

OYO-JONAPHER • SD

**Journal of the Nigeria Association
for Physical, Health Education,
Recreation, Sports and Dance
Oyo State Chapter
ISSN 1119-9865**



Volume 5 Number 1 2007

**Journal of the Nigeria Association
For Physical, Health Education,
Recreation Sports and Dance, Oyo
State Chapter
(OYO-JONAPHER. SD**

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**Journal of Nigeria Association for Physical, Health Education,
Recreation Sports and Dance,
Oyo State Chapter (OYO-JONAPHER.SD)**
C/o Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Volume 5 No. 1 2007

ISSN 1119-9865

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NATIONAL REBIRTH AS A PRE-QUISITE FOR ACHIEVING GOALS OF HEALTH SECTOR REFORM: THE ROLE OF HEALTH EDUCATION

By

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Abstract

Government put in place reform agenda in health sector apparently to facilitate the achievement for all Nigerians a level of health that will permit them to lead a socially and economically productive live as enunciated in the National Policy on Health. However, the goal of the reform became difficult to achieve due to poor attitude of the people to National issues. There arose the need for national rebirth. The paper examined concepts of national rebirth, need for national rebirth efforts of government at National rebirth as well as health education. The paper noted that national rebirth programme embarked upon is laudable but lacks a force that could really do the magic of attitudinal change in the people. It therefore recommended the integration of health education into the National rebirth programme.

Introduction

Improvement of the state of health and well being of an individual in a country is the main struggle of the government that wants to be popular among the governed. There is therefore the need to overhaul constantly as the case may be structures and policies in order to effect changes that could bring about meaningful development to the society. The changes in human endeavour that could guarantee enhanced standard of living to mankind is commonly called reform.

Ojeme (2007), described reform as attempts of government to reshape and reinvigate various aspects of a national life to bring about improvement in our society. He further said that it could be in form of introduction of new policies, new programme, valued attitudes, restructuring of machineries of government as well as laws that are designed to accelerate overall development. In other words, reform is a strategic tool used by government to bring about

national development in various sectors, the result of which is improved quality of life of the citizenry.

By 1999, Nigeria had all features of a failed state, institutions and structure had collapsed, political space was suffocated, civil society was intimidated and government had lost all its credibility. Thonvere in Uzoalor (2007) The level of health of Nigerians remain unimpressive. Maternal Mortality Rates (MMR) of 800 per 100,000 live births in the country ranks the highest in the world. Infant mortality, child mortality and under five mortality rates are unacceptably high at 100 per 1,000; 112 per 1,000 and 201 per 1000 respectively (UNEFPA, 2005). The life expectancy at birth is 54 years but this figure is expected to be on the decline as a result of the pandemic of HIV/AIDS. The average national prevalent rate of HIV is 5.0% while the youths are the most vulnerable group with a prevalent rate of between 5.9% and 6.3% (UNEFPA, 2005). Poor resource allocation, obsolete equipment and lack of basic health statistics all contribute to low quality of health service. The overall impact is that a marginal percentage of the nations population has access to modern health service.

The government under the leadership of Olusegun Obasanjo put in place reform agenda in the sectors of education, economy, health, agriculture, sports, telecommunication and system of government. This is with a view to bringing the country back on track for development and eventual political and economic stability. However, in the face of deep-rooted dishonesty, corruption, disobedience, unpatriotic behaviour, religious intolerance and unsanitary practices, the achievement of the goals of the reform could be a mirage. Therefore, there is need for a programme that will clear the vices from the psyche of the citizens of the nation for the people to embrace the virtues that will facilitate the needed change.

The new orientation that will usher in new life can facilitate the actualization of goals of reform. A reawakening of knowledge in the form of rebirth should be given a serious consideration if necessary change is to be achieved. Rebirth is a period of great enlightenment and change of attitudes, which often lead to activity. It involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills and disposition, which can facilitate the achievement of desired national development. The goal of National Rebirth cannot be different from that of health education which focuses on people and their action. According to WHO as reviewed by Achalu (1993) Health Education helps to

promote in an individual a sense of identity, dignity and responsibility as well as community solidarity. Health Education, no doubt has a crucial role to play in enhancing the realization of the goals of National rebirth as well as health sector reform programme.

