

COMMUNITY MOBILISATION FOR PARTICIPATION IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper likens the education enterprise to the task of erecting a new building. It further equates Islamic education to the foundation level of any building as well as the roots of a tree, thus making the success or failure of the subsequent levels contingent upon it. The paper accepts Islamic education as a potent tool for the realisation of national goals and aspirations and therefore posits Islamic education as a level that requires much desire attention by all members of Muslim community. The paper concludes by adducing practical suggestions and recommendations that in Nasarawa State, communities could be mobilised for effective participation in providing Islamic education to the entire members of the Muslim community.

Keywords: Community, Mobilisation, Participation, Islam, Education,
Development

Introduction

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) defines “community” as a group of people who has something in common and act together in their common interest. A community's ability to act together may have existed for centuries, or it may be triggered in a very short time by some urgent problem. Many people belong to a number of different communities; like the place they live, the people they work with, or their religious group¹.

Therefore, community mobilisation is an attempt to bring both human and non-human resources together to undertake developmental activities in order to achieve sustainable development in a community. In other words, community mobilisation is a process through which action is

stimulated by the community itself, or by others, that is planned, carried out and evaluated by a community's individuals, groups, and organisations on a participatory and sustained basis to improve the health, hygiene and educational levels so as to enhance the overall standard of living in the community².

A group of people has transcended their differences to meet on equal terms in order to facilitate a participatory decision-making process. In other words, it can be viewed as a process, which begins a dialogue among members of the community to determine who, what, and how issues are decided, and also to provide an avenue for everyone in making decisions that affect their lives in the community.

The Glorious Qur'ān has given instruction on permission to mobilise community to participate in programmes and activities that will develop and bring progress to the community because the Muslim communities are the best of people evolved for mankind. The Qur'ān says:

Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing In Allah (Q 3 v 110).

Another verse says:

Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: They are the ones to attain felicity (Q 3 v 104).

In addition, there are many traditions of the Prophet of Islam that talked about cooperation and mutual understanding among people. Some of these traditions include the one narrated by Abu Musa, which says:

That when Allah's Apostle sent him and Mu'adh bin Jabal to Yemen, he said to them, "Facilitate things for the people (treat the people in the most agreeable way), and do not make things difficult for them, and give them glad tidings, and let them not have aversion (i.e. to make the people hate good deeds) and you should both work in cooperation and mutual understanding, obey each other" ³.

It is observed that starting a community's effort is generally much easier than sustaining it. Many communities, organisations and programmes have been at work for years, and continue today with the same energy.

Others have withered and lost energy; some have disappeared completely and dramatically. For community responses to be effective, existing initiatives must be reinforced and new ones must be nurtured as they establish themselves. This will require flexible partnership arrangements with other forces and agencies.

A community becomes mobilised when a particular group of people becomes aware of a shared concern or common need, and decides together to take action in order to create shared benefits. This action may be helped by the participation of an external facilitator either a person or another organisation. However, momentum for continued mobilisation must come from within the concerned group or it will not be sustained over time.

There is a large body of literature on how communities mobilise themselves, and on how outside facilitators can help them do so. Most books and articles describe a sequence of assessing needs, developing plans, mobilising resources, and finally implementing and monitoring activities – ideally involving the community at every stage.⁴ In reality, few successful examples of community mobilisation have followed a clear pattern from the starting to the finishing. Much solid work is often accomplished long before formal assessment has been done, or before anyone has a clear idea of what resources are available.

Historically, Muslims in Nasarawa State have been disadvantaged in the Islamic formal education since the creation of the State in 1996 by the military government of late General Sani Abacha. Christian missionaries were the primary providers of formal secular education before and sometimes after the creation of the State, and Muslims were often discouraged from attending the schools, or did not allow their children to attend these schools for fear of possible conversion to Christianity.

As formal education was a requirement for most professional jobs in government, Muslims were often at a serious disadvantage in the modern labour market as a result of their lack of formal education, be it Islamic or secular. Following the creation of Nasarawa State, the inequality in formal education between Christians and Muslims in the State was reduced in some places, but persisted in others. This paper examined the ability of Muslim communities to become relevant educationally and politically in the form of Muslim civil society organisations, and the role of these organisations in representing and promoting the welfare of the Muslims, particularly in the area of formal Islamic education.

The Relevance of Education in Islam

Virtually, all nations of the world have come to perceive education as a veritable tool for the attainment of national objectives. In Nigeria therefore, the five main national objectives of the nation stated in the second National Development Plan which are the building of:

- (a) a free and democratic society;
- (b) a just and egalitarian society;
- (c) a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- (d) a great and dynamic economy; and
- (e) a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.⁵

These national focuses have largely come to be seen as objectives that can best be attained through education. This explains why education has been viewed as the greatest force that can be used to bring about individual and national development and progress.

