Employing Counselling for Societal Reformation

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Abstract

The place of counselling in ensuring societal harmony, cohesion and development cannot be ruled out. This paper discusses the counselling in societal reformation. The major bane of societal growth and development include lawlessness, corrupt practices, tribal and religious sentiments and bigotry, nepotism, gross indiscipline, and the likes. It also examined how the identified blocks could be removed, through no other alternative than a carefully and adequately monitored programme of guidance and counselling to assist youngsters to fully maximize their potential and drive their excess energies to more productive activities rather than acts capable of plunging the nation into oblivion. The study concluded that a well-structured counselling intervention is a likely effective strategy towards ensuring a peaceful, cohesive, reformed and ultimately developed nation.

Introduction

The continent of Africa is blessed with numerous endowments which include human and natural resources. Nigeria, being an African is regarded as the giant of Africa, as it is endowed with huge human, material and natural resources, like crude oil in the south, agriculture and sea port in the west and large scale farming (growth of grains, vegetables, pepper and animal grazing) in the north. In terms of human resources, Nobel Laureate/prize winners, like Soyinka, Iweala, Adesina, among many others. However, in spite of the manifold resources, Nigerians live paradoxical life style better described as lack amidst abundance.

In this light, experiences and literature have shown a strong link between the Nigerian abundance and poor leadership style. This is also traceable to lack of moral education and deficiency in counselling. This has accounted largely for the rise in poverty indices across the nation. The immediate source of disconnect between Nigeria’s vast abundance and the apparent poverty suffered by the average Nigerian stems from poor leadership (U.S. Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, 2010), hence, the place of counselling in covering this wide vacuum cannot be disputed. The need for integration of counselling into the Nigerian leadership vocabulary has therefore become imperative for the desired reform and transformation as is currently practiced in some countries across the globe. To this end, this paper looked at; i. the “Why” of Counselling in Leadership; ii. Societal reformation and transformation
via Counselling; iii. Blocks to functional societal reforms and transformation in Nigeria. The paper concluded with suggestions for a way forward.

The “Why” of Counselling in Leadership?

Counselling as an emerging profession in Nigeria, is designed to assist people in making informed choices and decisions through the provision of guidance services in effectively harnessing the huge human and material resources bestowed on humanity. From the submission of Olu makinde cited in Idowu (2016), this is largely due to the fact that everyone has had; is presently having; and will continue to encounter problems that he/she alone cannot solve without the intervention of a certified guidance counsellor. Counselling is about process and product. It is a complex process where the mind’s lines are skillfully fitted together to make “sense” out of “non-sense” (Counselling Association of Nigeria, 2015). Gibson and Mitchell (2012) described counselling as a helping profession whose members are specially trained and certified to perform unique and needed services, duties and responsibilities to clients.

In the same vein, Olayinka (1999) defined counselling as a process by which professionally trained personnel (counsellor) assists another person (client or counsellee) in a person-to-person or face-to-face encounter with the aim of providing educational, vocational, or moral assistance. Mallum (2000) further described counselling as a specialty in the field of psychology whose practitioners’ joy is to see their clients’ wellbeing improved, alleviate distress, resolve crises and increase their creative and innovative abilities with a view to enhancing sound decision-making capacity in the clients.

Consequently, Olayinka (1999) observed that professional counsellors are personnel who are capable of being regarded as specially trained teachers whose primary role is to assist individuals with peculiar needs through interpersonal counselling relationship. They assist clients to identify and outline resources, environmental opportunities cum challenges in the process of achieving adequate self-understanding, planning, decision-making and coping with the challenges that are associated with their developmental stages as each (client) navigate through life changes.

The aims of providing counselling as identified by Mc-Daniel (1990) include:

- Fostering psychological development of clients
- Assisting clients in exploring their environments and be architects of their lives
- Facilitating wise choices and decisions by clients
- Assisting clients to be able to independently handle future concerns
- Provision of guidance to clients to have full respect for the worth and dignity of self and others; and
- Assisting clients to become self-actualized and attain a rare feat as self-made or fulfilled individual (p.88)
In essence, the purpose of counselling is to assist clients to achieve self-understanding, connect appropriately with their environments and ultimately become productive, effective and fully functioning individuals. Consequently, professional counsellors are expected to direct, coordinate and implement guidance and counselling programmes in their respective organizations – school settings, government and non-governmental agencies, ministries, parastatals, health facilities, financial institutions, military and para-military agencies and multinational organizations. They are also to assist clients overcome obstacles preventing their (clients’ or counsellees’ effectiveness, prompt or rapid response and equally sensitize the management (of their respective organizations /institutions) on the need to urgently and without delay, address clients’ (employees’ or students’) differing concerns.