Concept of National Rebirth

The period in history between the dark ages of the medieval period and the beginning of modern times marked the period of reassurance. The medieval period was characterized by low interest in learning, lack of originality, high tolerance for corruption, perversion and immorality. The renaissance caused a change from this way of life.

The period of military rule in Nigeria could be likened to the dark ages. During the period, the environment was educationally unfriendly as schools were in shambles. Dilapidated school buildings made it impossible for any meaningful learning to take place. Teachers were ill-equipped and poorly paid and so found it difficult to give their best in terms of teaching. Poor and dehumanizing state of the people who are academically inclined made the generation of new ideas practically impossible. Researchers were constrained by lack of tools and sky rocketed cost of writing materials. Information flow was poor as freedom of the press was put on hold. People resulted into all forms of vices to make both ends meet. Diseases continue to ravage the health of the people. Nigerians lost confidence in their government and the spirit of patriotisms was at the low ebb.

The renaissance began initially about 1400AD and swept across the Western Europe. It brought a burst of intellectual growth, an era of enlightenment. People quested for knowledge and beauty. The search for truth and knowledge produced the intellectual movement known as the renaissance (Rebirth) (Flynn & Heffron, 1988).

During the Renaissance, medicine underwent a great burst of new knowledge. The scientific method of inquiry or research was introduced, Leonardo Dan Vinci began a study of human anatomy. According to Flynn and Heffron (1988) many of his discoveries dispelled myths about illness thus care of the sick took a new direction. There was revival of learning, a belief in the dignity of human beings and a renewed spirit of nationalism.

The third Republic in Nigeria ushered in new era. The government is showing interest in addressing the problems of the nation by

putting in place various reform agenda. In fact with all the policies and programmes in place Nigeria is set to witness Golden Age.

Health Sector Reforms and its objectives

Health sector reform is a world wide phenomenon. The reason is borne out of the fact that the unipolar economic system of the world as well as effects of globalization had compelled and shift towards markets. Therefore, health care like other social sector is now driven by the cost. The main issue now is how to provide cost effective health care. As a result, every nation is compelled to reform health sector in order to make them accessible, affordable and most especially cost effective.

In Nigeria, the process of health sector reform is primarily to increase the efficiency of health system while ultimate goals remains improved status of the people. In this way health sector reform is a way to reinvigorate the national health policy.

Prior to the emergence of reform proper, government had put in place certain tools for reform. According to (UNEPPA, 2005) tools for reform constitute discrete areas of health system functions, organizations and structures that matter fundamentally for health system performance. One of such is National Health Policy, which was prepared with wide participation of professional in the field. Another one is the availability of abundant data on the state of the country's health services. National Population Commission ensures availability of vital statistical data by making it compulsory for people to do the registration of marriage, birth and deaths. Also, data were generated from research studies and health institution records. Yet another one is that various bilateral and multilateral agencies have not only provided financial and logistical supports to government they have also initiated project for strengthening the health sector (UNEPPA, 2005). Government was able to catch good image for the country by complying with charter on health. This has encouraged various bilateral and multilateral agencies to provide financial and logistic supports to ensure a strong health sector.

The Primary Health Care was adopted as the main instrument for achieving health for all Nigerian. Primary Health Care is the first level of contact of the individual, family and community by its design. In order to make the Primary Health Care to be more effective, an appraisal was undertaken with the aim of revitalizing the programme. Also framework for strengthening the health care was put in place. In Nigeria, National Health Insurance

Scheme was launched on the 6th June 2006. The scheme aim at increasing the health service coverage. The health care benefits of the scheme include child, maternal and reproductive health. The initiatives on malaria, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and other communicable diseases are also important reforms in health sector. The Roll Back malaria initiative aim, at promoting the prevention through provision of insecticides treated mosquito nets, health education, environmental sanitation and chemotherapy (FMOH 2000). Nigeria developed HIV/AIDS Emergency Action Plan (HEAP) document for the control of the disease. Also National Actions AIDS Committee (NACA) State Action AIDS Committee (SACA) and Local Government Actions AIDS Committee (LACA) were established to prevent the epidemic of the disease. NACA is giving support to Civil Society Consultative Group on HIV/AIDS in Nigeria (CSCGHAN) an umbrella for Non-Governmental Organisation/Civil Society Organisation/Community Based Organisation (NGO/CSO/CBOS) that work on the control of HIV/AIDS epidemic.

