because taking care of the poor and the needy is part of the church's social responsibility and such as a significant social institution.

Contextual Clarifications

For the purpose of clarity of thought and ideas in this research work, the concepts to be clarified are: church, government, entrepreneurship, and youth.

Church: As used in this study, the church is a community of believers in the Lord, Jesus Christ. It represents a microcosm of the larger society to which it is called to mirror the love of God as demonstrated in the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus. The church is also called to serve humanity through the love of God that it has received and shares with other members of the society.

Government: In the context of this study, government denotes the political leadership of the day. In other words, the usage in this study refers to the political leadership of Nigeria and Igboland in particular.

Entrepreneurship: According to Wikipedia Encyclopedia (2020), entrepreneurship is the act of being an entrepreneur. It is a French word meaning one who undertakes innovations, finance and business acumen in an effort to transform innovations, finance and business acumen in an effort to transform innovations into economic goods. In other words, entrepreneurship carries with it the idea of probably setting up a new (innovative) business idea, financing it or sourcing for fund as well as meeting an economic need in the society. Thus, in this study, the entrepreneurship is used to encompass the identification of socio-economic needs within a society, raising of funds and selling of the idea to meet both the needs of the society and the employment need of the entrepreneur and his team.

Youth: The concept of youth as used in this study refers to the years bracket between 15-30 years which falls within the category of 2022 Commonwealth policy. Chigunta (2002) however, asserts that the sociological denotation of youth represents the interface between childhood and adulthood. In this study, the concept includes all those who are within 15 to 30 years age bracket who have the potentials to stimulate economic growth, social progress and overall national development.

The Church, the Government and the Igbo Youths

There is no doubt that young people play a significant role in economic activities in developing countries. In the Igbo context, a lot still needs to be put in place to achieve the desired and required growth because the strength of any nation cannot be isolated from its hope for the future. The church, the government, and the general public are therefore expected to rise to the challenge of catalyzing the innovative and dynamic participation of our youths in entrepreneurship. It is saddening to say that the youths of the day have increasingly spent their energy in vices, while they generally put up an indifferent attitude

towards the issues of national development (Egbuna, 2001). However, time has come for the youths to turn around and take the bull by the horns so that they can contribute towards the liberation of the nation from the shackles of poverty, obscurity and shame through entrepreneurial skills.

With a population of over 200 million people, Nigeria is the most populated black African nation in the world. Estimates show that the youth constitute over a half of the total population (Giwa, 2008). Despite this pool of active human resources, much has not been achieved by way of channeling this useful resource to contributing to the expected overall economic development. The unemployment rate is still very high because the average Nigerian youth go after white-collar jobs, which are hardly available. This trend needs to be given attention to, and reversed because poverty, disease, lack of social infrastructure and lack of hope is the everyday reality for these millions of Nigerians. This is therefore, an outstanding area that requires collective efforts from the church and the government to jointly insert itself as formidable social actors with enormous responsibility in charting a new course for the Nigerian/Igbo youths. Kalu (2004) and Ononogbu (2008) have both pointed out the relevance of joint efforts in the context of bringing about social change in the society. With particular reference to the youth, Okwueze (1998) observes that the first form of wisdom literature consists of practical advice to young people on how they may obtain a successful and good life. Hence, the church has a basis for working with young people and impacting them positively. This includes the challenge of building a future where poverty and despair for the majority of the youth population are productive and resourceful; a situation where the youths would apply their resources (ideas and wealth) to produce utility and satisfy human want. The creation of utility necessitates profit to accumulate capital and to make a business productive enough to provide jobs. Thus, the entrepreneur engages in the vocation of Christian faith and church to be a more faithful disciple as an entrepreneur. In view of this, there is a compelling need to develop a model entrepreneurial and resourceful human element to tackle the numerous financial challenges facing the people. In the land of plenty, in the land blessed with enormous human and material resources, the youth should not be faced with the challenge of poverty in the land of plenty.

Obstacles and Solutions to Enhanced Entrepreneurship in Nigeria/Igbo Society

To achieve the target raised above, there are some obstacles that must be dealt with which include:

- (a) *Lack of Finances:* Young people are often frustrated by lack of funds or inability to access start-up capital or seed grants. There is no doubt that capital is one of the crucial factors that affects business. The church should network with both the

government and the organized private sectors to make funds available to budding and existing entrepreneurs. Assessing support from the government and organized private sectors will form a corporate social responsibility (CSR) which will go a long way in helping young people achieve more, rather than being idle. However, in the absence of these forms of support, the youths can explore alternative sources of funds like loans from friends and family amongst others. If a business idea is well-communicated and people can explicitly see the value derivable from it, it is likely that those sources would assist.

