

Using African Value-based Programmes as Alternative Frameworks for the Modification of the Values, Attitudes and Behaviour of Nigerian Children: the CBAAC Initiative

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Abstract

Children in Nigerian society, like their counterparts in other developing countries of the world, have in the last two decades been experiencing cultural conflicts due to millennium exposure to a bewildering array of values, made possible by the global media. This is more prominent in urban centres where the power of new cultural concepts and ideals communicated by various modes of media is clashing with and undermining those inherited from the tightly knit community structures of the past that had clearly defined value systems. African traditional value systems today have to a large extent broken down, leaving the youth to make the transition from childhood to adolescence without a clear idea of their emerging roles and norms of behaviour – the result of which is prevalent behavioural problems among the young in society. A general outcry by the leadership, parents, schools, churches and government that the current behaviour problems may not abate if not tackled from all fronts precipitated the formulation of specifically designed adolescent programmes to serve as alternative frameworks for the modification of the identified negative values, attitudes and behaviours of the young in Nigerian society. These attitudes and behaviours manifest in forms of cultism, school drop-out, exam malpractices, underachievement, poor attitude to work, lack of pride in the nation-state, avarice, dishonesty, disobedience to law and order, graft, drug abuse, robbery, rape, homicide, sexual immorality, teenage pregnancies, prostitution, suicide, etc.

The packaged programmes are:

- Quarterly adolescent programmed reading of positive literature materials with expressions of African positive values (love, family spirit, kindness, charity, gratitude, honesty, courage, moral uprightness, chastity, etc.) for behaviour modification.
- Bi-monthly programme of “Use of African Folktales, Folklores, Songs and Rhythm in behaviour formation and modification in pre-adolescents.”
- Inter-school debates on the restoration of family values, and the use of African culture to curb corruption.
- Use of exhibitions, dramas and costumes to interpret and condemn corruption and inequity.

In essence, CBAAC is pro-actively harnessing the potentials of African indigenous knowledge and other intangible cultural heritage to positively impact the lives of children and adolescents within Nigerian society and beyond.

Introduction:

GCAM 4: The Creative Museum: African Museums Using Culture for the Development of Children and Youth. Chief Albert Luthuli Museum, Stanger, South Africa, October 24–29, 2009

A good value system is needed as an anchor by an emerging society like that in Nigeria upon which to hinge the social, economic, governance and development behaviour of her citizenry for national growth. Many developing nations, of which Nigeria is one, have not in recent times made meaningful socio-economic progress due to a prevailing negative value system among the citizenry, especially among the adolescents within their respective societies (Chuma-Ibe, 2008). These negative values are manifested in the form of undesirable behaviours such as negative attitudes to self, to one another, and to the larger society through practices such as corruption, cultism, bribery, disobedience to law and order, lack of pride in the nation-state, dishonesty, avarice, poor attitude to work, under-achievement, drug abuse, robbery, rape, homicide, sexual immorality, prostitution, suicide, and other behaviour problems found to be detrimental to national development. Popular opinion is that positive behaviour in a setting where negative values and attitudes are prevalent can only be achieved through societal change of mindset (Mayer, 2006; El-Rufai, 2006). It has become indisputable within the last two decades, therefore, that positive attitudes and mindsets are the much sought after veritable ingredient missing in the task of nation-building, national peace, national consciousness and growth in almost all developing countries of the world. El-Rufai (2006) citing Winston Churchill affirms that “empires of the future, will be empires of the mind, as positive mindsets, not certificates, are fast becoming potential veritable engines of change for transforming societies.” Although it is indisputable that positive value systems cannot solve all mankind’s problems, we must admit that we cannot solve many of those problems without good value system.

