

The Challenges of Using Islam to Fight AIDS Scourge in Nigeria

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Abstract: Statistical data show that Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is prevalent in every State of Nigeria. The prevalence level varies between 1.6% in Ekiti State and 10% in Benue State. Among the major causes of the disease in Nigeria are sexual intercourse with persons already infected, contact with the blood of infected persons and infection of babies by mothers carrying the HIV virus. Most Nigerians are religious. They practise Islam, Christianity or the Traditional Religion. In view of this, Government sometimes resorts to the use of religion to mobilize citizens for civic duties. This study calls for taking advantage of the religious life of Nigerians, especially Muslims among them, to look into the possibility of using the teachings of Islam to stem the tide of the spread of the disease. Of course, there are challenges in this respect bearing in mind the fact that the country is multi-religious and is susceptible to the influence of foreign cultures. As a way of using Islam to check the spread of the disease, this study calls for mass education, sexual discipline and avoidance of having contact with the blood of infected persons. To this end, Government is required to make adequate provisions for the health needs of citizens, get rid of quacks in medical and para-medical professions and make deliberate efforts to reduce poverty to the barest minimum if at all it cannot be totally eradicated. Economic stability will check the practice of taking chances with their health as they will be able to afford to settle their medical bills without any problem. Muslims, in particular and other religionists as well, are expected to live up to the moral teachings of their religion to lead a wholesome life free of disease.

Key words: Challenges, Islam, AIDS, HIV virus, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

According to the Technical Report of 2005 National HIV Sero-Prevalence Sentinel Survey, HIV is prevalent in every State in Nigeria. The prevalence rate ranged from 10% in Benue State, 8% in Akwa Ibom State, 6.7% in Nasarawa State to 1.6% in Ekiti State, being the lowest. Only Osun, Oyo, Ekiti and Jigawa States had prevalence rates not exceeding 2% while 7 States recorded 5% and above (Federal Ministry of Health, 2005; Danbatta, 2006). With these staggering statistical data, the Government and people of Nigeria as well as the international agencies concerned with the scourge of HIV/AIDS have realized the fact that urgent steps should be taken to stem the tide of the spread of the killer disease.

Government agencies especially the National, State and Local Government Action Committees on HIV/AIDS (NACA), (SACA) and (LACA) respectively, as well as international donor organizations and locally-based Non-Governmental Organizations have done a lot of sensitization on the existence, spread, causes, dangers and treatment of AIDS. Bearing in mind the fact that Nigerians are mostly religious practising African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity, both

Governmental and non-Governmental organizations concerned with the combat of AIDS have had recourse to the major religions as a means of reaching out to their adherents. Many Nigerians attach more importance to what they hear from religious leaders than what parents, spouses, relatives and friends tell them. As such, there have been many training programmes, workshops, public lectures, conferences and seminars organized by or for Faith Based Organizations (F.B.O.s). This writer has participated in some of such programmes representing the interest of Islam both as a religious leader and a lecturer in Islamic Studies. In fact, this study is based on the outcome of the training on HIV/AIDS and Islam for Nigerian Muslim Leaders which was jointly organized by the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN), Islamic Medical Association of Uganda (MAU) and Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom, at Ado-Ekiti, September 2 to 6, 2002 (Department of International Development (DFID) Abuja, 2002).

CAUSES OF THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS

It is pertinent to mention briefly the causes of the spread of HIV/AIDS even at the risk of repetition. This is

necessary to identify the areas on which to focus our attention. Without knowing the causes, it is difficult, if not impossible, to get rid of them in an attempt to solve the problem they create. The following are the causes identified to be responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS with particular reference to Nigeria

Sexual intercourse with an infected person: Having sex with a person already infected exposes one to infection. It does not matter whether the sexual intercourse is with one's spouse or extra-marital, heterogeneous or homogenous, or between persons "faithful" to each other. It may be necessary to draw attention to some salient points implied by the description of the various sexual partners mentioned above.

A person infected with HIV may not necessarily show any sign because the effects of infection are not immediately known or felt. Showing the signs such as loss of weight, fever, cough, diarrhea and weakness of the body, just to mention a few, on the other hand, does not necessarily mean that the person has already been infected. Most of the symptoms are those of the opportunistic infections taking advantage of the collapse of the immune system in the body. The only means of ascertaining the status of any person is by medical test which may have to be repeated at an interval of about three months for confirmation (Parveen and Michael, 1995). The fact that one is faithful to one's spouse and does not involve in extra-marital sex does not necessarily mean that one is perfectly free from the risk of being infected with HIV. Even though sex accounts for the most cases of infection, it is not the only cause.

