

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF BUILDING APPROPRIATE SELF ESTEEM AMONG YOUTHS FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The deflating, depreciating and depressed self-esteem which has become the lot of youths especially in Nigeria has remained a cause for worry for many who are desirous of active participation of youths in Nigeria's developmental process. The increase in social vices and persistent rise in crime rate is typical of society whose youths have very low sense of self-worth, self-esteem, and self dominion. Although youths are seen as the leaders of tomorrow, regrettably, many Nigerian youths are disconcerted, debased, lack self-will and are poised for negativism as a result of low perception of themselves. This review paper, therefore, tries to explore the problems and prospects of building appropriate self-esteem among Nigerian youths for sustainable development of the country. In approaching the discussion, types of self-esteem were highlighted and solutions proffered on how to build self confidence in the youths and set them on the right path to positive and fulfilling lives.

Key words: *Self Esteem, Dominion, Worth, Image, and Youths*

Introduction

The term **self-image** is used to refer to a person's mental picture of himself or herself. A lot of our self-image is based on interactions we have with other people and our life experiences. This mental picture (our self-image) contributes and shapes our **self-esteem**. Thus self-esteem is all about how much we feel valued, loved, accepted, and thought well by others-and how much we value, love, and accept ourselves. People with high self-esteem are able to feel good about themselves, appreciate their own worth, and take pride in their abilities, skills, and accomplishments. People with low self-esteem may feel as if no one likes them or accept them or that they can't do well in anything. Such people with low self esteem are not good assets for prosecuting meaningful and sustainable development agenda.

Sustainable development is a term originally conceived by the 1987 United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (the "Brundtland Commission"), as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (UNCED, 1987:43). Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature" (Rio Summit 1992).

Youth is generally the time of life between childhood and adulthood (maturity). It is a period in both males and females characterized by freshness, vigor, high spirit, etc; Youth is the stage of constructing the self-concept which is influenced by several variables such as peers, education, lifestyle, gender, environment and culture. It is a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community.

Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group. However, age is the easiest way to define this group. The exact age categories that constitute youths differ across defining authorities. For instance, the African Youth Charter defines a youth as every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years. On their part, UNFPA (2003:4) stated that the period of adolescence is between the ages of 10 – 19 years where as Youth is 15-24 years; Young people: 10-24 years and Children: 0-18 years. However, the Nigerian National Youth Policy (2001:2), defines youth as comprising all young person's between the ages 18 and 35 years who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Nigeria.Unfpa.org/youngpeople.html). Furthermore, of Nigeria's population of one hundred and forty million people (NPC 2006), it is estimated that one third are young people between the ages of 10 to 24 years.

Irrespective of the age category that is defined as youths in any society, the role of youths in development is not in doubt. This is particularly important if the crop of youths available is imbued with the right measure of esteem. In Nigeria, the problem of low self-esteem is greatly affecting the contribution of youths to national development. Due to low self-esteem, many youths are unable to think, make choices, and act on those choices. They also fail to see that they deserve happiness and benefits accruing from hard work which they ought to be committed to. Unfortunately, other than a commitment to hard work, many youths are arrogant and fail to be guided by wise counsel. This explains why criminality and other vices are on the rise among youths in Nigeria. All these negatively affect participation of youths in development and the overall development outcome.