Value system has been conceptualized in different forms by different scholars, but what is common to all the concepts is that the culture of a people represents the embodiment of their society’s values, norms, beliefs, ethos and religions, which, in all, form the basis for social interactions between members of that society (Idachaba, 2005; Olurode, 2005). Cultural mores, values, ethos and norms, in effect, define the expectations of right and wrong behaviour, proper and improper behaviour, in a given society. Our values and attitudes often reflect the degree of the internalization of the norms, beliefs, and ethos imbibed from the family, community and society in which we live. Development of a positive value system is therefore the first process of proper socialization in an individual in any given society. Families, communities, schools and religious institutions are all major socialization agencies responsible for inculcating positive aspects of human values in individuals from birth, through adolescence, to adulthood (Idachaba, 2005). This in effect suggests that when an individual’s values are right, his or her attitude to issues, to self and to others will be healthy because positive attitude and behaviour emanate from an entrenched positive value system. This presupposes that a good value system is hinged on the emergence of a socially responsible citizenry that make for a healthy, peaceful and prosperous society. There is, therefore, a close interconnection between a good value system, socio-economic growth and the development behaviour of a nation.

This realization propelled the passion for the introduction of adolescent value re-orientation programmes into CBAAC’s programme of activities as we have them today. The programmes are basically proactive ventures used in harnessing the intangible information resources (indigenous knowledge) that African Heritage Centres preserve for the job of impacting lives and contributing to societal change. It is the “hows,” “whys,”

“objectives” and “goals” of these initiated programmes for the young by CBAAC that I am set to share with us all for the benefit of enriching our respective institutional programmes in this short presentation.

What are the Acceptable Values that Make for Progress in a Given Society?

The desirable values and attitudes that make for national development and peaceful co-existence are identified as respect for authority, respect for self, for others, for life and property, tolerance for individual and group differences, tolerance for ethnic difference, tolerance for religious faith and cultural beliefs, hard-work, diligence, commitment, resilience, trust, dependability, reliability, integrity, loyalty to state, interdependency, sense of oneness and family spirit, contentment, honesty, gratitude, love, honour, accountability, transparency, sexual morality, positive attitude towards self, to leadership and to others, which invariably are the core African values as they were in times past (Rojers, 1981).

The Nigerian Palliative Prescriptions

The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), in a bid to proffer solutions to the endemic behaviour problems in the society, instituted the Anti-Corruption Bill to enhance probity in all human affairs. The laws were to be enforced through social reform agencies known as the Economic Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and Allied Offences Commission (ICPC), the Budget Monitoring and Implementation and Price Intelligence Unit (Due Process), and the Code of Conduct Bureau. Also incorporated is a value re-orientation programme for national image laundering termed “The Heart of Africa Project.” This project has both domestic and external components. The external component seeks to provide authentic information about Nigeria to the world with a view to achieving foreign direct investment to promote economic growth. The domestic aspect of the project is encapsulated in the acronym PRIDE, which stands for Patriotism, Resourcefulness, Integrity, Distinction and Enterprise. The core elements of the PRIDE Campaign are the re-orientation of the values of Nigerians and the promotion of the nation’s core values, with a view to inculcating positive attitudes especially among children and youths of the Nigerian nation. The domestic aspect of the project has today been given a much wider dimension and the PRIDE acronym changed to read “Rebranding Nigeria.” “Rebranding Nigeria” is believed to be better home-based and grassroots oriented.

The Anti-Corruption Bill and its designated enforcement agencies, however, have continued to generate much criticism from antagonists of FGN, not so much as to the contents of the Bill, but that “the establishment of the agencies is a ploy to fight the perceived enemies of government” (Alamesiegha, 2005; Kalu, 2005; Musa, 2005). This general distrust of the leadership could be said to be partly responsible for the perennial obstacles being encountered by the major anti-corruption agencies in executing their mandate. The modest attempt of FGN to fight the dysfunctional values and attitudes of the citizenry using sanctions and decrees is perhaps not yielding the desired fast results, as all moves to enforce the laws seem to be facing challenges imposed by the citizenry.

The Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC), being a Federal Government parastatal, decided to explore the possibility of using African cultural values for a re-socialization and re-orientation programme for adolescents. CBAAC’s alternative

framework initiatives were drawn from theories of scholars such as Bandura (1965, 1977) on Social Learning Theory, which posits that bringing individuals in contact with positively written materials whether as literature, drama, narrations, rhythm, idioms, or performances, etc., over a period of time changes the negative values, attitudes and behaviour of such individuals for the positive through the role modelling of the characters in what is read, heard or seen by such individuals. CBAAC has all the prerequisites, a well-stocked library, audio visual library with well-stocked CDs on performances that were regularly patronized by adolescents and youths, and all that was required was an initiated programme to test our hypothesis.

