

JOHN DEWEY'S PRAGMATIC PROBLEM SOLVING METHOD AND THE HIV/AIDS SCOURGE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper acknowledges the effort of government agencies, health organizations and concern groups in Nigeria to bring lasting solution to HIV/AIDS pandemic in the Nation. Among others, there has been a lot of investment in massive education campaign on HIV/AIDS, prevention of mother to child transmission, increasing availability of drugs and accessibility to treatment, computerized patient database to integrate monitoring tools, availability of condoms and widespread education on its usage. While one cannot deny the fact that some progress is being made in combating the pandemic, this author however maintains that greater progress can be made and a lasting solution recorded if the relevant bodies will make use of John Dewey's Pragmatic Problem Solving Method in combating HIV/AIDS Pandemic in Nigeria.

To this end, effort is made at enunciating John Dewey's Pragmatic Problem Solving Method with particular emphasis on how this method can be used in bringing about the much cherished lasting solution to HIV/AIDS pandemic in Nigeria. As a prelude, attempt is made to give a general overview of HIV and AIDS in Nigeria. The paper concludes by giving specific suggestions derived from John Dewey's Pragmatic Problem Solving Method as it applies to Nigeria's HIV/AIDS situation

Key words: Corruption, Poverty, Child Marriage, Heraclitus, Gboko

HIV and AIDS in Nigeria

The first two cases of HIV and AIDS in Nigeria were identified in 1985 and were reported at an international conference in 1986 (Adeyi et al. 2006). According to Sofo, Ali-Akpajiak & Pyke (2003), in 1991 the Federal Ministry of Health made their first attempt to assess Nigeria's AIDS situation. The results showed that around 1.8 percent of the population of Nigeria was infected with HIV/AIDS. Subsequent surveillance report revealed that during the 1990's the HIV prevalence rose from 3.8% in 1993 to 4.5% in 1998. In the year 2001 the then government set up a three-year HIV/AIDS Emergency Action Plan (HEAP). In The same year, President Obasanjo hosted the organization of African Unity's first African Summit on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and other related Infectious Diseases. (Adeyi et al. 2006). In recent years there has been increasing concern especially about HIV/AIDS scourge in Nigeria. Considerable number of people at all levels of society has also reacted to this problem with emotions ranging from worry to apprehension. The scourge has deprived the nation of many economically active people and has threatened to either reverse the development gained by Nigeria since independence or cause a prolong developmental stagnation. Though HIV/AIDS is a problem confronting the nations of the world, but in Nigeria according to UNAIDS (2008), an estimated 3.1 per cent of adults between ages 15-49 are living with HIV and AIDS. Although the HIV prevalence is lower in Nigeria than in other African Countries such as South Africa, Zambia and Botswana, the size of Nigeria's population which is around 138 million imply according to UNAIDS(2008) that by the end of 2007, there were an estimated 2,600,000 people infected with HIV. Approximately one

hundred and seventy thousand (170,000) people died from AIDS in 2007 alone (UNAIDS.2008). With aids claiming so many lives, Nigeria's life expectancy has declined significantly. According to WHO-African Region: Nigeria (2008), in 1991 the average life expectancy was 53.8 years for women and 52.6 years for men. WHO observed further that by 2007, these figures had fallen to 46 for women and 47 for men.

As a way of solution, UNFPA (2005) observed condoms provided by international donors and distributed between 2003 and 2005 amounted to an average of 5.9% per man per year. After surmounting religious and cultural objections, the government succeeded in putting in place a curriculum for comprehensive sex education for 10 – 18 years olds. The curriculum was developed with consultation from religious and community leaders and it focuses on improving young people's knowledge and attitudes to sexual health and reducing sexual risk taking behaviours. Odutolu et al. (2006) opine that the new curriculum was informed by the findings that majority of new HIV infections occur in young people between the ages of 15 and 25.

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) NEWS (2005) reported that, in addition to the various media campaigns that have been in place for some years to ensure increasing public awareness of the various ramifications of HIV and AIDS throughout the large and diverse country, in 2005 a campaign was launched whereby text messages with information about HIV/AIDS were sent to subscribers of mobile phones.

