

Impact of Children Evangelism Ministry on Youth and Nation Building

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Abstract

Youths are the backbone of every society. They are a significant group in terms of nation building because they have a lot of potentials in them that can be harnessed to nation building. They are strong and possess ideas that could be useful in nation building. Unfortunately, these potentials have not been valued, the youths are looked down upon as such issues of their development and welfare are neglected. It is on this background that this paper examined the impact of Children Evangelism Ministry (CEM) on youth and Nation building in Nigeria. The paper identifies the mode of operation of CEM and the goals. The significance of youth participation in nation building is also portrayed. The paper again examines the role of the church in developing youths for national development. The paper concludes by highlighting the impact of CEM on youth and nation building. The paper uses descriptive method where the secondary sources which includes text books, journals, newspapers and electronic media are used in gathering information. The paper focused on the impact of Children Evangelism Ministry and nation building. It recommends that children ministries should be mobilized to ensure that Children are properly developed, as their work is preparing the youth for the future, Government should also develop programs and policies that focus more on the development of youths.

Keywords: Youth, Nation Building, Impact.

Introduction

Youths are a significant population in Nigeria and are a productive force, youths play a vital and significant role in nation building as they are the leaders of tomorrow and future of the nation. Idike and Eme (2013) said that “the wheel of development of any country lies on the shoulder of how productive and creative the youthful populations are. Where they are properly harnessed, they contribute immensely towards nation building”. Youths can sometimes be used negatively. Idike and Ime (2013) opined that, “they are easily manipulated to engage in vices, because of the advantages of this group, most politicians use them as political tools instead of engaging them in activities that will lead to national development. They are used to pull down the nation”. However, religion is a vital organ of the society that can be used in nation building. In this regard, religion being an aspect of the three foundations has played a vital role in building Nigerian nation. The church does not deal with only adults but also deals with the development of children to ensure that they grow to be good citizens of the nation they belong to. The church is saddled with the

responsibility to "train up a child in a way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov.22:6).

Within the church is the children ministry which is associated with children organizations. Children evangelism ministry (CEM) is one of such organizations, focused to train children holistically- mentally, physically spiritually and socially. Children evangelism ministry is able to train Nigerian youths from childhood through the holistic approach. If the youths are properly guided from childhood through the activities of children evangelism ministry they will not in any way allow themselves to be used negatively against the nation, instead they will contribute immensely to the development of the nation. It is in line with this that this paper examines the impact of children evangelism ministry on the youth in Nation building with Nigeria as a focus.

Mode of operation of Children Evangelism Ministry and the goals

Children Evangelism Ministry (CEM) is an interdenominational, a non-sectarian Christian missionary organization, fully committed to

total development and welfare of the child. She operates through the church Sunday schools and Bible clubs. The president of children Evangelism ministry is Tony Chukwudile. The ministry started since 1979, it assumed the present name in 1982 and was incorporated in 1985. The headquarters of the ministry is at Ilorin. CEM is functional in all states of the federation with foreign offices in nations like Ghana, Cote-d'ivoire, Cameroon, Gambia, Liberia, USA and United Kingdom. (Haruna 2008:76).

CEM vision is that all children be reached with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ by trained Christians, that they be disciplined in such a way that they become like Jesus Christ, physically, spiritually, mentally and socially. (Luke 2:52). The Children Evangelism Ministry (CEM) mission statement is "to correct the neglect of the children in the evangelistic effort and to impact the life of Christ into them for the church and the whole society" CEM (2021).

Children Evangelism Ministry operates eleven programs in order to ensure a total development of a child. The motto of the ministry is "train up a child now as a solid foundation for a better tomorrow" (Prov.22:6). Children Evangelism Ministry is also of the view that "it is better to build children than to repair men". This is in support of the fact that the child's mind is a complete Tabularasa at birth and it grows with whatever is planted on it (CEM Manual, 2004). Parents are usually the first people to instill value system in children. This shows that character and values are better instilled from the formative years of a child.

The following programmes/ activities as discussed by CEM training manual (2017101-102) operated by the Children Evangelism Ministry can play an effective role in developing youths to be nation builders:

- **Sunday schools:** The ministry assists the churches in organizing and running effective and result oriented Sunday schools, through the trained teachers.
- **Children Bible Clubs:** are run by trained teachers in the neighborhood, primary schools, and handicapped homes etcetera. Children outreaches like holiday camps, rallies, crusades,

vocational Bible schools, Joy fairs and picnics are also a means of developing youths as nation builders.

- **Qualitative Education:** The ministry runs Daycare-Centres, Nursery/Primary/Secondary schools, formal and informal learning centers to reach children with the gospel of Christ along with the learning processes.
- **Research and Literature Development:** Children are selected from all centers and taken to Ilorin for camping programme where they are taught about Christian literature media. They are made to write moral stories according to their life experiences, they are developed into booklets. One of such material is titled "True Life Testimonies Vol. 1 Published in 2015. A video cassette titled not without a mission was produced by CEM and was launched in August, 2016. More of such literature have been produced in recent times.

