

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT THROUGH QUALITY EDUCATION

BY

***CHIEF (HAJIA) REKIYA ENEMONA MOMOH-ABAJI
PhD***

***BEING A KEYNOTE ADDRESS @ THE 15TH ANNUAL
NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF IGALA
ASSOCIATION, USA***

DATE: *30TH AUGUST, 2014*

VENUE: *HAMPTON INN & SUITES, MARYLAND, USA*

TIME: *PM*

PROTOCOLS:

It is my utmost delight to give this keynote address at this vital and auspicious conference. I feel a sense of privilege that the organizers considered me worthy to play such a pivotal role. Thank you very much one and all, Madam President, more especially.

I do recognize that this address is intended to lead a robust discussion for a *“meaningful exchange of ideas”* with the ultimate goal of enabling us to *“proffer workable solutions to the myriad of problems faced by the educational system in our land”*. This goal is in focus and I am glad to lead the discussion towards achieving it for the benefit of the Igala kingdom.

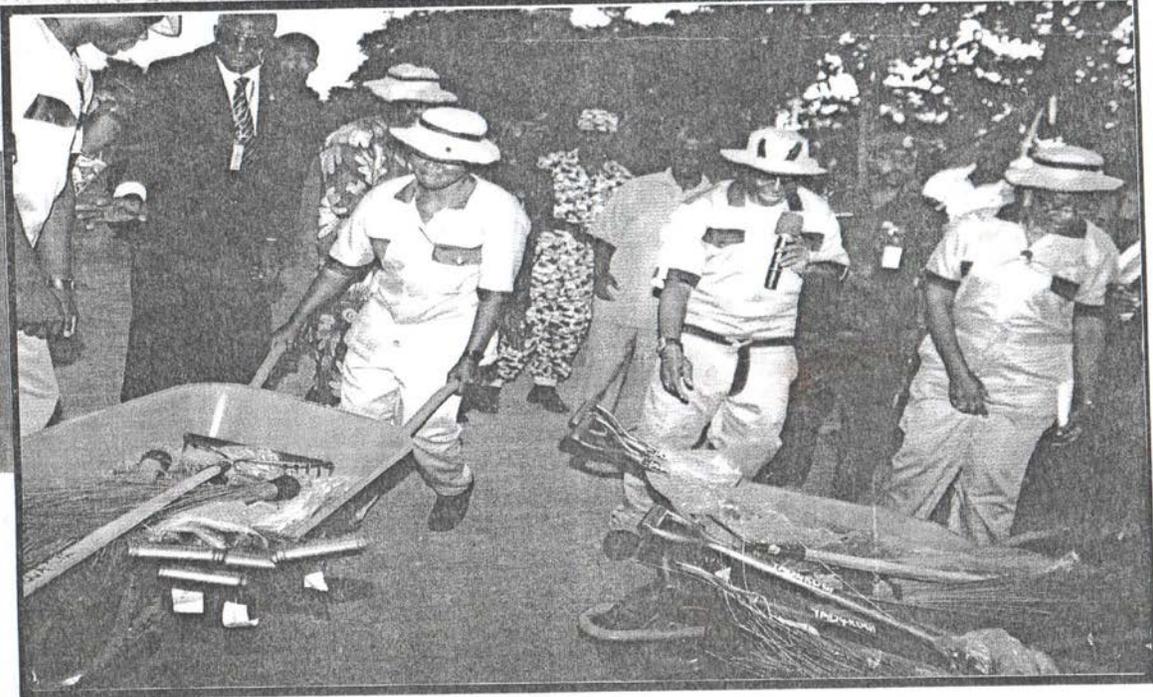
TERM DEFINED:

There are two twin-words in the topic which need to be understood to put our discussion in appropriate perspective. The words are ***“Youth Empowerment”*** and ***Quality Education”***.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT:

Youth Empowerment is an attitudinal, structural, cultural and enterpreneural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement positive change in their own lives and the lives of other people including youth and adults.

It is also the process of obtaining basic opportunities for marginalized people either directly by those people, or through the help of non- marginalized others who share their own access to these opportunities as can be seen in the desire of this group {Igala USA Association}. The kind of activities the First Lady of Kogi State Hajia Ladi Wada engages in can be categorized as empowerment under her Non-Governmental Organisation - Kogi Women Empowerment Network (KOWEN). She has empowered Youths and Women particularly. Just as His Excellency in addition to the entire governance activities has a Youth Empowerment Network and a specific parastatal for Youth engagement manned by a special Adviser.