UNFPA (2005) describe Health sector reform programme as a health sector response to National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and provides the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) for the public health sector. The seven major thrusts are:

- a. Improving the stewardship role of government.
- b. Strengthening the national health system and its management.
- c. Reducing the burden of disease
- d. Improving availability of health resources and their management.
- e. Improving access to quality health services.
- f. Improving consumers' awareness and community involvement
- g. Promoting effective partnership, collaboration and co-ordination.

A draft plan of Action 2000-2006 prepared for the United Kingdom Department for International Development. (DID) as reviewed by Nzeagwu (2007) identified thirteen reform objectives. They are

1. Expand and strengthen primary health services throughout the country.
2. Eradicate, eliminate and control childhood and other vaccine preventable diseases through adequate routine immunization activities.

3. Integrate and strengthen all diseases control efforts and health promotion activities into health care at primary care level.
4. Address the demographic problems through the provision of family and reproductive health services including the necessary services to reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted infections and HIV infection.
5. Reduce environmental and occupational health morbidity and mortality.
6. Rapidly resuscitate and improve the service of the secondary health care to serve as referral for Primary Health Care.
7. Broaden financial options to expand and improve access to affordable and adequate health care to majority of Nigerians.
8. Improve investigative, diagnostic and treatment capability of Tertiary Health facilities to serve effectively in the country.
9. Ensure the attainment of the goals and objectives of the National Drug Policy (NDP), which focuses on self-reliance in essential drugs, vaccines and biological through local manufacture and effective drug administration and control system.
10. Protect the public from harmful effect of taking drugs, unregistered medicines and processed foods.
11. Ensure that the support given by donors, NGOs and UN agencies is provided within the framework of the National Health Policy and Plans.
12. Strengthen policy formulation, general management, financial management and planning capacity of the Federal Ministry of Health and parastatals.
13. Strengthen the capacity to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate evidence based national health policy programme and activities to accommodate the interest of new parties to the reform.
14. Institutionalize and manage competition between a public-private partnership and the national health accounts.

Need for National Rebirth

The fall of Roman Empire in West about 476 resulted in period in history that is frequently referred to as the Dark Ages (Bucher, 1979). Consideration of circumstances that led to the fall of Roman Empire is pertinent, as similarities can be drawn from the Nigeria situation. Bucher (1979) listed among other things the

causes of the fall of Roman Empire to include moral decay of Roman people. The type of life Roman led was characterized by divorce and suicide, which majorly caused a decrease in population. Extravagance and misuse of public funds caused economic ruin. Luxurious living, vices and excesses caused poor health and physical deterioration. The situation as depicted above is not different from what obtained in Nigeria. There is a sharp decline in moral value among the people, poor attitude to work contribute to low efficiency and poor productivity. The ailing economy has defied all economic theories and policies. Corruption has eaten deep into fabric of the society. There incessant is responsible for power failure, irregular water supply and poor road construction.

Infact, the situation at the power sector is so bad that the president threatened to declare state of emergency on the sector. Huge amount of money has been sunk into the energy sector with virtually no result. Teachers are too busy with economic activities during the schools hours and so have no time to teach. They often left them students unattended to. The students who are themselves not ready to learn resulted into cheating to pass examinations. The international agencies had in many occasions decried our poor reading culture. No country with such a magnitude of indiscipline could attain desired development envious of other nations.

Efforts of Government at National Rebirth

The first step towards achieving the objectives of any developmental programmes is the establishment of framework for awareness and proper education. There may also be the need for the people to evolve socially desirable attitude, culture and values in order to create enabling environment for the programme to thrive.