Mission Programmes

The ministry does organise mission camps for children especially those that just finished their secondary schools. This is aimed at exposing and involving them in mission work.

Other programs include; Health care, social welfare, support mobilization, organization and man power development, baby ministry and women who care and campus link.

The above programmes can go a long way in preparing youths for nation building.

These programmes are organized by the ministry in order to achieve the following goals:

- ❖ To reach children with the gospel of Christ.
- ❖ To raise Christ-centered and intellectually developed children to influence the society.
- ❖ To produce books, Christian films that will meet the physical, social, mental and spiritual needs of the children and equipped the adults for children ministry.

- ❖ To help the children to live holy lives and become good citizens of their society.
- ❖ To prepare them for the future etcetera
- ❖ To cater for the physical wellbeing of the child among the neglected people groups.
- ❖ To develop children workers so that they will be able to mould the character of the children with the skills acquired from training etc.

Youths and Nation Building

Nation building does not only constitute physical development, it is a process of structuring a national identity using the power of the state with the aim of uniting the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run (Google Arts and Culture, 2022). For this to be done effectively, there is the need to have capable leaders and the stake holders that are willing to support them. Bharatiya (2022) once said that, “if you want to build a Nation, we have to create patriotism first”, meaning that the leaders should simulate the upcoming citizens to be devoted to their country and also ready to support their country. In line with this, the Google arts (2022) observe that; “Nation builders are those members of a state who take the initiative to develop the National community through government programs including military description and National content mass school”. This shows that leaders should focus in the training of future leaders and they are non-other than the youths.

Youth is a quality of being young. It is a period that precedes maturity. It is a period between childhood and adulthood. There is no universal definition of youth, each country defines it differently. Eugene and Okechukwu (2014) gives the analysis of definition of youth by various nations thus, “Ghana and Tanzania and South Africa define the youth population as those between fifteen (15) and thirty five (35) years of age, Nigeria and Switzerland define it as those between twelve and thirty (30) years, and Botswana and Mauritius defines it as those between fourteen (14) and twenty five (25) years.

The youths are young and still at the stage of development and they have a lot of potentials

in them in which if developed can be harnessed to nation building. This stage is beneficial to nation building in that they are strong and possess ideas that could be useful in nation building. Eugene and Okechukwu (2014:172) quoted the national youth's development policy as saying that;

Youth are the foundation of a society, their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides in economic development and socio-political attainments. In their dreams and hopes, a nation finds her motivation, on their energies, she builds her vitality and purpose. And because of their dreams and aspirations, the future of a nation is assured.

The above quotation shows that youth cannot be neglected in nation building. Building a nation without their participation means that the nation will not attain her great height.

Again the world population shows that youths are the most populated in the world. Vendat (2021) C. reports that, “half of the population is under the age of 25 and that 1.8 billion people are between the Ages of 11-25”. He also said that 62 % of Indian population are youths Business day (2022) postulated the population of the Nigerian youth as 53.7 % aged 15 to 65, and median age of 18. Business day (2022) also acknowledged that “the country has the largest youth population globally”. This group could be a source of labour inputs as well as Human capital in production which would improve total factor productivity in a region of the world where capital formation is limited (Idike and Innocent, 2015).

Furthermore, youths are the most productive set of the population being that they are the ones that provide labour. With this population Business day (2022) sees it as an opportunity for harnessing its sustainable development and growth through the empowerment of its youths”

For any tangible growth to take place in any nation, the youth must be significantly in the process of growth. Wise nations, countries, groups and organizations focus more on the development of youths so that the future of such investment would never be improvised or blind.

The Role of the Church in Developing Youth for National development

The role of the church in training youth for national development cannot be over emphasized. Ozekhome in Sun (2019) identifies the following roles of the church:

- Giving sound, Bible-based counsel that builds spirituality
- Principles that can motivate bonding and bridging social capital through community service, corporation, peace-making, pursuit of social justice and the possibility of respect and tolerance.
- Preserves western civilization
- Strengthens the social fabrics
- Transforms the society positively
- Provides restraint by teaching personal responsibility and accountability.
- The above roles are also targeted at children being tomorrow's church where youths pass through during their formation period. In order to fulfil the above functions, Thea (2022) identifies the following as aims of children ministries:
 - To give children direction in life as regards their spiritual well-being.
 - To build their moral character
 - To create an atmosphere of fellowship with like-minded Christians.
 - To combat peer-Pressure
 - Gaining knowledge of Biblical truths.
 - To help the children to discern in the decisions they make as they grow to adulthood.
 - To learn the importance of church: that the church is essential for the well-being of all Christians.

In line with the above CEM manual (2017) lists the aims of children church as follows:

- To get the children to be born again
- To give children the appropriate attention.
- To equip children with efficient tools to fight against destructive elements that attempt to confuse their lives during a period of intellectual, physical and emotional development.
- For the child to know, love and serve God.