Blood and blood products: The blood of the infected person contains the virus which it may spread to the blood of another person with which it has contact (Parveen and Michael, 1995). This contact may result from blood transfusion when the blood of the person already infected is given to another person. Another way of having contact with the blood of another person is by the use of any sharp object that has had contact with the blood of an infected person. This results mainly from using unsterilised needles, blades or knives to make incisions or pierce the body in such a way as to make contact with blood. This may result from circumcision or the cult practice of sucking the blood of members by each other as a means of taking the oath of allegiance or secrecy (Parveen and Michael, 1995).

Mother-to-child transmission: A pregnant woman already infected may transmit HIV to the baby during pregnancy, delivery or breast feeding (Parveen and

Michael, 1995). However, this risk is removed or minimized if she knows her status early enough and takes advantage of medical services now available to prevent the mother-to-child transmission of the virus.

ISLAMIC SOLUTION TO THE HIV/AIDS PROBLEM

One of the distinctive characteristics of Islam is its systemic practical approach to the various problems standing between man and leading a fulfilled wholesome life in this world and achieving bliss in the hereafter. Islam recognizes no dichotomy between the various aspects of life. That is why it does not separate any action as mundane from the spiritual ones. The totality of life is taken as a single organic indivisible whole. This is in realization of the fact that what one does in one aspect of life has effects on one's activities. As such, Islam provides solutions to the problems of the spread of HIV/AIDS among which are the following:

Education: The first weapon Islam equips its adherents with to fight HIV/AIDS as well as other diseases is education (Ulwan, 1412 A.H./2001). The importance of education in Islam cannot be over-emphasized. Based on strict rules and regulations, it is almost impossible to practise Islam without learning. Its teachings relating to the various aspects of life including social, political and economic, just to mention a few, are such that one cannot take knowing about them for granted. Apart from the numerous verses of the Qur'an stressing the importance of education in Islam (Qur'an 2: 30-35, 3:7, 39:9, 35:28 and 69:1-5), the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) practically demonstrated it both in speech and action. Having been persecuted for long thirteen years in Makkah as a result of which he lost not only many faithful and committed followers but also his only wife at the time and uncle who was protecting him, the Prophet (SAW) had to flee to Madinah. In spite of that, the people of Makkah spared no effort to dislodge him there. This led to many wars, the first of which was the Badr.

The people of Makkah came all the way to attack Madinah. They numbered about 1,000 armed with the best weapons of the time. The Prophet (SAW), based on consultation with his followers, decided not to surrender. The decision was that the Muslims should not allow the enemies to invade the city. They should go and meet them at the outskirts which happened to be Badr. Barely 300 Muslims could hurriedly get themselves prepared for the war. Contrary to the expectation, the Muslims defeated their enemies hands down, taking a good number of them as prisoners of war. They were not executed. In fact, those

who were literate among them were set free on the condition that they should teach a number of Muslims literacy (Al-Mubakphuri, 1416 A.H./1996). This incident in which the value of education was appreciated so much that avowed enemies, overpowered and subdued, were allowed to go scot-free in exchange for imparting knowledge to some Muslims goes a long way to prove that Islam lays a high premium on education and does not mind any sacrifice to acquire it.

The type of education Islam recommends to combat HIV/AIDS is holistic. It aims at the mind, body and soul. It includes all forms of enlightenment to draw attention to the reality of HIV/AIDS by making available necessary information on its causes, symptoms, care of those infected and coping with its consequences. It encourages efforts to restrain people from taking risks with the virus by warning against sexual promiscuity, transfusion of unscreened blood, careless use of sharp objects and encouraging prospective mothers to take necessary steps to avoid mother-to-child infection. All the attention paid to the mind and body is anchored on the consciousness of Allah, the Supreme Being, to whom Muslims believe they are responsible for everything they do in this world. To Him is the final return for judgment. Thus, taking precaution against being infected and infecting others is not only to live a healthy and wholesome life but also a religious and spiritual duty (Qur'ân 2: 195 and 4: 29; Al-Nawawi, 1993).