His Excellency, Capt. Idris Wada Chatting with some officials

Empowerment can be in several ways and it is widely accepted that significant improvements in training the workforce of tomorrow, requires real change at the heart of learning and teaching. George Gendon, founder of Inc Magazine opines that *"Youth entrepreneurship programs are essential part of preparing boys and girls, Young men and women to take charge of their economic destiny"* .

In a paper released by the consortium for Entrepreneurship Education (2006) a case is made that entrepreneurship Education reaches out to kids who lack interest in traditional learning models and approaches and students of all kinds from the disaffected to the gifted and talented, can be motivated to dream big dreams and work to make them happen.

This suggests the need to re-examine our current educational practices and banish any assumption that what was good enough for us is good enough for our kids. This is to say that our focus for intervention will not be the conventional *"Go to school, make good grades, get a job and settle down with family"*.

In our attempt to understand Quality Education, let it be known that the provision of quality basic Education for children is an obligation stated in the Convention on the Right of a child. In reviewing relevant literature for quality education, I stumbled on and adopted UNICEF's definition with a broad perspective which demonstrates that for education to be considered qualitative, programmes therein must encompass a broader definition involving learners, content, process, environments and outcomes. In a working paper UNICEF: 2000 described quality education to include

- Learners who are healthy, well nourished and ready to participate and learn, supported by families and communities
- Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and provide adequate resources and facilities
- Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for acquisition of basic skills, especially in areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life and knowledge in such areas as civics, gender, ethics, nutrition, health especially in topical issues like HIV/AIDS prevention and maybe the current dreaded Ebola and Peace
- Processes through which trained teachers use child-centered teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms, schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities.
- Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to National goals and competitiveness for education and positive participation in society.

The systemic nature of education is brought to the fore here and no segment can be said to be complete without the other.

Bearing in mind all the characteristics of quality education listed above, I took a look at our National Policy on Education, 2004: 4th Edition to examine if the desires expressed in there meet the set criteria for what quality education should be. A vital aspect of the Nigerian Education Policy entails:

- a) The development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen
- b) The full integration of the individual into the community and
- c) The provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the Country at primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system.

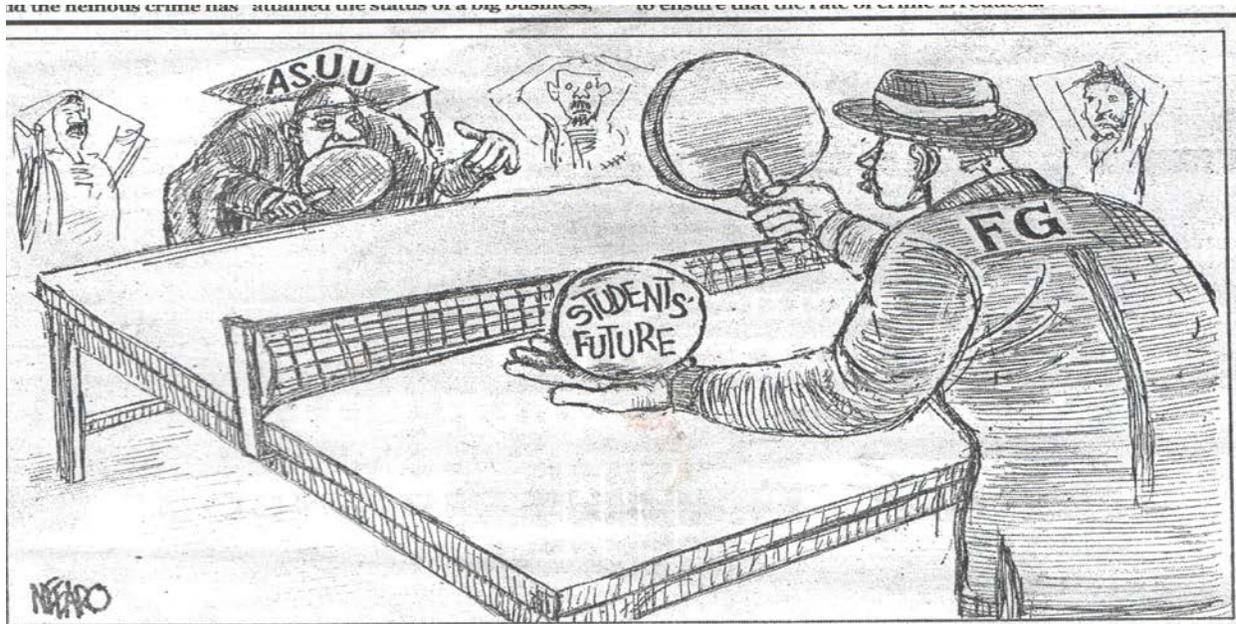
The Education Policy actually avers that for harmony between the philosophy and its goals “education has to be geared towards self realization, better human relationship, individual & national efficiency, effective citizenship, and national consciousness, national Unity as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political and technological progress.