According to Odutolu et al (2006) when antiretroviral drugs(ARVs) were introduced in Nigeria in the early 1990,s they were only available to those who paid for them as the cost of the drugs was very high at this time only the rich were able to afford the treatment. Furthermore, Odutolu (2006) reported that in the year 2002, the government started an ambitious treatment program, which aimed to supply 10 000 adults and 5000 children with antiretroviral drugs within one year. An initial \$3.5 million worth of ARVs were to be imported from India and delivered at a subsidized monthly cost of \$7 per person. The programme was announced as "Africa's largest antiretroviral treatment programme" (Odutolu 2006). According to WHO, UNAIDS & UNICEF ((2007), by the year 2004 the programme had suffered a major setback as too many patients were being recruited without enough drugs to supply the high demand. The patients who had already started the treatment then had to wait for up to three months for drugs. Eventually, another \$ 3.8 million worth of drugs were ordered and the programme resumed. Treatment scal up between 2006-7 was impressive rising from 81 000 people (15% of those in need) to 198 000 (26%) by the end of 2007.

Health Reform Foundation of Nigeria (HERFON) (2007) reported that the Nigerian government are contributing around 5 percent of the funds for the antiretroviral treatment programme with the main donors being President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Global Fund and the World Bank.

In 2002, the world Bank loaned US\$90.3 million to Nigeria to support the 5-year HIV/AIDS programme Development Project (Health Reform Foundation of Nigeria. 2007). In 2008, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) provided approximately US \$448 million to Nigeria for HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care. By the end of 2008, the Global Fund also had disbursed US\$ 95 million in funds for Nigeria to expand treatment, prevention, and prevention of mother-to child transmission programme.

At the National conference on HIV/AIDS that took place in Abuja (Nigeria) recently Makinde(2010) in a situation report wrote that lack of sincerity, poor funds administration, Unclear motives and slipshod approach of government officials, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGO's), have left little to sheer about over two decades after HIV/AIDS was first reported in Nigeria as cases of new infections keep increasing. Furthermore, Makinde (2010) rightly observed that since the HIV virus was first discovered in Lagos(Nigeria) in 1986, the struggle with the scourge has consumed billions of Naira. In addition, Makinde (2010) noted correctly that the huge sums spent on the prevention and management of the pandemic has been like pouring drums of water in a big basket. Citing a 2009 release by the National Intelligence Council, USA, Makinde(2010) wrote that the number of people with HIV/AIDS in the world will grow significantly by the end of 2010, predicting that this will be largely driven by the spread of the disease in five populous countries, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Russia, India and China, where the number of infected people will grow from 14 million - 23 million currently to an estimated 50 million by the end of the year 2010. According to Makinde (2010), for Nigeria, the report specifically stated that the country will witness an increase in new cases of between 10million and 15 million HIV infections despite the huge funds and grants expended on the anti – AIDS fight. This being the case it is obvious that while some progress has been made in combating HIV and AIDS scourge in Nigeria, the prevailing situation and the anticipated future condition still call for very serious concern. The author opines therefore that a consideration of John Dewey's Pragmatic problem solving method and its application in providing lasting solution to Nigeria's HIV and AIDS s scourge can not be overemphasized.

The History And Various Strands Of Pragmatism

One of the earliest of the Greek Philosophers; Heraclitus developed a philosophic theory that has a close kinship with the basic tenets of modern pragmatism. The central idea in the Heraclitan philosophy was that there is no fixed or absolute reality, truth or value. Hassen (1960) maintained that Peirce, James and Dewey constitute a Trinitarian authority for pragmatism. It was Charles Peirce (1968) who first mentioned what he called "pragmaticism", his thesis being that the real meaning of an idea is to be found in its concrete result, especially in its practical consequence for human action. According to Edwards (1967), the metaphysical position that underlies Pierce's Pragmatism is called metaphysical realism. Pierce according to Abel (1972), believed in the reality of what are called universal concepts which are used to refer to a number of particular objects. He believed that these concepts have real existence; they are not just fictions. A problem for holding such view is that of explaining in what sense they are real. And to explain the sense in which they are real is to explain the meaning of the concepts. Pragmatism for Peirce therefore becomes a theory of meaning. For many years after Peirce had written his two papers: "Fixation of belief" and "How to make our ides clear" which formed the origin of modern pragmatism, his ideas had no effect until William James started to popularize them. Edwards (1967) reported William James view that the meaning of a word involves knowing what you will do and what experience you will get. Knowledge, according to him, consisted, not simply of the passive method of looking at our past experiences from memory, but the active projection of past experiences as well as current ones into the future. Knowledge is the imaginative reconstruction of something we have not experienced in terms of what we have experienced. Such experiences however are not carried out in a vacuum. It takes into account future possibilities in the light of present problems.