Alternative Framework for Behaviour Modification: CBAAC Initiatives – Brief Information on CBAAC

The Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC) was established by Decree 69 of 1979, following the successful and epoch-making hosting of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC'77). It is a parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation. It takes custody of all the materials that were on display during FESTAC'77, as well as the colloquium proceedings at FESTAC'77. It also has the responsibility of spearheading the promotion and propagation of global understanding and appreciation of Black and African people's culture. CBAAC has a Museum of Black & African Peoples Art, an Archive, Library and Audio/Visual Library, all housing collections of cultural and historical significance to Black and African peoples all over the world.

CBAAC's Focus on Nigerian Children

Adolescents and youth in every society are seen as next in line of succession in leadership in the society in general. This is the stage in life at which individuals contribute the most to their society and is referred to as a period of self-discovery and self-definition. Rogers (1981) refers to "adolescence" as a process of achieving the attitudes and beliefs needed for effective participation and functioning in the society. With modern society eroding the stable cultural framework of pre-colonial society that had clearly defined value systems and rites of passage, adolescents in recent times are having to make the transition to adulthood without a clear idea of their emerging roles and norms of behaviour. Unless adolescent development is well guided and moderated, the adolescent can and often does go adrift, leading to emotional crisis, delinquency or other ills. This makes the adolescents and youth the most targeted group in every behaviour re-orientation programme. To address the behaviour problems among the young within the Nigerian society, CBAAC instituted the following programmes:

- A quarterly adolescent, predetermined, programmed reading of positive literary works that have expressions of indigenous African values such as love, kindness, charity, gratitude, honesty, courage, moral uprightness, and other such positive values that make for a socially responsible adult. The book-reading programme lasts for a period of four weeks, within which the book therapist anchoring the programme discusses the synopsis of what was read with adolescents. This area of study is called bibliotherapy (using reading to effect changes in people's lives). Evaluation reports over

time have proved this programme highly rewarding to participating adolescents who have improved in the area of attitudes to one another, courage, honesty, kindness, sexual morality, self-esteem, self-respect, self-confidence and respect to constituted authority. CBAAC has equally benefited from the programme by way of patronage and outreach to wider audience. The younger generations through this programme have come to love leisure reading and are developing the interests in books that could last through life. Their reading habits are also being improved. Another plus to CBAAC is the interest this has generated in private partnerships; Agencies such as British Council – Nigeria; United States Public Affairs Section – Nigeria; UNICEF – Nigeria, and other well-meaning individuals have continued to donate publications to develop the collections within the children’s library section of CBAAC’s main library. Publishers of Africana literature also from time to time donate published materials to CBAAC for the use of African Children.

- The Centre went further to introduce a bi-monthly programme of “Use of African Folktales, Folklores, Folk Songs, Proverbs, Idioms and Rhythm in behaviour formation and modification in pre-adolescents.” The main objective of this programme is to harness the African values embedded in these sources of African history, for the benefit of the younger generation of Nigerian children. In this programme, an elder of impeccable character who has passion for children, and is vast in this area of knowledge, is invited to anchor the programme as resource person. At the end of the narrations and singing with the children, the children face the questions and answers session. This is to ensure that what is heard is synthesized and internalized in the minds of the child audience. Evaluation reports of the various programmes held so far on this point to positive impact in the emotional development of these children. They revealed also that their attitudes to wrongs and rights are also being shaped in the positive direction.
- Similarly, CBAAC instituted an Inter-Secondary Schools Literary Debate programme that runs yearly. This is also geared towards the re-socialization and re-orientation of the values, attitudes and behaviours of the Nigerian child. This is held on May 27 every year to mark the World’s International Children’s Day. The title for the 2009 programme was “Restoration of family values and use of African culture to curb corruption,” and it attracted students from 48 secondary schools, within and outside Lagos Metropolis. May 27 every year is a day dedicated to children worldwide by the United Nations (UN). This is to enable society to give the young ones a voice on issues that touch their lives, with the aim of encouraging them to participate in discussions of problems that affect them. This is one of the programmes CBAAC is using to embark on aggressive campaign to revive our dying value system and address maladjusted behaviours among the young ones in our society with the aim of instilling positive values, attitudes and behaviours in them for progressive change. The need for this re-engineering effort, like all other programmes of CBAAC for the young, was borne out of prevalent negative behaviours among the young in the society, which if left unattended may probably see our society worse than what it is today.