Looking through the expectations for quality education and the philosophy on which our National Policy on Education is based, it will appear that we have an appropriate road map and should be towing the correct direction but are we? Education empowers, inculcates skills and sound moral values for the betterment of the individual and the State. Education also affords individuals, producers, investors, savers and consumers the pertinent information and knowledge to make wise, relevant production and development decisions {Akpa 2010: 8-9.}

From the foregoing, Education and indeed quality education can be said to be of immense importance to any society. However, according to Prof. Yaqub: 2014 “the Nigerian education system has over the years *“like the large society been afflicted by pervasive corruption, declining standard, graduate unemployment and as a result, there is a general call to redress all the negative factors that erode its intrinsic value”*

In a Newspaper article (Punch August 1st 2013:24) Eratus Ikhide wrote in reference to our Nigerian Universities that an international online Universities and Colleges ranking directory, ww.41cu.org published its current top 100 Universities and Colleges in Africa. The top 10 are in South Africa and Egypt while others are from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana, Ghana, Morocco and

Sudan. The six on the list from Nigeria appear at No. 32, Unilbadan 34 Unilorin 40th Benin 62nd, IFE, ABU UniJos 70th and he concludes that “with these findings, no one requires sorcerers or stargazers to know that our Universities and colleges are breeding grounds for mediocrity and incubation of illiteracy”.



The Punch Pg 22 Monday, Sept 9, 2013

This rating in 2013, I think is generally harsh and even as I do not agree that “Our Universities are breeding grounds for mediocrity and incubation of illiteracy”, there is a sense in which some graduates you encounter these days actually present such a picture. However, some intelligent and brilliant young ones can still be sparingly encountered and they are often indeed outstanding using and applying modern day technology so effectively.

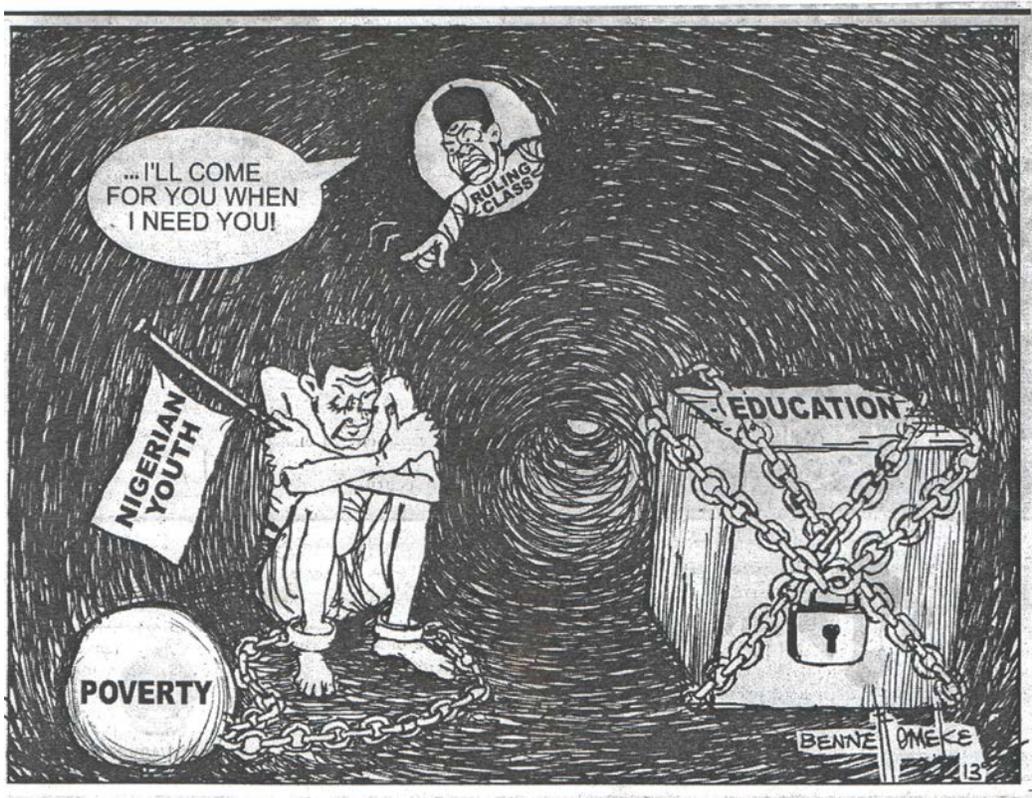
I can go on and on about opinions and commentaries on the fall from grace of our educational system and I will be justified because we are very worried about this as a Nation and at the micro level as an Igala Nation. Obviously, this is why we have chosen to discuss this concept and its impact on Youth empowerment hoping that with a clearer understanding, we would identify areas of intervention. However, I need us to note a thread that runs through the

process of defining or trying to understand the two terms - Youth Empowerment & Education/ Quality Education.