It is also, important to bear in mind the various aspects of Islamic education which include making knowledge available to be acquired instead of hoarding it, correcting misconceptions that may lead unsuspecting people astray and the practical application of the knowledge acquired. This unique approach of Islam to education shows that the religion is a practical way of life, simple, straightforward and logical. Failure to put one's knowledge to practice especially by keeping away from what Allah forbids is a big sin (Qur'ân 2: 44 and 6: 2-3).

Sexual discipline: The fact has been established that recklessness in matters of sex is mainly responsible for more than 80% of the spread of HIV/AIDS (Anthony, 2001). It is more common among young people who are sexually active than among elderly people (Federal Ministry of Health, 2005). The prevalence rate is higher among commercial sex workers than other ladies having other means of income (Anthony, 2001). Bearing this fact in mind, it is expedient to take advantage of the strict teaching of Islam that requires its adherents not to move near sexual infidelity not to talk of committing it (Qur'ân 17:32). It is instructive that failure to live up to this teaching of Islam exposes one not to

physical, medical, social and economic dangers alone but also debases one spiritually. Stiff punishment is prescribed for those guilty of this sin in the *Sharī'ah* while great penalties await them on the Day of Judgment (Doi, 1981).

Islam does not teach sexual fidelity alone. It prepares the ground for its actualization. This it does in two ways. The first is by prohibiting the various forms of anti-social behaviour that may lure one into sexual indiscipline. Thus, alcoholic drinks, unbridled intermingling between members of the opposite sexes, flamboyant living, extravagance, seductive dressing and rape, just to mention a few are forbidden (Nasir, 1423). One can appreciate how easy it is to avoid pre-marital and extra-marital sex in a society in which all the practices mentioned above are not allowed. That is the situation expected to exist among Nigerians being the adherents of religions that teach chastity.

The other way of minimizing incidents of sexual misbehaviour is by encouraging early marriage for those who can afford it and recommending measures to keep carnal feelings in check in the case of those who have reached the age of marriage but cannot marry as a result of one problem or the other. Along the same line, Islam discourages having single ladies without legitimate husbands in the society no matter their status except when they have reached an advanced age. It is for this reason that Islam allows for marrying more than one wife to the maximum of four. In fact, the verse of the Qur'ân granting this allowance bases it on the concern for taking care of the orphans (Qur'ân 4: 3) ostensibly left behind by fellow Muslims who have fallen in the various wars. Marrying their mothers will qualify them to live under one's care in which case one will not only give them financial assistance but also fatherly moral training. In addition, one will have to provide necessary support for their mothers in this respect.

It is pertinent to make a remark here in relation to the use of condoms to prevent contracting HIV/AIDS in case of casual sex. The advocates of the use of condoms appear to focus attention on preventing the possibility of contracting the virus in case one has sex with somebody whose status one is not sure of. They appear to assume that total abstinence from casual sex is almost impossible especially among single sexually active youth. Thus, the advocates openly display and distribute condoms. They also demonstrate how to use them for males and females. All these raise many moral issues.

It is a fact that many young boys and girls start having sex before marriage (Federal Ministry of Health, 2005). For such, there is no problem counseling them to

use condoms. The problem here is that there is need for caution to avoid over-generalization. Pre-marital sex is abnormal. It is even a sin according to Islam. It is reprehensible in the African Traditional setting and Christianity. Promoting the use of condoms in the way described above suggests that pre-marital sex is unavoidable and is common to every Dick and Harry, whereas the emphasis is supposed to be on total abstinence which is not only possible but is actually practised by many especially in view of spiritual and moral re-awakening among the religiously minded youth. Advocacy of the use of condoms is meant for those who cannot afford total abstinence. Of course, there is no objection to creating awareness about it which is quite different from its wholesale promotion as it is apparently the case at present.

Many dangers are inherent in the large-scale promotion of the use of condoms. Its frequent mention and demonstration of its use arouse sexual feelings as a result of the effects of what youth hear and see. Single people using it may get fed up with it and have the feeling of not deriving maximum enjoyment. In the end, they graduate to the level of dispensing with it not minding the risk of contacting the virus. Promoting abstinence does not give room for all these fears (Department of International Development (DFID), 2002).

Avoiding contact with the blood of the infected person:

HIV/AIDS is contacted through contact with the blood of a person already infected. The contact may be by transfusing his blood to another person or using any instrument having contact with his blood. As far as transfusing unscreened blood is concerned, the solution provided by Islam is in the following areas.