It is in the light of the foregoing that government has succinctly expressed its commitment to the educational sector in very clear terms in the National Policy on Education (NPE) in the following words:

Education will continue to be highly rated in the national development plans, because education is the most important instrument of change, as any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution.⁶

It could be stated that successive governments at local, state and federal levels are pursuing this committed statement to the extent that at least in all budgetary estimates, education is usually and formally accorded a significant share. In Islam, education is accorded very fundamental position to the extent that a person is not expected to perform any religious function unless he is fully aware of its legal injunctions as ordained in either the Qur'ān or the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad.⁷ Concisely therefore, knowledge in Islamic tradition, aims at moulding the behaviour of a Muslim to realise the most important objectives in life. The first objective is that one should acquire knowledge in order to know his Creator, obey His laws as revealed to His Prophet, worship Him and fulfil religious obligations as stipulated in the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet.

Secondly, a Muslim should acquire knowledge to cultivate the earth and exploit the vast resources created by Allah (Q 80:24-32) and he should acquire knowledge with the aim of being a responsible and useful citizen

capable of performing his duties in the best interest of the community he lives in; as the Prophet said- “pursuance of knowledge is from cradle to the grave”⁸. These objectives are expected to be realised by every Muslim irrespective of his colour, race or sex. This is why the quest for Islamic education became a continuous phenomenon in the Muslim life throughout the Muslim world. Wherever Islam reached, either through conquest or through peaceful means, education was given utmost attention and priority.⁹ Education by extension is a continuous process which requires perseverance as a necessary condition for its foundation to be firmly established, its correctness and accuracy strengthened and its aim fulfilled.¹⁰ The religion of Islam, therefore, enhances the importance of learning and, conscious of its necessity for all Muslims and its moral excellence, upgrades the educated and puts scholars and teachers in the highest rank because of the honour intrinsic in their profession as the Prophet said- “Scholars are the heirs of the Prophets.”¹¹

Community Mobilisation for Participation in Islamic Education in Nasarawa State

Before delving into this however, mention must be made of the fact that this writer is not in any way ignorant of the contemporary avocation by groups of human rights activists who attach much relevance to issue of fundamental human rights and have even proceeded to the point of calling for a mandatory provision by government of such welfare services as provision of free food, free shelter, free health and free education. However, whereas such a critique could apply in the case of developed countries, developing nations such as Nigeria still have to leave the community and voluntary agencies assist in the provision of such essential welfare service in the area of education. Thus, government efforts especially in the sphere of education for now are reduced to mere statement. It is in that sense that concern Muslims call on the communities to participate in the task of provision and management of Islamic education for the society to be morally upright and the children to be trained as leaders of tomorrow.

Many Muslim communities in Nasarawa State have been playing some roles in their local Islamic schools. The involvement of parents in school matters in most of the communities is usually through the Parents/Teachers Associations (P.T.A). With a few exceptions, the traditional role of the P.T.As has been the ‘making of little financial contributions to the schools’. These contributions are usually used for

providing meagre facilities and procuring few materials and equipment that may be lacking in the schools. The involvement of the Muslim community in the life and activities of their schools has recently gone beyond mere financial contributions by P.T.As. A study of the roles of four communities in Nasarawa State in the development of schools in their areas about a decade ago, revealed that each of them established at least one Islamic school for the community on their initiative even though with little and scanty resources which may not be able to provide the requisite level of Islamic Education and development. These communities are Hausa Community in Keffi, Rindre Community in Wamba, Ebira Community in Toto and Alago Community in Doma Local Government Areas.¹²

In Nasarawa State, this finding is true of virtually many communities. The Kamberi, Hausa, Fulani, Gwandari, Alago, Eggon, Mada, Gbagyi, Rindre etc all have at one time or the other established community Islamic schools to supplement government efforts in their localities. This effort was displayed through the provision of resource persons and payment of some token remuneration to them. It is also observed that in the absence of constructed classroom blocks, some philanthropists provide temporary classrooms in their residence where pupils were taught Islamic knowledge and morality. For example, in Keffi LGA, *Usmanu bn Affan, Sabilur Rashad* and *Madrasatu Tahfizul Qur'ān* were all established through individual and community efforts.¹³ In Lafia LGA, Dunama College of Arabic and Islamic Studies was initially established and run by the community before the Government took it over, *Failatu Islam* and *Fityanul Islam* schools were also community initiatives.¹⁴ In Doma LGA, Islamic schools established through community and individual efforts were many. Some of these schools are: Usman Bawa College of Arabic and Islamic Studies, *Madrasatul Ansarud Deen*, Bilal Islamic Academy¹⁵ and so on.