Gibson and Mitchell (2012) stressed that aside the provision of services to schools and other rehabilitation cum health centers, counsellors should be more of public service oriented, not in a partisan sense, but in terms of public information and guidance. This largely informs the immediate need for the introduction, implementation and supervision of carefully designed and operated guidance and counselling programmes for societal reformation which would ultimately transform the society. The authors noted further that counsellors should publicly communicate what they do, what they are achieving and ultimately the extent they could go in promoting societal development. The researchers affirmed that the general public appears to be misinformed, partially informed or uninformed regarding the significant contributions that the counselling profession can make in fostering the individual’s wellbeing as well as that of the larger society.

This paper therefore intends to explore the creation of awareness on how counsellors can assist in achieving the much desired reforms, transformation and positive change in Nigerian communities. In addition, the focus is on the need to address incessant cases of corruption, which has become a cankerworm plaguing the entire Nigeria, geometric rise in poverty index, unemployment, insurgency, economic crunch which has crippled and almost grounded the entire nation, among others.

**Societal Reformation and Transformation through Counselling**

The Advanced Learners’ Dictionary (6th Edition) defined reformation as the act of improving or changing something. Therefore, societal reformation implies an often gradual movement through which subtle changes are made to particular societal characteristics. However, where a subtle, tender and mild societal movement does not seem to work out, a rather radical, aggressive or social revolution resulting ultimately to societal reformation becomes the only alternative (last resort). Usually, societal reforms take forms like that of a revolutionary movement seeking to change the social, economic as well as political views of marginalized group of persons. English Dictionary (8th Edition) viewed reformation as an intended improvement in the existing form or condition of institutions or practices. This involves an intention to make a striking change in order to achieve a better social and political transition.
Societal transformation on the other hand refers to the change of society’s systematic features. This incorporates the change of existing parameters of a societal system, including technological, economic, political and cultural restructuring. It is a marked change in appearance or character, especially one for the better. Transformation is also considered an act or state of being changed, especially for the better. In essence, societal reformation and transformation tilt towards engendering change in all facets of the society; hence, the focus of this paper and the place of counselling in bringing about the much anticipated reforms also regarded as changes. Reforms largely culminate into what is regarded as transformation.

The place of counselling in achieving effective societal reformation culminating into greater transformation cannot be overemphasized. A good illustration of countries that rightly positioned counselling for societal reformation and ultimately achieving transformation is the United States of America in the early 1950s when Russia was reported leading the world in space technology. Today, the US leads the entire global village in virtually all aspects of technology, science, etc. As a matter of fact, the white house has the office of a counsellor, who from Cable Network News (CNN) Report obtained in 2001 averted what could have resulted into a third world war after the series of attacks on US facilities by the Late Osama Bin Laden.

**Blocks to Functional Societal Reforms and Transformation in Nigeria**

As the nation progresses in her democratic governance, the need for professional counsellors to help in the identification of major blocks constituting hindrances to functional and meaningful societal reformation and transformation as well as proffer workable solutions have become imperative. The identified blocks are:

- Corruption
- Indiscipline
- Religious Bigotry
- Political Instability
- Misplaced Priorities
- Ethnic and tribal sentiments
- Poor Value Orientation

These blocks are here under discussed with their respective implications and the way forward

**Corruption**

Corruption has been identified as Nigeria’s major blockade to national development. It is now commonplace in virtually all sectors of the Nation’s economy; it has even become a household nomenclature in recent times with the whistle-blowing policy of the current government. Recently, Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari, in an interview noted that the Nigerian Nation needed to act fast be-
fore corruption destroys its economy. He noted further that corruption is a cankerworm which has taken roots in all public and private institutions. Losses to the tune of billions of dollars have been recorded in recent times. Nigerians seem to fix their gaze on government institutions like Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC), the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Pensions Commission (PENCOM), Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), ministries and other agencies, with little or no attention on the individual holding no public portfolio or responsibility. If the pandemic called corruption must be tamed or at best totally eradicated from the annals of the history of Nigeria as a nation, all and sundry must put their hands on deck to destroy this canker worm before it gets rid of the nation; a West African nation that is bountifully endowed with sustainable, as well as enviable human and natural resources. This implies that religious bodies, schools, agencies, ministries and other parastatals, non-governmental organizations, farmers, business men and women, transporters, among others, must cooperate in order to flush the scourge called corruption out of the Nigerian system in its entirety.