In Nigeria, our attitude and culture are badly affected as the value is misplaced. The attitude of most Nigerian to social amenities is bad as people see them as government properties meant to be treated with less care. Hence, each time there is a protest against government policy they are vandalized. Attitude to work is nothing to write home about as people come to office late and handle official duties with utmost unpatriotic manner, lack of maintenance culture on the part of government lead to array of abandoned projects and poor state of many social amenities.

Most often, people fail to keep appointments, schedules are never met as time management could be rated as low as below average. People do not value good environment as it is polluted with

human activities such as noise, use of chemicals and indiscriminate refuse dumping. The value placed on life is low as people engage in destructive activities such as dangerous driving, bush burning, abuse of drug and smoking of Indian hem, marijuana and cigarette.

Nigerian government had long realized the importance of National Rebirth in the form of infusing discipline in all facets of our national life to the achievement of objectives of any programme. In this regards policies and programmes were put in place for the purpose. War Against Indiscipline (WAI) was inaugurated on the 20th March 1994. WAI was motivated by a sense of mission to infuse discipline in all facets of national life. It also aimed at combating environmental and social indiscipline. Mass mobilization, Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) were instituted in 1987 to curb all forms of malpractices and mismanagement of public funds. National Orientation Agency (NOA) was established to create public awareness of government new policies and programmes. It aimed at using the instrument of social mobilization and sensitization for people to imbibe the spirit of patriotism, oneness and unity of purpose. National rebirth was introduced by Olusegun Obasanjo's administration apparently to put a stop to those attitudes and practices that slow down the pace of development of the nation. The aim of national rebirth among things includes avoidance of corruption, imbibing spirit of patriotism, selfless services, good health practices, positive thinking about the country and promotion of good culture.

National Rebirth and Health Education

National rebirth is all about positive change in attitude and value. Human behaviour is a measure of his/her attitude. Since knowledge is an instrument for effecting attitudinal change, therefore for National rebirth programme to succeed in leading citizens to change attitudes and values, relevant knowledge provision must be ensured.

The ultimate aim of health reform is improved condition of health of the citizenry. Good health could be achieved through the educational process of health knowledge provision for the protection and maintenance of personal and community health. Health education is an effective means of helping individual to improve his/her health knowledge and develop attitudes that facilitate good health practice.

The people provided with scientific fact about health should be able to make informed decision regarding health issues. In this way people could be helped to take necessary preventive measures against other health problems. The contemporary health problem occurrence in Nigeria include unsanitary waste disposal, drug abuse, alcoholism, cigarette smoking, teenage pregnancy. Poor sexual behaviour with its attendant sexually transmitted infections and traffic offences leading to increased accident occurrence. Proper health education should be put in place to stem the tide of these problems.

Ajala (2003) noted that it is through the process of education that citizens of a democratic society are alerted to the personal and societal obstacles to good health. The needed changes in human behaviour that could make the society a better place to live is embedded in health education. Such qualities as trust, worthiness, dependability, social consciousness, loyalty, morality, patriotisms and sense of fairness as well as adherence to democratic principle are all products of changes as a result of result of national rebirth programme through effective health education.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, health sector had experienced its worst specifically during the Military administration. This decay culminated into poor state of equipment and facilities, dismal coverage of health service and unacceptably low level of performance of medical personnel. The last administration embarked on the reform in health sector to address this anomaly.

However, corruption and other vices that have permeated all facets of our national life slowed down the work of the refund agenda. There arose the need for Nigerians to evolve the right attitude that would create conducive environment for the reform agenda to thrive. Hence, National Health reform instituted by the same administration. However, Health Education is a programme that could enhance the effectiveness of the reform agenda.

Recommendation

In order to reinforce the role of health education in enhancing the effectiveness of national rebirth, the following recommendations are made;

1. Government must ensure the interpretation health education into the National rebirth programme.
2. Health education must be taught as a national subject. It should be introduced into the curricular of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria.
3. Provision must be made for waste disposal facilities so as to encourage sanitary practices at work places, market places, schools and other public places.

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