- (b) *Basic Management Skills:* Most youths do not have the basic skills to manage small businesses. There are a good number of young Nigerian graduates who desire to own and manage their businesses but in some cases the choice of business is usually different from their area of academic specialization. Hence, since the skills for being a successful entrepreneur differ, they need to learn more techniques of managing a business in order to achieve set goals. There is more to handling or managing a business than just personal interest or suggestions from people. Thus, any viable business management techniques should be adaptable in the real business world and young people who want to start business should be aware of what business plan is and its importance to success. For an effective business plan and management, access to capital and other capacity building initiatives is of utmost necessity.
- (c) *Infrastructure:* Infrastructures that directly or indirectly affect business success are not adequately provided for in Nigeria. Some of such amenities include electricity supply, good roads, portable water and effective transportation. As a matter of fact, for the youths to perform maximally in business there is an absolute need for motivation by creating the needed environment for both small and large scale businesses. Most youths have lost interest in setting up businesses because of the supposed harsh environment that affects business growth in Nigeria. For a budding enterprise to blossom it needs the required conducive business environment to grow. Government in partnership with the church is expected to create this type of environment by consciously formulating and implementing policies that will make it possible for businesses to thrive.
- (d) *Failure:* Failing in a particular venture or endeavor does not infer that the person is an all round failure. Failure is part of growth and young people should see it from the positive angle. It is not a crime to fail in an endeavor but many people fail to learn vital lessons from their past mistakes. The major reason for failure among some young people is because they are eager to make millions in the first few years venturing into business. This makes them to lose focus in hard work before

reaping the dividends from their labor. This should not be so; growing slowly and steadily is the key to successful business. In most cases, the few years of starting a business need to be used to create the right systems and consolidating on whatever one has been able to achieve. It is imperative to know that success is gradual and young people should be willing and equipped to give it all it takes to reach the apex.

- (e) *Mentoring/Coaching*: Recent studies have revealed the importance of having someone more experienced than one, to look up to, in whatever endeavor one is involved in cannot be over emphasized. The outcome of mentoring and coaching program has been tremendous because it provides the pedigree with the opportunity to share one's problems and challenges with a more experienced person who can guide and offer necessary assistance when needed. The act of mentoring and coaching guides the potential entrepreneur and makes him aspire towards greatness. It creates vision in form of a road map and provides an avenue for honest self-assessment. Nigerian youths should have both personal and collective mentors that can guide them on their way to the top.
- (f) *Partnership*: Studies have shown that most entrepreneurs in Nigeria (the youths inclusive) feel more comfortable working alone as sole-proprietors. This may not be helpful in all cases because people can pull resources together to form a network or alliance that can achieve more, than if they were operating as single entities or entrepreneurs.

The Role of the Church and the Government in Creating an Enabling Environment for Youth Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

In order to achieve the targets that have been set out in this paper, the following recommendations are suggested:

- (a) Being that access to finance is key to the success of any entrepreneurial venture, the church and the government should collaborate to prod the on-going reforms in the banking sector. This includes the recapitalization of commercial banks and the formation of micro-credit finance banks that are run by individuals and private organizations to replace community banks that were not functional. This should be done with the aim of reducing the bottlenecks involved in obtaining soft loans for young entrepreneurs who do not generally have the required collateral to be credit worthy to banks who only want to make profits from their investments.
- (b) Another important area where the church can influence government policy is in the area of efficiency in the process of registering a business or enterprise with the

Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) in Nigeria. Currently, the process involved appear simple but for grassroots like in the Local Government Headquarters where many of these young business entrepreneurs live and operate. For them, going to the state capitals where the CAC offices are located are expensive and time consuming. The church can assist the youths in getting through this simple but apparently frightening process. Hence, many young people run business without registering them officially. If the church steps in to support them through this process, then many more people can delve into the arena of business.

- (c) Currently, the electric power system in Nigeria is nothing to write home about and this is a very crucial factor for young entrepreneurs who are often unable to procure and maintain generating sets from the onset of their business life. Thus, it is recommended that the church should also try to influence government policy in this area. This will ensure that the environment will be conducive for young people to nurture and pursue their business ideas.

Conclusion

Through the course of the research, it was discovered that government's policies and projects have not really empowered the youth and given them substantial means and opportunities to participate constructively in the economy. Although, the study did not specifically deal with the reasons behind this development, it is apparent that government's economic reforms did not open up the national economy such that they did not have any direct bearing on the situation of the youth in Nigeria. More so, over the years, most of the national social structures recorded some level of growth but collapsed at the long run while the youth population has continued to grow. Thus, unless something is done to enable young people become fully integrated into the mainstream of the society, they will continue to be a social burden on the nation. On the strength of these conclusions given under the conditions under which the average youth struggles to find his feet economically, the study pointed out that one viable option towards empowering the youths is for both the church and the government to step into the terrain and proffer valid support and skills acquisition/entrepreneurship training and packages to young people.

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