**Indiscipline**

Discipline can simply be described as voluntary compliance with rules and regulations. It can also be defined as display of desirable behaviours whether or not an individual is being monitored. Sokan (1997) defined discipline as a way of fostering and developing in a person, self-regulatory behaviors which enhance better adjustment. The situation Nigeria finds herself today is at variance with discipline. Nigerians do not obey rules and regulations, which is evident in the way people drive on the roads, dress, queuing and struggling for fuel and other essentials, etc. For any nation to witness positive changes and reforms leading ultimately to transformation, her citizens cannot eschew the virtue of discipline.

**Religious Bigotry**

Religion by nature is supposed to be a means of promoting positive human behaviour. However, in contemporary Nigerian societies, it has been turned into a business venture. Although, many Nigerians attend churches and mosques, they profess to be adherents of Christianity and Islam; yet, their attitudes do not portray such religiosity in them. They discriminate against one another and care less about others’ welfare issues. It is very serious that religious leaders and their followers live opposite lifestyles; where the former live in luxury, ride exotic and latest cars and even private jets, the latter (followers) hardly afford two square meals a day (abject poverty). For any meaningful reforms to take place, urgent steps must be taken to address the negative influences exerted by our religious affiliations particularly where issues of merit are forgone because of religious affinity.

**Political Instability**

Election periods are usually characterized by extreme levels of anxiety, thuggery, hooliganism, gangsterism, as well as loss of lives and property. Prior to the last general elections, dates were shifted,
leading to anxieties by all and sundry and careless statements on the part of politicians, thus, heating up the polity. It is commonplace for successive governments to abandon projects, policies and programmes embarked upon by previous administrations, all because of party differences, rather than the interest of the masses. Where these thrive, national development becomes highly jeopardized. Also, policy inconsistency, baseless ideology and needless party affinity contribute immensely to incidences of political instability as is experienced across Nigeria.

**Misplaced Priorities**

The philosophy, aims and goals of governance in Nigeria have not been clearly reeled out. Notable sectors like education, health and agriculture are not accorded the deserved attention by the political class. For instance, the United Nations declared that at least 26% of the annual national budget should be allocated to education; yet, Nigeria’s 2015 budget for education sector hangs at 10.7%, which fell short of UN’s recommendation if the education sector must get meaningful reforms ultimately, transformation. Regardless of the whopping sums allocated to security for military might, adequate security cannot be guaranteed until citizens receive quality education, get gainfully employed, are well fed and have their health needs fully provided for. To have the desirable reforms and transformations, education, agriculture and health sectors must be adequately prioritized by successive governments at federal, state and local levels.

**Ethnic and Tribal Sentiments**

The sentiments and affiliations played out by Nigerians to their different ethnic groups rather than the nation Nigeria constitute a major cause of disunity and crises. Rather than giving priorities to merit and competence in appointments or elective positions, people’s places of origin, tribes, language, state, and lately, religious affiliations take priority. Political office holders prefer to appoint persons of same ethnic affiliations as themselves, rather than considering competence, integrity and capability of the said individual. This is one major cause of ineffective service deliveries by public institutions and organizations. However, with a comprehensive array of counselling services in place, these anomalies would be things of the past because counselling would go a great way in identifying “square pegs for square holes and round ones for round holes”. If this is put in place, sooner than later, Nigeria will get enlisted among comity of nations across the globe.

**Poor Value Orientation**

Governments at all levels have not clearly identified and promoted the core values of human society. Values are things we cherish more than every other thing. Values like patriotism, loyalty and integrity have not been widely imbibed by many Nigerians. For instance, insurgency, militancy, kidnapping, political thuggery and hooliganism would not have assumed skyrocketed feats had each Nigerian been taught early enough the need to have respect for human life and dignity. It is only in recent times that governments at all levels appear to be making frantic attempts at compulsorily imposing civic educa-
tion on all school children up to senior secondary levels and also made to register it in their senior school certificate examinations (SSCE). Counselling, if prioritized would help address and fill up these identified lapses and vacuum in building a virile, strong and self-reliant Nigeria.