The above aims are in line with the roles of the church and the aims of children ministries as a whole. The church is therefore able to achieve the above through her affiliation with children evangelism ministry that engages in training children teachers with the methods that will enhance their work.

Impact of CEM on Youth and Nation Building

The impact of children Evangelism ministry (CEM) on youth and nation building cannot be over emphasized being that CEM aims at training children for a successful life in future as stated in their motto which is "train up a child now as a solid foundation for a better tomorrow". This is embedded in God's instruction to the Israelites in proverbs 22:6 which is: "Train up a child in a way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it (NIV).

This ministry is adequate in the formation of children to adulthood, being that no one is born as a youth or an adult, every one passes through childhood to adulthood through various agents of socialization which includes; the family, the school, peer spiritually, socially, mentally and physically, Children Evangelism ministry can make the following impact on youths which will translate to national development.

Fear of God:

The Bible commands man to fear God. According to Bennet (2023) fear of the Lord "means having awe for God's Power and authority. Rather than causing someone to be afraid of God a proper fear of the lord leads one to love him". Fearing the Lord means to do good and depart from evil. (Proverbs 8:13) children are led to accept Christ as their lord. And personal savior through which the love of God is established in their hearts, through the

teaching of God's word they will appropriate the lessons learnt. As they grow in the fear of the Lord, the law of God is internalized and they will choose never to do evil, not for the fear of being caught, but because of God's love in them. On this Ogebenika (2021) is of the view that; a balanced and all-encompassing formation of the youths in Nigeria would be achievable if they are also taught the need for spiritual growth, and the role of God in their lives. This aspect of youth formation is indispensable as it positions the youth to view their pursuits and aspirations from a stand point of purpose and morality, guided by the fear of God and a desire to do their will. When the youths are nurtured in the fear of God it will be a strong foundation in them, they will exhibit the fear of God in all their actions, thereby contributing to building a nation void of corruption.

Courage:

Courage has to do with having confidence to attempt a difficult project or to overcome peer-pressure. When Joshua was to take over leadership after the death of Moses, God said "be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them" (Joshua 1:6) it is a vital part of everyday life and an important quality for nation building.

Determination:

This character can help children to avoid the temptation to become a pessimist. It can also equip him with the indispensable knowledge that present struggles are simply building blocks for future achievement. This character will help the youths to be able to face any hardship that is ahead.

Discipline and obedience:

Discipline and obedience are also strong blocks in nation building.

Rules play a vital role in discipline and obedience. Eme and Innocent (2015) said that "where there is no discipline and set rules to govern the society, anarchy would certainly follow"

In this society everyone will live as he wish, it will lead to confusion and that kind of a society will not develop talk less of being stable. On this, sociologists observe that "a society without consistent values will not survive" (A

handbook in CRS, 2010). Youths that possess these qualities can contribute meaningfully to nation building.

Patriotism:

Refers to love for one's nation. A patriotic youth will try his best to protect the image of his country. According to Eme and Innocent (2015), "A patriotic youth will not engage in corrupt behaviour because he knows that corruption is inimical to national development" "A patriotic individual has special concern for the well-being of the nation and is willing to make sacrifice in order to promote the nation's good.

Honesty:

Honesty refers to truthfulness. Honesty means ceasing to be dishonest Buhari (2022) Observed that Honesty is a critical quality in all interactions with other people" it creates a healthy relationship among people. You don't need to swear before people take you by your word. Jesus said "let your yes be yes and your no be no (Mathew 5:37) Honesty therefore is strong quality in nation building because it prevents deceit and thereby leads to transparency.

Conclusion:

It is the pride of every nation to see that the nation is progressing. In every society youths are important in nation building being that they are the most populated group and they provide the labour force in the society. Youths should therefore be trained to grow with the mentality that nation building is their responsibility. This work can successfully be carried out by children evangelism ministry being that the organization focuses on reaching out to the children by ensuring that they are developed totally. They also focus on raising godly children that will become responsible citizens viewing the fact that everyone passes through childhood to becoming a youth or adult all stakeholders should cooperate with all children organizations to ensure that youths grow up with virtues that will lead to nation building.

Recommendations

Following the impact of children evangelism ministry on youth and nation development, these are recommended:

- Churches should liaise with children evangelism ministry to ensure that their teachers are adequately trained and equipped with the modern methods of teaching the children.
- Parents should encourage the ministry by allowing the children to attend the Bible clubs where the children are reached with the gospel of Christ and taught how to grow in Christ.
- The church should endeavor to teach youths the skill of peace keeping so that they will keep peace and make the society stable.
- Government should encourage the teaching of Christian Religious studies in nursery, Primary and secondary schools so as to compliment the efforts of children evangelism ministry as the children pass through the formation stage. This will ensure that every youth that has passed through these stages is adequately equipped with the values that will translate to making the Youths good citizens and thereby serve as instruments to curbing national insecurity.
- Government should also ensure that youths are equipped with the appropriate skills for driving social, environmental and economic progress.

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