Inter-Secondary Schools Debates, Cultural-Quiz, and the themes of programme are always tailored around identified areas of societal problems. The objectives of the programme are:

- to offer children the opportunity to contribute to the generation of ideas necessary for decision-making;
- to encourage the participating child develop information – seeking and acquisition skills – which in the long run widen their knowledge-base on every issue under discussion;
- to encourage the children to acquire skill in use of the language of communication in the society;
- to enable them to gain the right exposure through one-on-one interaction and also interaction with the larger group;
- to build their confidence and self-esteem;
- to build oratory skills in the child.

The winning school for this year left with a trophy donated by His Royal Highness, Oba Dokun Abolarin, Aroyekeye I, The Orangun of Oke-Ila, Oke-Ila Orangun, a specified amount, and a prize reserved for the first position. The second and third runners-up equally went home with prizes. All participating children departed with gifts from CBAAC and donor agencies.

Remarkably too, in December of every year CBAAC runs a programme for children titled “CBAAC’S Children’s Cultural Festival.” The programme harnesses the potentials of exhibitions, dramas and costumes in interpreting identified problems in the society. It also uses the mediums to condemn the identified ills in society such as corruption, inequity, and injustice. For each year, a title is formulated to fit into the main theme, “Children’s Cultural Festival,” and a competitive interpretative exhibition by children is incorporated as side attraction for viewers.

Private Partnerships/CBAAC

The vision to revolutionize the use of resources in CBAAC’s Heritage Reserve for the benefit of all age groups was born when the incumbent leadership confronted the static idea of a Heritage Centre being created only to “document,” to “preserve” and to “disseminate” information on available resources to the museum public. The leadership began to question why the intangible aspects of the materials preserved cannot be harnessed for the benefit of the public and be used to change our world, if not the whole world, where possible. These were the challenging questions that ignited the packaging of proposals that eventually saw the private sector coming into partnership with CBAAC on the initiated programmes. The response was encouraging and this has seen CBAAC partnering with numerous sponsors and also other like-agencies for not only children’s programmes, but all other programmes of CBAAC for adults and for children. MTN – Nigeria, Fidelity Bank – Nigeria, Indomie Noodles – Nigeria, Cadbury – Nigeria, Seven-Up – Nigeria, Nestle – Nigeria, SCOA – Nigeria and several others have in the last three years come into partnership with CBAAC for various children’s programmes.

The successes recorded have attracted many more funders who have raised the programmes from levels where they were celebrated to international levels, making these programmes acquire a travelling status. They are being slated for movement from one Nigerian state to another for more children to benefit from their riches. What CBAAC has done is harness the potentials of unexplored indigenous knowledge, embedded in the tangible and intangible cultural heritage materials we preserve, for use in impacting the lives of the young in the Nigerian society and beyond. The indigenous knowledge aspect of our tangible and intangible cultural heritage materials has always been there, but has been lying dormant as it were. Today this knowledge is being harnessed for the uplifting of the cultural sector, for development of the behaviour of our youth, and for the behaviour modification of all for peaceful co-existence and national growth. This way the Heritage Cultural Centre known as CBAAC has become a living Cultural Centre, bringing life to the lifeless exhibits, African idioms, folktales, folklores, folksongs, published materials in the different sections of our library, and the manuscripts in our archives. These works are of greater relevance to all. They are being used in bringing about change in identified problem areas among a targeted group in the Nigerian society. As earlier stated, this presentation concludes with the re-affirmation that, though behaviour modification and change among the citizenry may not solve all of Nigeria's societal problems and those of other nations of the world, the problems of Nigeria and other developing nations may not be solved without positive behaviour on the part of the citizenry; positive behaviour to self, to one another, and to the larger society.

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