At the core of both definitions is the pivotal point that be it education or empowerment, the aim is to build, train and develop inborn potentials and capabilities of individuals for effective usefulness to self and the Nation and perhaps to enable us live life more abundantly and competitively nationally & internationally.

EDUCATION IN KOGI STATE:

Our educational system is bedeviled with incessant and prolonged strikes,



nation-wide. In Kogi State specifically, I found no better expression on the state of education than the picture painted by Idachaba, FS (:2002), where in a keynote address to the second Igala Education summit, he had indicated some worrying trends and stated "over the last few years, I have worried and agonized over some trends relating to education of the Igala Nation". These are:

- The declining performance of Igala boys and girls in major national examinations such as the SSCE and JAMB as measured by the number of students who obtain 5 credits in SSCE and the number who score above the pass mark of 200 in JAMB.
- The declining performance of Igala youths who pass well in Common Entrance Examinations and who get admitted into Federal Government Colleges without any form of assistance whatsoever.
- The declining performance of Igala youths in JAMB who seek to pursue professional courses and are unable to qualify for admission into such professional courses as medicine, pharmacy, law, architecture, electrical engineering and electronics, mechanical engineering, chemical engineering, civil engineering, communication arts.
- The poor presence of Igala youths in the sciences such as mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology.
- The failure of Igala youths in institutions of higher learning to distinguish themselves in their universities in examinations for them to receive honorable mention in their universities during convocation and graduation ceremonies when other Nigerian youths receive numerous prizes and awards.
- The very small proportion of Igala secondary school graduates who actually gain admission into universities and polytechnics on merit without going through remedial or through tremendous pleasure on known and sympathetic lecturers.
- The large number of Igala graduates of secondary schools located in Igala land who purportedly score "high marks" in SSCE but who woefully fail to gain university admission because of their poor marks in JAMB.

- The very poor overall performance of Igala girls at both the primary and secondary school level that has created wide gender imbalances in the education of Igala youths.
- The learning environment in Igala land remains harsh, and many Igala youths are disillusioned; they are losing interest in schooling because in their limited understanding, they do not see any future dividends to education, and
- The tendency of Igala youths to concentrate their search for university admissions in those institutions around the north and middle belt to the neglect of the older universities in the south where competition for entry is much stiffer and fiercer and standards are relatively higher.

He went ahead to state that "these means that the Igalas are not being prepared to play key roles on the National scale. The poor scores of Igala youths in the National common entrance examinations that are well below cut-off points for admission into Federal government colleges for boys and girls deprive them access to the training that comes from Federal resources. It is obvious that the Igala Nation is being eventually squeezed out of the Professions. He further stated that the poor performance of Igala youth in the mathematical sciences, the biological sciences and the sciences in general means that the Igala runs the risk of being by-passed in the intense revolution taking place in Nigeria and around the world in information, communication, computing techniques, biotechnology {incidentally our Professor Jummai Ogbadu is the current Director General of the biotechnology Agency but she is only 1%} and new applications of Mathematics and Natural and man-made Phenomena? {Professor Oyibo to the rescue}.

There in (2002 *ibid*), he stated that "*I have come to the firm conclusion that education holds the key to the sustained eradication of abject mass poverty within families, local communities, ethnic groups and societies everywhere*". Indeed, education holds the key to sustained better life for all Igala. It is the most powerful instrument for closing existing gaps and inequalities in income, wealth

and social status among Igala individuals, families and local communities on the one hand, and between the Igala Nation and the other ethnic groups in Nigeria on the other" He concludes that "in my view education is the foundation, the pillar & the roof for enabling the Igala to compete successfully in the Nigerian polity and Market place.

In 2013 and still going, the Executive Governor of Kogi State Captain Idris Wada still emphasized in all of his public speeches that Education is the key! It's the first priority of his government, the second and third. He has paid attention to encouraging scholarships, renovated school building through the States Ministry of Education, the Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), The Teaching Service Commission (TSC), The State Scholarship Board, and we only need to take advantage of the opportunities inherent in the measures.