It is observed that in Nasarawa State apart from very few individual and philanthropists' efforts, found mostly in urban centres and some Local Government headquarters, neither individuals nor communities have fared well in supporting Islamic education. This is in spite of the fact that it is this level of education that dictates the success or failure of subsequent levels of education. The need therefore for communities to embrace the challenge posed by sporadic dilapidated classroom blocks, almost complete absence of desks, working materials, qualified teachers etc. in many Islamic schools in the State is more desirable now. This study, therefore, calls on our communities in Nasarawa State to consider:

- i. Extending the formation of the Parents/Teachers Association in functional terms to all the Islamic schools performing the same functions as has been the case at the public primary and secondary school levels in the State. In addition, through the PTA, communities are to be challenged and encouraged to commence participation in the provision of standard Islamic education through construction and rehabilitation of classrooms, supply/provision of desks, teaching materials, textbooks, resource persons etc.
- ii. Formation of Alumni Associations in all Islamic schools. Since many Muslim scholars, workers and elites in Nasarawa State traced their success and achievements to such Islamic schools, it is incumbent on all to cast back their minds and see how their alma mater is fairing with a view to coming to its aid either by renovating its buildings, constructing new classrooms, provision of enough working, teaching and reading materials, provision of enough qualified teachers and perhaps fencing the school compound to curb trespass which act as detractions to teaching and learning.
- iii. Provision of community prizes to be competed for in various academic competitions, like Islamic quiz competition, Qur'anic recitation competition, Islamic reading competition, ICT competition etc. This will help in boosting talents at this stage of the educational system.
- iv. Community serving as supervisors and monitors. These days, it is an open secret that some teachers do not see absenteeism and truancy as an offence. Laissez faire attitude to work is becoming the order of the day especially in some Islamic schools. It is the duty of the respective communities where these schools are situated to serve as monitors and supervisors to the teachers working in the school to teach their children. Most teachers are likely to work best under close watch and supervision; therefore, it will be good for the immediate community members to handle the issue of monitoring and supervision in their respective Islamic schools.
- v. Encouraging efficient and hardworking headmasters and teachers through recognition, incentives and goodwill messages. It is the duty of community members to invite attention of the proprietors to the good work of a headmaster or teacher working or teaching in the community for possible reward which would then serve as an incentive and motivation for greater productivity and efficiently.

- vi. Organising launch: Muslims could organise a grand Islamic education appeal fund launch at the State, local or individual levels; and then later share the funds realised from such an exercise either to all Islamic schools on the principle of equality or to each according to its needs. Since competitiveness has been known to be a moving force in the success of such an endeavour, it is hoped that all communities within respective local government area would leave no stone unturned in mobilising themselves and friends of their community in ensuring that their

Local Government surpasses others on what is to be realised. With the on-going democratic and political terrain, this venture is surely going to be with tremendous success.

In summary, other ways and methods of community mobilisation include organisation of community meetings, training and sensitisation sessions, religious preaching, community rallies, mass media campaigns through the use of radio, television, billboards, newspapers, mobile phones, etc. Though community outreach strategies and mass media campaigns are two distinct strategies, the most effective of such approaches tend to combine mass media intervention with community-based action¹⁴.

Conclusion

The provision of education is gradually becoming so expensive that no government may be in a position to live up to its constitutional and societal expectations. The authority therefore relies on the respective communities to rise up to the task of complementing whatever government is able to provide for them. This could be best accomplished under the umbrella of community mobilisation and participation in the task of providing Islamic education to the members of the community.

Muslims in Nasarawa State have lower educational attainment, on average, than their Christian counterparts, but this disadvantage in formal educational attainment varies across space and time. This study proposes a theory explaining the role, relevance and efficacy of Muslim communities and how these communities affected educational outcomes. The structure of ethnic groups influenced the structure of Muslim communities by facilitating or hindering coordination, while the position of Muslim communities within the State affected demand for formal Islamic education through competition with Christian missionaries and access to jobs requiring

formal education. Since Islamic education is the fundamental bedrock upon which the subsequent levels are rested, the need to strengthen such profitable ventures of community mobilisation to all Islamic schools cannot be over emphasised.

In summary, Community mobilisation needs many analytical and supportive resources, which are internal and external as well. Resources of community mobilisation include good leadership, effective organisational capacity, reliable communication channels, critical assessments, effective problem solving, good resource mobilisation and good administrative and operational management.

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