Randal et al (1946) recorded Dewey's view of pragmatism as a theory of knowledge.

According to Dewey, Knowledge takes place within human experience, the complete network of interaction between man and his environment. To him knowledge getting activity begins when we start not merely to think but to think reflectively. Reflective thought proper takes place when a problem confronts us and in trying to solve the problem we manipulate our environment, we experiment on things, and make discoveries. What we discover does not present itself ready made; it is the result of experimentation. Therefore, for John Dewey, experimentation is an essential part of the knowing process. According to John Dewey, there are five steps of Pragmatic problem solving method. These are:

1. I identify the main problem
2. Analyze the main problem
3. Collect the necessary data
4. Based on the data, come up with the possible solutions to the problem
5. Weigh the merits and the demerits of the possible solutions; accepting and rejection them accordingly

Gboko (1972) sees pragmatism as an emphasis on the practical. According to him, education curricula should not be dictated by what merely conform to tradition. He recommends that in teaching, we should pay attention more to the specifics, the concrete or the particular rather than the abstract and the universal. In other words, we should base truth upon specific and particular facts of perception rather than upon abstract and universal principle of reason. He also sees pragmatism as futurism. He maintained that making the practical consequence of a theory the criterion of its truth is an emphasis not only on the practical but also on the future. For example, whereas authoritarianism justifies beliefs in conformity with present authorities, pragmatism tests them by their consequences in the future.

Randal (1971) reported Schiller's view of pragmatism as a theory of truth. To Schiller, man is a social being and therefore truth is a social product. He contends further that individual truth valuations are corrected and altered under social influence until certain beliefs are accepted generally. Brown (1931) recorded that pragmatism is concerned primarily with the question of practical usefulness, holding for example, that ideas, belief and attitude are important particularly for their function in social interaction. Hanssen (1960) wrote that the basic philosophical framework of pragmatism is this; ontologically, experience is what is most real. Epistemologically, experience is the best way of knowing the truth. Axiologically, democratic experience is the highest known value. Therefore from the pragmatist point of view, reality can not be defined any more absolutely than anything else. Ontologically, the pragmatist says that what is experienced by an ordinary human being in the ordinary life is the reality we can define. Therefore reality is not an abstract idea and is certainly not embodied in some impersonal scientific or cosmic law. The pragmatist believes that all axiological judgments of aesthetic and ethics must be fundamentally human judgment. The pragmatist sees no need whatsoever for an impersonal moral law. Man has within his power the ability to make judgment on everything that affects him as man. Therefore, from the pragmatist standpoint, good is found in satisfaction and workability.

Having gone through the history of Pragmatism and its various strands, for the purpose of this paper, we shall concentrate mainly on pragmatism as presented by John Dewey; a theory

of knowledge, an emphasis on the practical and that which sees moral standards and values as hypothesis to be verified in experience. We shall concentrate on pragmatism as presented by John Dewey because unlike the other stands, it is more relevant to the task of securing a more lasting solution to Nigeria's HIV and AIDS problem.