Conceptual Approaches and Classifications Relevant to Self Esteem Discourse

Steffenhagen (1990:3) quoting Robison and Shaver define self-esteem as liking and respect for oneself which has some realistic basis. This suggests that self-esteem could be viewed as a feeling or affection. Obviously, if one feels good about himself or herself, it simply shows that one's self esteem is good. Thus, self-esteem equals one's assessment and evaluation of oneself at any particular time. In addition, Mruk (2006:10) conceptualized self-esteem into two. He contends that the first and the most basic definition is characterize self-esteem as attitude. According to him, as with any other attitude that is held towards a given object, self-esteem can also involve positive or negative cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions. His second type of definition is based on the idea of a discrepancy. He argues that, it is the discrepancy between the self that one wishes to be (the [ideal] self) and the self that one currently sees oneself as being (the [real] or [perceived] self) that matters. The closer these two percepts are, the higher the individual's self-esteem becomes, and the wider the gap between the two, the more self-esteem suffers. A third approach to defining self-esteem focus on psychological responses a person holds towards himself or herself, rather than attitudes alone. In other words, asking what kind of person one is in terms of confidence and power. These responses are usually described as feeling-based or affective in nature, such as positive versus negative or accepting versus rejecting.

There are two types of self esteem, namely high self esteem and low self esteem. People with **high self-esteem** consider themselves worthy, and view themselves as equal to others. They recognize their limitations, expect to grow and improve, and do not pretend to be perfect. According to Sommer (2001:167-168) in the face of failure, people with high self esteem strive to be the best, to stand out and to prove their superiority. On the hand, people with low self esteem try to avoid being the worst to deflect attention from their faults and to prevent total failure.

Characteristics of a person with high self-esteem

- 1 Believes strongly in certain principles and values.
- 2 Is capable of acting in his/her own best judgment.
- 3 Have fewer health problems.
- 4 Genuinely enjoys him/her self and participates in a wide variety of activities.
- 5 Feels equal to others as a person.
- 6 Resists efforts of peers to dominate or sway them.
- 7 Feels confident in the ability to deal with challenging situations, despite failures and setbacks
- 8 Is sensitive to the needs of others; cares about others.
- 9 Is more flexible and adaptable in changing situations.
- 10 Is happy, energetic, enthusiastic, and enjoys life.

Bryan (2009) opines that **low self-esteem** is when an individual have a low opinion of him or herself and low self-confidence which is your opinion of what you think you can't do. Many people suffer from low self-esteem. According to him, it often begins during our school days, especially with the unrealistic notion that no one must fail and non-accomplishment to this opinion yields a negative self-image. People with lower trait self-esteem tend to experience virtually every aversive emotion more frequently than people with higher self-esteem. Trait self-esteem correlates negatively with scores on measures of anxiety, sadness and depression, hostility and anger, social anxiety, shame and guilt, embarrass-ability, and loneliness, as well as general negative affectivity and neuroticism. Those low in self-esteem generally experience self-rejection, self pity, self-dissatisfaction, self-contempt, and self-disparagement. Low self-esteem can be a major factor in mental health problems, suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, violence, and many other problems. In addition, other characteristics of a person with low self esteem include:

1. Blames others for whatever that happens and does not take responsibility for anything
2. Always shy, timid, or withdrawn.
3. Never sure of his or her opinions and values
4. Very sensitive to criticism, and afraid to make a mistake
5. Always critical of others
6. Feels persecuted.
7. Has a fear of competition and/or is reluctant to try new things.
8. Always over-responsive to praise.
9. May be jealous or possessive.
10. Has difficulty entering into loving relationships because he or she feels that he is never wanted
11. engages in negative activities like bullying, smoking, drinking, or disordered eating

How Self Esteem of Nigerian Youths have Affected Development Efforts in the Country

For youths who be successful in life they should have a high opinion and high self esteem. In other words, youths should believe in their ability, be courageous enough to face challenges. They should be able to take right decisions in event of difficult situations, be bold and above all, develop the self confidence that is needed in a competitive society like Nigeria. Regrettably,

some Nigerian youths have given up on life as a result of low self esteem, low self worth and low self value. For this group of youths, 'anything goes'. As such, they settle for less and can do anything just to survive. Settling for less is what every youth should avoid. It is counterproductive and will undermine development.