Duty of government to adequately provide for the health needs of citizens:

The *Shari'ah* makes it the duty of Government to make provisions for the health care of its citizens as much as possible. This is in view of the fact that all basic necessities of life should be reasonably made available to the citizens to the extent that they will have no justification to go into crimes prohibited by the *Shari'ah* and for which stiff punishments have been prescribed (Qur'an 23: 2; Doi, 1981).

Medical and para-medical practitioners: People working in the hospital as well as workers generally are urged to be proficient and efficient in the discharge of their responsibilities. Negligence does not expose only the life of the patient to danger but also constitutes risks to the health workers as well. It is unfortunate that there have been cases of patients contacting HIV/AIDS in the hospital.

Patients: As a result of pressure of work, lack of adequate facilities and urgent attention to save life, medical personnel may likely make one mistake or the other in treating their patients. In case the patient or his relative gets to know of the mistake, he should alert the worker concerned to forestall the mistake or make correction if the mistake has already been made.

Citizens: Many people ignorantly or unconsciously do certain things that may have negative effects on their life. In this respect, there is need for caution in the use of sharp objects to clip nails or hair, make incisions on the body for whatever purpose or make holes in the ears or nose for beautification (Department of International Development (DFID) 2002; Parveen and Michael, 1995).

Getting rid of quacks in health-care delivery: It is unfortunate that people not qualified in medical and paramedical sciences claiming expertise in medicine still abound in Nigerian cities and villages. In an attempt to make money, they resort to the use of fake drugs and injecting people with used needles. The Qur'an 7:65 and 85, 17:35, 26:181-183 and 83:1-6 warns against condoning practices like this while the Prophet (SAW) urges restraining such dishonest people from their illegal and dangerous practices. Should the society connive at the practices, everybody will have to pay for them. Those who may escape being infected will definitely be affected in one form or the other. Having necessary education about HIV/AIDS in all aspects draws attention to the importance of the precautionary measures Islam recommends in handling issues that may expose one to dangers. For instance, the use of hand gloves should be made compulsory for any person having contact with the blood of another person. Washing of corpse which is part of the final rites before burying the remains of a deceased Muslim should be done wearing gloves. Special attention should be devoted to the eradication of cultism and the use of hard drugs. People involved in these practices carelessly make use of sharp objects in common, a practice that portends dangers in accelerating the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Prevention of mother-to-child infection: The Qur'an says:

Your wives are a tilt for you, go to your tilt, when or how you will and send (good deeds) before you for yourselves. And fear Allah and know that you are to meet Him (in the hereafter) and give good tidings to the believers (Qur'an 2: 223).

Men (husbands) are the protectors and maintainers of women (wives) because Allah has made one of them to excel the other and because they spend (to support them) from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard in the husband's absence what Allah orders to guard... (Qur'ân 4:34).

The first *Âyah* quoted above likens one's wife to a tilt, a piece of land cultivated to bring about a good harvest. Just as the farmer has to work strenuously to plant good seeds, tend the crops and get rid of weeds, so also the husband should spare no effort to take good care of his wife so as to bring about healthy children. The aim in doing all this is not only to win the love and loyalty of the woman and the children, but more importantly, as a service in obedience to the commandment of Allah who one is bound to meet for appropriate rewards in the Hereafter. The second quotation charges husbands to protect and maintain their wives to the best of their ability. This is to make them free from any form of discomfort, moral, psychological, financial medical and social, just to mention a few. In return for this, the woman is instructed to be obedient and chaste. She is obedient when she concedes the leadership of the family to the husband even though she enjoys the right to give advice to the husband. More importantly, she has the duty to keep her chastity and ensure the security of the husband's belongings in his absence.

The two quotations above stress the responsibility of the husband to protect the interest of his wife all the time bearing in mind that this is the duty with which Allah has charged him. Accordingly, he should bear her interest in mind even when he wishes to exercise his right to have more legitimate wives and not casual sexual partners which are expressly forbidden. With this, the woman may be protected from being infected with any sexually transmitted disease especially HIV/AIDS.