John Dewey's Pragmatic Problem Solving Method And The Handling Of The Hiv / Aids Scourge In Nigeria

One observes that while HIV and AIDS scourge is a problem in Nigeria, the scourge itself is an indirect result of some other fundamental societal problems that have eaten deep into the fabric of the nation and the scourge can only be successfully curbed if these fundamental problems are acknowledged and faced headlong for solution. These problems which are more fundamental, are a combination of corruption and its sister vices such as: poverty among a large segment of the populace, drug and alcohol abuse, moral decadence, prostitution, failure to acknowledge and respect the sanctity of sex, the sanctity of marriage, deeply rooted and harmful cultural practices such as wife sharing, child marriage, etc. If these various aspects of behavioral problem in the country can be addressed with the same zeal with which the government and the various non-governmental organizations have been struggling with finding solution to HIV/AIDS the country would have recorded greater success if not put the pandemic totally behind the nations' history as a milestone. While corruption, poverty, drug abuse, moral decadence, prostitution etc are vices which can be found in almost every country, the dimension of these vices in Nigeria is alarming to say the least

As listed earlier, the indirect cause of HIV/ AIDS and the major reasons why only minimal success may ever be realized in the struggle against HIV/AIDS and why the battle against the pandemic may never be won, have not been acknowledged by the relevant authorities in Nigeria neither has any move been made to confront these issues.

Within the context of John Dewey's Pragmatism, for a problem to be solved at all, it has to first of all be correctly identified in its total ramifications. Dewey correctly observes that until a problem is correctly identified to start with, no further step of progress can be taken in the way of finding solution to the problem. This is because a problem that has not been correctly identified cannot be correctly and comprehensively analyzed and neither can all the relevant data in respect of solving the problem be collected. In this vein, one can not talk of testing the possible solutions to an unidentified problem nor think of evaluating data that are not there with respect to such a problem.

While one cannot overemphasize the effort of the government of Nigeria and the various non-governmental organizations in combating HIV/AIDS in the country it is an undeniable fact that the "parent" problem of corruption in the country and its "allies" (poverty, drug abuse, prostitution, harmful cultural) practices have seriously mitigated all the efforts made so far in putting a total end to the pandemic or seriously slowing it down.

Corruption

Corruption is a major unresolved problem in Nigeria. It has done and is still doing much havoc to every segment of life in Nigeria. While Corruption is not peculiar to Nigeria as a nation, the intensity, the span and the nature is unique and alarming. Corruption in Nigeria rages from looting of public treasury, misappropriation of public funds, inflation of figures, embezzlement, extortion, bribery, gratification in form of money, services and

favour. Many who indulge in corruption courier public money into foreign accounts unlike what happens in some other countries where looted public money are invested at home to create jobs. It can not be overemphasized that HIV/AIDS Pandemic in Nigeria can only be meaningfully addressed only after its “mother” problem in the country has been acknowledged and dealt with. This is because the bulk of whatever funds, equipment, materials, etc from whatever source meant to be used in the war against the “monster” called HIV/AIDS can be sure to have ended up and continue to end up in wrong hands through corruption. Lanre Adewole and Tunde Oyesina (2010) reported that the Chairperson of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mrs Farida Waziri noted that the commission has secured 100 convictions and recovered approximately \$3.5 billion. Furthermore she noted that Nigeria’s global corruption index has moved from 0.5 to 2.7 points leaving the nation 121st out of 179 countries. Over the years, funds meant for the provision of portable water, electricity among others have been known to have suddenly disappeared. Even in the 21st century, as a major oil producing country, Nigeria can not boast of the availability of these basic amenities in her cities not even to talk of the villages. The rule of the day is each man to his own generator for power supply and his own bore hole for water supply when the public supply are either extremely erratic or totally absent. With a scenario like this, it is only very obvious that unless corruption is seriously dealt with, to talk of fighting against HIV/AIDS is to talk of fighting a lost battle.

According to Makinde(2010), the Global Fund cancelled a grant to Nigeria for reasons that border on non -performance and inadequate management of large scale financial interventions for public health. Furthermore, Makinde(2010) wrote that the Global Fund claimed that the Nigerian Agency for the control of AIDS (NACA) presented questionable data. The view of the Global Fund on the Nigerian situation, according to Makinde(2010) is that “funds should not just be spent simply for its own sake, just as a process, or disappear into deep private pockets, but to achieve concrete outcomes in prevention, treatment and lives saved by the interventions funded.”