The primary error with narcissists or arrogant people (i.e people with low self esteem) is that they feel they must be right all the time or there's something wrong with them. This is a huge error, as no matter how smart we are, we can make mistakes in our thinking or actions. The healthy person knows this and doesn't let a lapse in knowledge or a mistake threaten his self-esteem. In fact, he embraces facts, whether those facts come from himself or someone else, because he knows that knowledge will help him in his life.

Criminals and rapists don't have high self-esteem, if they have any at all. Criminals and rapists (falsely) believe they can obtain self-esteem by exploiting, deceiving, assaulting, or taking advantage of others. When they get away with it, they feel "good" about themselves because they've put something over on others, and they feel "superior" as a result. But, this is a completely false sense of superiority or "self-esteem," because it's based on faking reality (i.e., lying, maiming and evasion). One cannot achieve or maintain self-esteem by this means.

Recommendations on How to Build High Self Esteem among Nigerian Youths for Sustainable Development

Jaesong & Tinasu (2003) gave the following useful suggestions on how one can build high self-esteem which are also applicable to Nigerian Youths;

1. Start small-Youths should be encouraged to start with something they can do immediately and easily. When they start with small successes, they build momentum to gain more confidence in their abilities. Each completed task, regardless of how small, is a building block towards a more confident investment by youths into self realization and national development.
2. Create a Compelling Vision- Youths should be tutored to use power of your imagination. They should create an image of confident and self-assured person they aspire to become.
3. Socialize- Youths should get out of the house, hostels or setup a date with friends. Socializing with others will give them opportunities to connect with other people, and practice real communication and interpersonal skills. All socialization tasks must be anchored on positive ideals/virtues that are relevant to self and national development.
4. Do something that scares you. The skills of youths get better with practice and repetition. The more often youths proactively do things that scare them, the less scary these situations will seem, and eventually will be rid of that fear.
5. Do Something You Are Good at- Youths should search for what they are especially good at or enjoy doing? Regularly doing things that you are good at reinforces your belief in one's abilities and strength. This is also applicable to youths.
6. Set Goals- By setting goals that are clear and actionable, youths have a clear target of where they want to be. When youths take action towards set goal, they build more confidence and self-esteem in their abilities to follow through.

7. Help others feel good about themselves- Help somebody or teach them something. When youths help other people feel better about themselves and like themselves more, it will make them feel good. See what you can do to make others feel good or trigger them to smile. Maybe giving them a genuine compliment, helping them with something or telling them what you admire about them.
8. Youths should get clarity on life areas- They should get clarity on the life area that needs the most attention. Self-esteem is the average of one's self-concept in all the major areas of life. Youths should regularly rate themselves on major categories of your life, e.g., health, relationships, finance, etc. They should be helped to work on areas they have low scores. The more they build up each area of their life, the higher their overall self-esteem.
9. Youths should create a plan get motivated. They should read something inspirational, listen to something empowering, talk to someone who can uplift their spirits, who can motivate them to become a better person, to live more consciously, and to take proactive steps towards creating a better life for themselves and their families.
10. **Youths should get external compliments and no more comparisons.** Youths should stop comparing themselves to other people. Low-self esteem stems from the feeling of being inferior. Self-esteem comes from self-dominion. The more power youths have in getting themselves individually and collectively to take the right actions, the more self-esteem they will have. One's level of self-esteem affects the individual's happiness and everything he/she does. For Brian Tracy 'People with high self esteem are most desired and desirable people in society'.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that youths are pivotal and indispensable in the overall development of any society. However, when the youths lack self esteem, self worth, self value and good dispositions towards themselves and others, stagnation, crises, and lawlessness becomes the order of the day. The paper has tried to address self esteem as it affects the youths, pointing out the characteristics of people with high and low self esteems, makes a distinction between an arrogant person and a person with high self esteem. It also proffered solutions to inflate and boost the self esteem of the youths. In all, it is advised that the youths should strive to develop good sense of self admiration, self confidence, self respect, self satisfaction and self sufficiency as it is the only way we can move our society forward.

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