But of course, the states resources have being reported poor and what do we have? The interventions are still minimal and do need a beef-up. The pictures of some schools and cartoons embedded here





show how much more interventions from all angles and levels we still need to move the Igala Nation forward, that is, assuming that we are able to arrest the generally negative attitude of our youth towards acquiring education. Then we would also need all hands on deck to give them quality education that will enhance their performance.

As Professor Yaqub, 2014, puts it "the country 's value system should be looked into, as well, with a view to re-orienting everybody and everything. The country is going down the drain as it is now generally assumed that what matters to the people of this country is material acquisition and no moral rearmament or rejuvenation. An educational system that is not anchored on the moral system that is attuned with the people's aspiration shall always bring forth what we are harvesting at this point in time - kidnaps, terrorism to mention a few".

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Brothers and Sisters, it cannot be overemphasized that we are all called upon at this juncture and time to make sacrifices alongside all other efforts on ground to bring succor to our youth (boys & girls) and generations yet unborn.

My suggestions for intervention includes;

- Donation of libraries and quality reading materials delivered to the schools directly.
- Provision of "a meal" during the duration of the school day.
- Assistance in training and re-training teachers at home and abroad.
- Provision of technology and textbooks, direct supply of textbooks and school uniforms.
- Intervention from Old Students Association as has been beneficial to Holy Rosary School, Dekina Government Secondary School and St Peters College Idah (these are relevant ideas I know, I believe others exist).
- ICT facilitation in any way for both teachers and students is a necessity.
- Other specific Learners - related support.
- Adopt a school and grow it amongst others.
- Encouraging our youth in non-formal endeavor like swimming (Ibaji boys and girls, basketball {Idah} & kitting for sports..etc
- Development of music & musical talents around the entire Igalaland by setting-up training centers where learning & practice may take place.
- Health talks to benefit boys & girls on contemporary health issues, HIV/AIDS, EBOLA and simple Hygiene.
- Constant job availability information Nationally & Inter-nationally.
- Heart, Eye foundation so as to service everyone.
- What about coming home on Sabbatical.
- Acknowledged intervention could also highlight.
- Alumnis of Scholarship
- Students loans scheme.

I do believe that these suggestions and a few others that will be generated from our interactions are the crux of this paper and your Association's focal area. It is concluded that if your organisation funds or accesses funding for any of these suggestions, this year's conference would have achieved a lot .

Thank you very much for your attention.

BIOGRAPHY OF DR. HAJIA REKIYA MOMOH-ABAJI



Dr. Hajia Rekiya, born to the family of late Alhaji Abu Abaji and late Hajia Berikisu Abaji in the late 50s hails from Idah, Kogi State. Her early education began at Holy Rosary Primary School Idah and Holy Rosary Secondary School where she obtained her Secondary School Certificate in 1975. She proceeded to Kwara State College of Technology and sat for Cambridge Certificate Examination in 1977 to obtain her A levels.

The year 1977 to 1980 saw her at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria where she obtained a B.A. (Honors) English Literature. A graduate Certificate in Education followed this degree at ABU and in 1985 she obtained a Master's degree in Public Administration. Later in 1996 she also obtained a certificate in Adult Education and Life Long Learning from Ahron Ofri in Israel. The quest for further education took made her pursue a PhD in Public Administration and Policy Analysis (PAPA). In 2010 she was conferred with that degree.

She served Kogi State as Executive Director Agency for Adult and Non-Formal Education from 1994 to 1999 and as Caretaker Chairman for Ajaokuta Local Government in 1999.

She is currently a Director of Information Service and Publication at the National Productivity Center, Abuja. Having spent the past 32 years across the Federal, State and Local Government, she is a known Administrator of Men, Material and Money. Though she has since returned to the Federal Civil Service after a leave of absence, she still serves the state on a part -time basis as Chairman, Kogi State Scholarship Board.

She is an astute administrator and a public speaker who enjoys mentoring and loves people from diverse backgrounds. Her passion and area of continued research is Women's Political Participation. She runs a Non-Governmental Organization which focuses on this passion. Every year in the last five years and working in partnership with Fredrick Ebert Shifting (Foundation), she has undertaken a Sensitization Workshop in two local government areas in Kogi state.

Her other activities are Election Observation culminating in her being nominated as one of the 100 Election Observers invited by the States Department of the US Embassy from around the world to observe the 2008 U.S.A Obama Election

She is blessed with four equally blessed children. She is also a grandmother who loves travelling, reading, dancing and meditation.

Keynote Address Speaker, Dr. Hajia Rekiya Momoh-Abaji