Poverty

According to Lambo(2003) poverty can be said to mean inability to afford basic needs, lack of control of resources, lack of education and skills, poor health, malnutrition, lack of shelter, poor access to water and sanitation, vulnerability to shocks, violence and crime, lack of potential freedom, choice and voice. With the exception of a selected few, this definition captures the scenario in Nigeria. Poverty obviously has a tremendous impact on HIV/AIDS. Poor people in every society are prone to engage in high risk behavior like prostitution (both men and women) and drug abuse. For a poor person prostitution is not seen as anything abnormal because what matters is survival now, AIDS or no AIDS tomorrow. Therefore no matter how much is expended in combating HIV/AIDS unless poverty is acknowledged as a major “disease” in Nigeria the battle against HIV/AIDS will be tantamount to chasing the shadows at best. According to the Energy information Administration (2007), Nigeria is the largest oil producer in Africa and the 12th largest in the world. Therefore, poverty among a large segment of Nigerian populace is not because the country is poor but a direct result of corruption where by the money meant for all have been swindled and are being swindled by some. So intense is the level of poverty in Nigeria that the country is ranked 158 out of 177 on the UNITED Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Poverty index(UNDP 2007/2008).

Child Marriage

Women are particularly affected by the epidemic in Nigeria. In 2007 women accounted for 58% of all adults aged 15 and above living with HIV (UNAIDS, 2008 “Epidemiological fact sheet on HIV and AIDS”. Traditionally women in Nigeria young, although the average age at which they marry varies between states. A 2007 study revealed that 54 percent of girls from the North West aged between 15-24 were married by age 15, and 81 per cent were married by age 18(The population Council, Inc (2007)”The experience of married adolescent girls in Northern Nigeria”) The study showed that younger married girls lacked knowledge on reproductive health, which included HIV/AIDS. They also tend to lack the power and education needed to insist upon using condoms during sex. Coupled with the high probability that the husband will be significantly older than the girl and therefore is more likely to have had more sexual partners in the past, young women are more vulnerable to HIV infection within marriage. Child marriage in Nigeria can be traced to the desire to “trade” the child for quick money labeled as dowry either because of greed which is a form of corruption or because of poverty which is also an outcome of corruption in the nation. Therefore child marriage as one of the “allies” of corruption needs to be acknowledged and cured in order to give way for meaningful progress in the battle against HIV/AIDS.

Moral Values in Nigeria have for some time now been changing. Incidentally the direction of the change is such that is not in the best interest of the populace. In the very distant past, the sanctity of sex and the sanctity of marriage were never questioned. Then it was a taboo to have sex outside wedlock or before wedlock However with “modernization”, “human rights” etc such ideas like sanctity of marriage, sanctity of sex ere thrown to the dogs with the attendant results of HIV/AIDS everywhere. Generally in Nigeria the moral values are terribly “sick” and unless this is acknowledged and addressed, the best that can be achieved in the battle against HIV/AIDS is to move in circles. Similarly, in operation some parts of Nigeria are some strange cultural practices such as wife sharing whereby a visitor is not just giving a treat at table but also offered the woman of the house(wife of the host) to sleep with. To talk of winning the battle against HIV/AIDS while a monster like a cultural practice of this nature is allowed to continue is nothing but sheer deceit. Incidentally, those who would have used their position in government to stop such strange and harmful cultural practices have not been able to do so and can not do so because of their history of corrupt practices in getting to the office and while in office. As it were such people are living in glass houses and therefore dare not throw stones.

Summary and Conclusion

The core of John Dewey’s pragmatism is the need to correctly identify a problem and to locate the most appropriate solution. In this paper, attempt has been made to show that HIV/AIDS in Nigeria is an indirect result of a “parent” monster; corruption and its “allies” such as poverty, loss of moral values manifesting in child marriage, wife sharing, failure to acknowledge the sanctity of sex, sanctity of marriage etc. It is observed that these vices are as serious as or even more serious than HIV/AIDS pandemic. This is because corruption and its accompanying vices as highlighted in this paper will continue to paralyze whatever effort is aimed a fining meaningful solution to HIV/AIDS scourge in Nigeria. To avoid simply marking time in the war against HIV/AIDS it is imperative therefore for the relevant authorities to broaden their focus and acknowledge the presence of a “parent” pandemic and its allies and face them altogether instead of simply facing HIV/AIDS alone.

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