Should any pregnant woman, for whatever reason, be infected, she should not be abandoned, based on the teachings of the two verses quoted above. A Hadith of the Prophet urges Muslims to take to medication if they suffer from any ailment (Al-Bkhari, n.d.). Such a woman has to be encouraged and supported to seek necessary medication so that she can safely carry the pregnancy and deliver the baby without being infected. Since modern medicine can safely provide this protection, it is un-Islamic to ignore the services especially when Government and other interest groups are making frantic efforts to bring down the cost of medication in this respect or make it free.

PROBLEMS MILITATING AGAINST IMPLEMENTING ISLAMIC SOLUTION

A cursory look at the teachings of Islam discussed above shows that, if implemented to the letter, they will assist to minimize the spread of HIV/AIDS if at all they do not totally get rid of it. There is no doubt that they can help to reduce the prevalence of the disease in places where Muslims living up to the teachings of the religion constitute the majority. The situation in Nigeria presents a scenario largely not conducive to the implementation of the Islamic solution. Some of the stumbling blocks in the way of realizing this are as follows:

Lack of education: Despite the fact that Islam places a high premium on education, it is quite unfortunate that many Muslims in Nigeria do not give it due attention. Statistical data prove that Muslims constitute the bulk of illiterates in Nigeria (Anthony, 2001). The danger in lacking education vis-à-vis checking the spread of HIV/AIDS is that necessary precautionary measures are ignored when involved in anything that may get one infected. Such an occasion may arise if one is to have blood transfusion. While an educated patient will prefer paying more to have the blood screened, an illiterate will like to save money and choose to take the risk especially when the donor appears to be healthy. It is confirmed that lack of or low education aggravates the spread of HIV/AIDS (Federal Ministry of Health, 2005).

Poverty: Statistical data prove that there is close affinity between poverty and diseases including HIV/AIDS (Anthony, 2001). It is established that many more women are susceptible to the HIV/AIDS infection because they are subjected to abuse by men who pay for having sex with them and even dictate whether to use condoms or otherwise. This is in addition to the case of commercial sex workers among whom the spread of the virus is confirmed to be the highest. Poor parents are also guilty of getting their daughters married to the rich with the hope that such people will help better their lot. Unfortunately, such parents do not mind the promiscuous sexual life of such rich men. Daughters in this situation are mostly too young to raise any voice against the abuse.

Sexual indiscipline: It is apparent that indiscriminate sex accounts for more than 80% of the cases of HIV/AIDS infection. That is why the prevalence level is higher among sexually active youth in most parts of the country. Much as available data show that this problem is less pronounced among the predominantly Muslim areas, the fact cannot be established that Muslims are totally

absolved from it. Since, the virus does not discriminate on the basis of religion, ethnicity and geographical location, it is necessary to draw the attention of Nigerians generally to this fact in an attempt to curb the spread of the virus. While talking about sexual indiscipline, it is pertinent to discuss some of the factors contributing to it so that the problem is seen in its true perspective. The following are some of such factors:

Seductive dressing: Most modern designs of dresses in vogue lay undue emphasis on the feminine features of women with a view to attracting the attention of the members of the opposite sex. Such dresses expose chests including a reasonable part of breasts at times, thighs and stomachs reaching as low as to display pubic hair in some cases. All these are in addition to the usual make-ups on the face and use of perfume of pungent odour. Clothing materials used are tight-fitting and transparent. The latest fashion is the use of nets of different colours, with scanty underwear barely covering the sensitive parts of the body.

A popular adage says that appearance shows manners. There is no doubt that the way of dressing of young ladies obviously shows their sexual orientation. It is either that they are sexually loose or are out to entice and take undue advantage of unsuspecting sexually active young men. Many female students do this not because they so much sleep about but to extort money from wealthy men whom they mostly avoid to have sex with except when it becomes unavoidable. Some others are said to dress as such because they are used to that from childhood. Whatever the case may be, the fact cannot be denied that young men subjected to such seductive appearances cannot but develop sexual feelings impelling them to look for ways of satisfying their orgies. The effect of that is pre-marital sex, rape, unwanted pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Alcoholism and drug abuse: There is no doubt that there is close relationship between wine and women. Where there is wine, there is bound to be women. It is no surprise therefore to see women of easy virtue use drinking parlours and hotels as brothels or joints to attract customers. The higher the number of people who drink, the higher the number of the cases of sexual indiscipline. Much as drinking of alcohol has been attracting condemnation and public criticism in Nigeria as far back as the colonial days, the problem has not abated (Ayandele, 1966). Government has attempted several times to discourage drinking habits especially by banning the sales of alcohol in motor parks and sponsoring jingles