**Conclusion**

The focus of the paper was to examine how counselling could be employed as a tool for achieving greater societal reformation and transformation. It was found that the cankerworm called corruption, religious sentiments, tribal/ethnic loyalty, preference for mediocrity and god-fatherism (at play in almost position being contested) above merit, etc contribute to the retrogressive state Nigeria finds herself. It is in the light of the listed problems bedeviling Nigeria and other succinctly discussed parameters that the paper concludes that a carefully planned, supervised, fully implemented and adequately evaluated programme of guidance and counselling is required not only at all levels of Nigeria’s educational system, but also in all sectors of the economy, so as to bring to the sub-consciousness of each Nigerian the need for faithfulness, loyalty and honesty as enshrined in the national anthem/pledge rehearsed almost daily by all. This to a large extent would discourage tendencies for terrorism, insubordination and rebellion to one’s fatherland in Nigerian youths.

**Suggestions**

Without any doubt, Certified Counselling Practitioners have important roles to play in enlisting Nigeria among comity of Nations. To buttress this, the following suggestions are considered relevant:

1. Counselling should be given its rightful professional status in order to block its highly porous borders. With this in place, counselling services will only be conducted by certified counsellors.

2. Counsellors should be employed and ultimately posted to schools and other organizations, agencies, ministries and parastatals. Counsellors in their own rights and capacities will promote and teach clients virtues of diligence, dedication to duty, integrity, patriotism and high sense of discipline and above all, loyalty to one’s fatherland.

3. The scope of civic education which is taught at both primary and secondary school levels should be extended in order to accommodate the teaching and learning of universal cum specific values not only at these lower levels, but also at the higher levels of education (tertiary level of education). In the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2013) revised edition), the need for the introduction of counselling programmes in schools was condensed only to six lines, with no direction on the modalities through which counselling practitioners are expected to carry out their expected duties, as well as effective monitoring/supervision by the government. Counsellors sometimes encounter series of challenges like negative attitudes of teachers and school heads (who see them as rivals and lazy sets of school personnel).
4. The different dimensions through which restiveness among youths make incursions into our lifestyles could only be tamed or at best totally eradicated if counselling is prioritized. Respect for human life and dignity will be instilled in toddlers, infants, adolescents and teens and when they grow up, they tend to abide by taught and imbibed love for their country, appreciation of the importance attached to human life, appreciation of the place of other people if Nigeria must move forward, as well as appreciation of even those regarded as “minorities” in their fatherland! This can be achieved if counselling is rightly positioned particularly in our elementary (primary) schools. This is because at this level, the mind of the average Nigerian child is still very fertile, empty and ready to be occupied. However, whatever the parent, teacher, counsellor, etc write on those “empty slates” become registered, rehearsed overtime and put to use by the Nigerian child. When this is achieved, rebellion against one’s fatherland in the form of insurgency (like the Boko Haram menace in the North East), kidnapping and militancy (in the Southern part of the country) as well as incessant cases of rape, armed robbery attacks cultism and other forms of youth and teen restiveness will be a thing of the past, thus, commissioning explosive economic, educational, social and even vocational reforms and transformation, which will ultimately push us as a Nation to global limelight.

5. Religious tolerance should be entrenched. Counsellors are in the best positions to make advocacy for this because they have undergone training in religious and psychological counselling, unlike many other professionals who assume extreme levels in their religious practice, even while discharging their respective duties to the citizenry. All and sundry should be enlightened that the Supreme Being, called God created the entire Universe and its different components, hence, beliefs, faiths or modes of worship held by an individual should be unarguably respected as it constitutes his/her inalienable rights.

6. Government at all levels should as much as possible be counselled to prioritize sectors like education, agriculture and health in order to promote skill acquisition, tame or totally eradicate unemployment, especially as youths, and promote good healthy loving and proper hygiene among the citizenry.

7. In an attempt to re-integrate kidnapped, raped and victims of incestuous relationships back into their respective communities and homes, there is the need to actively involve counselling practitioners. This occupied a prominent place in CASSON’s (2014) Uniben international conference communiqué which was forwarded to both Federal and Borno State Governments with respect to the kidnapped Chibok school girls. If this is put in place and counselling receives necessary governmental backing, the girls in question, as well as other victims of kidnap, rape, incest and other forms of abuse would achieve healthy integration back into their communities, get united with their families again and become functional members of the society and not con-
stitute nuisance to the society or disrupt its peaceful coexistence. As a matter of fact, CASSON even offered to render such service as its contribution to the nation building, growth and development.

8. The issue of Nigeria’s national integration has been haphazardly fixed through the NYSC scheme. With a comprehensive guidance and counselling programme in place, total integration of all geo-political zones is assured. It has always been said by successive governments in Nigeria that the issue of her togetherness is not debatable, yet, a good number of Nigerians talk more of seceding (break-up) in contemporary times than integration. Counselling practitioners have every required recipe if Nigeria must achieve total integration of all ethnic groups.

References