to alert on the danger of driving while drunk. Mass media were cautioned against advertising alcoholic drinks. Some States implementing the *Shari'ah* ban or restrict drastically the consumption of liquor. All these efforts have not succeeded in reducing alcoholic consumption in the country. Worse still, it is the youth that constitute the majority of alcoholics, a situation which poses dangers bearing in mind that the fact that they are the most sexually active members of the society. In a situation saturated with consumption of alcohol with the usual accompaniment of sexual promiscuity, it is difficult, if not impossible, for Islam to make any headway in the use of the prohibition of alcoholic drinks as a way of combating the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Corruption: Corruption provides opportunities for criminals to reap where they have not sown. They swindle individuals, corporate bodies and Government establishments of large sums of money without contributing anything to the economy. As a result, they have too much money in their possession. They lavish part of it to wine, dine and womanise. Men who sweat before they can make money barely enough to take care of their basic needs can hardly afford to squander it on women. The lower the problem of corruption, the higher the tendency to judiciously spend one's legitimate earning and the less the patronage of women of easy virtue. This will positively impact on the war against the spread of HIV/AIDS. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission allege that, at least, 24 out of 36 Governors are involved in corrupt practices. By implication, members of the State cabinets and Local Government Chairmen in the respective States have colluded with such Governors. One imagines, therefore, the extent of corruption still in the nation despite the vigorous war the Federal Government wages against it (Agua and Guobadia, 2001 and *The Punch* (Lagos) "Editorial Comment", (August 14, 2006).

Lack of quality medical services: Problems bedeviling medical and para-medical services in Nigeria are too many to count. They include inadequacy of qualified personnel, infiltration by quacks into the allied professions, lack of necessary equipment and infra-structural facilities, poor motivation to workers and lack of dedication and patriotism on the part of workers. Another problem here is the undue importance attached to material possessions at the expense of quality services to patients. All these problems as well as others combine to deprive Nigerians of benefiting maximally from the care giving institutions in Nigeria. They lead to inefficiency, dereliction of duty and committing gross mistakes in the health care delivery

system. It is reported that Public Health Systems / Bamako Initiative Project in ten Local Government Areas in Katsina, Kebbi and Oyo States which was commissioned by the United Kingdom Department of International Development (DFID) discovered that:

... Many PHC facilities were dilapidated, with or no evidence of preventive maintenance or repair and no provision for consultations in privacy. Most of the facilities visited by the evaluation team were not using prescribed diagnostic tools, sterilizing their instruments, or maintaining good standards of hygiene and cleanliness and often they lacked sources of water (Anthony, 2001).

The case of baby Oyinkansola Eniola who was infected with HIV as a result of blood transfusion at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, Idi-Araba, Lagos, is quite unfortunate (*The Punch* (Lagos) Tuesday, August 8, 2006). It draws attention to the possibility of many cases like that bearing in mind that most Nigerians will not have the wherewithal to make any report. With the situation as bleak as pointed out above in many public and private health institutions in Nigeria, one is worried about the possibility of putting to practice the Islamic ideal of seeing one's services to fellow men as part of one's devotion to Allah. Worse still, there are many quacks in the various aspects of the profession.

In view of the discussions above, it is clear that faith-based solutions have the potential to assist in the war against the spread of HIV/AIDS. The problem is that the environment has not been made conducive enough to apply the solutions. In the light of this, it is necessary to suggest ways and means of making use of the Islamic panacea in the Nigerian milieu without necessarily Islamizing the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The fact that Nigeria is a pluralistic nation in terms of ethnicity, cultural identity and religious affiliation dictates that one should bear in mind the fear of being marginalized by some of the groups before putting forward any recommendation to move the nation forward. In the area of religion, it is a constitutional provision that the nation should not adopt any of the religions being practised by the citizens as the State religion. Despite that, the nation shall continue to make provisions for every citizen to practise his/her religion as long as that does not infringe on the rights of other citizens. To that extent, it is not out of place to explore the areas in which major religions in Nigeria have similar teachings with a view to recommending a joint approach to national issues especially the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In the light of this, the following suggestions are recommended:

Mobilization of religious leaders to educate their leaders on HIV/AIDS:

Government and non-Governmental agencies should, as a matter of urgency, direct efforts to the use of religious leaders of the various faiths as agents of mass education on HIV/AIDS. They should be required to take advantage of the various occasions such as daily or weekly worship, marriage, naming, funeral, birth day and house-warming ceremonies to draw attention to the dangers of the spread of HIV/AIDS. To ensure that they themselves have authentic knowledge about the virus, workshops, seminars or conferences should be organized for them in which they should be active participants. They should be free to air their views on some aspects of the measures being advocated for curbing the spread of the disease, for instance, the use of condoms. On some issues, they may not unanimously agree whereas there will be no dissenting voice while talking about others for instance abstinence as a means of preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. Facilitators should pay attention on misconceptions and assumptions which are common among religionists. For instance, many people take the issues of sickness and death as purely matters of destiny such that no matter what precautionary measures are taken, what has been pre-destined will come to pass. Making statistical data, results of empirical researches and case studies available to the participants will go a long way to bring about desired results in this respect. If vigorously pursued, it is anticipated that this measure will assist a great deal to educate Nigerians better on HIV/AIDS. In fact, such religious leaders may even invite experts to address their congregations on the issue.

Intensification of poverty alleviation and economic empowerment programmes:

The poverty level in the country is too high. This has negative effects on the ability of some ladies to make choices in matters of sex. Commercial sex workers mention poverty as the excuse for their job. State and Local Governments should team up with the Federal Government and Non-Governmental organizations to reduce poverty. Efforts should be intensified to get rid of illiteracy by ensuring that all children of school ages attend schools. Provision of electricity, good roads, portable water and security will assist to empower more Nigerians to be self-reliant economically than the various intervention programmes which hardly make any appreciable impact.

Resuscitation of moral values: Exposure to ways of life foreign to Africa, shift of emphasis to personal freedom at the expense of social ethos, unlimited access to all kinds of information as a result of globalization, influence of peer groups, shirking by parents the responsibility of

guiding and providing role models for children, failure of the agents of socialization to live up to their duties, urbanization and the astronomical upsurge of the entertainment industry with its allurements combine to negatively influence the Nigerian youth to develop passions for practices antithetical and inimical to the well being of the society. Both boys and girls ignorantly ape foreign countries in dressing, taking drugs, sexual misbehaviour and other forms of anti-social behaviour. As soon as they see the picture of a singer or actress on the album, they rush to the tailor to sew the type of the dress the artiste wears not minding that stage dresses are different from what such people wear off the stage even in Europe and America. It is no wonder that some girls have the audacity to wear to the lecture room dresses meant for relaxation at the bar beach or disco parties. The trend is so horrendous that most tertiary institutions, despite the traditional academic freedom, have to prescribe dressing codes for students with stern warnings of penalties for failure to comply. The step taken by the tertiary institutions should be extended to all the nooks and crannies of the nation. This should be based on the proper education of parents and children on the need for decent dressing. Fashion designers and importers of dresses should have codes of profession. Exposing the sensitive parts of the female body does not help curbing sexual misbehaviour which accounts for more than 80% of the cases of HIV/AIDS spread.

Restriction of consumption of alcoholic drinks:

Government, parents, institutions of learning, relaxation centres and the general public should bear in mind the negative effects of alcoholic drinks on the youth, parents and the nation at large. Many cases of accidents, violent crimes including armed robbery and rape, juvenile delinquency and dropping out of school, just to mention a few, result directly or indirectly from addiction to alcohol. Worse still, it contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS because of the close relationship between wine and women. Government should put restrictions on the consumption of alcohol with a view to minimizing it since it cannot be banned for some socio-economic reasons.

Creating awareness about the multiplying effects of the spread of HIV/AIDS:

It is obvious that most Nigerians avoid being infected with HIV/AIDS for personal safety. Much as there is nothing wrong with this, the efforts should be extended to ensure that fellow Nigerians are not

infected; otherwise every Nigerian will be affected even if not infected. For instance, those infected may not be healthy enough to contribute their quota to the national development while the scarce funds available to Government will have to be expended to take care of them. Loss of manpower results from the pre-occupation of relatives and spouses with the care of HIV/AIDS patients. Orphans left behind add to the number of social liabilities. They may grow to become miscreants in the society as a result of lack of parental care and social security services. In the end, the nation as a whole as well as her citizens and residents are in for it. A stitch in time saves nine.

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