

DELES – AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

The term development has meant different things for different people. Sometimes the notion is shrouded with ambiguity. Some have judged it from the purely economic and technical points of view. Others describe it as a march forward from the less human to the more human. Pope Paul VI (1967) speaks of it as “the promotion of the good of people, every person, and the whole person”. John Paul II (1979) sees it as “the priority of ethics over technology, the primacy of persons over things, and the superiority of the spirit over matter”. Emmanuel Milingo (1976) declares that there is no such thing as a ‘developed’ nation, unless that nation has succeeded in making its people live together in harmony and unity, in love and justice, in mutual respect, interdependence, and peace. Kenneth Kaunda (1966) observes that the experts have all kinds of standards by which they judge the degree of civilization of a people. “My own test”, he says, “is this: How does the society treat its old people, and indeed all its members who are not useful and productive in the narrowest sense?”

For DELES an acronym for **D**evelopment, **E**ducation and **L**eadership **S**ervices, development means all the above and much more. The goal of DELES programme, which is integral human development, says it all – development has to be integral or holistic if it is to empower. DELES programme Nigeria as a human development programme has social justice as its constitutive dimension. As a popular educational programme, it involves purposeful educational intervention in the pursuit of social and political change. It is a breakaway from project approach in favour of human-centred approach to justice and developments and that is based on the belief that human beings are architects of own growth and development, must draw life not on borrowed but on own authentic culture. Since its conception in October 1979, regular phased workshops from January 1982 and birth in October 1983, when it acquired the name DELES, it has grown organically to embody three interrelated features namely, *curriculum* because it has specific theme for each of the four phases, *programme* because of its organizational structures and activities within which it operates and *movement* given its system of beliefs and values which it cannot compromise.

DELES is developed on the Christian principles and values of faith in and obedience to God, Creator of Heaven and earth. It advocates respect for the dignity of persons, due attention to gender equity, compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation, love, justice, and openness to the principles and practice of other religious which do not conflict with these values. It places an important value on ecumenical collaboration and is open to all people irrespective of their religion, nationality and tribal affiliation, who are committed to helping people to help

themselves and to live fully human life. DELES stands on the assumption that participatory and experiential approach is the basis of authentic human development.

The key principles of this training for transformation programme – the Freiran Psycho-Social Method (PSM), which has been adopted as the methodology of DELES Nigeria, offers the most valuable aspects of informing the way we look at the other person and the context in which s/he lives. It is extremely helpful in the wider society aspect especially in relation to power, abuse and systems critique. This methodology which is facilitative and people centered, opens up the whole world of empowerment skills and attitudes, and brings about a radical conversion in one's whole way of life and work. In DELES methodology, there is a 'respect and inclusion of all'.

As an individual participant, and Facilitator, the whole philosophy/values has helped me grow as a person and brought out the best in me. It has influenced the way I work and given me a vision and commitment towards a just, responsible and free society as well as creates a dynamic of positive change with people I work with. I have tried to internalized the principles, the spiritually of the three circles that they have almost permeate and shape everything I do and how I relate with others.

For many other participants, DELES training can be:

- A programme designed for personal and group development
- A seminal life changing experience offering the courage and competencies needed for serious engagement in societal change
- A challenging and alternative way for engaging in development work
- A continuing source of inspiration and nourishment for committed community activists
- An excellent training process for volunteers and professionals who want to work for change in their communities, etc.

RELEVANCE OF DELES TO THE NIGERIAN CHURCH

The Nigerian Catholic Bishops in calling for educational programmes designed in such a way as to empower people to free themselves from misery and degradation, as well as to work for their own well being, embraced DELES programme wholly into its formation programmes. DELES became part of the inter-Novices formation programmes of both the Male and Female Religious Congregations since the 1980s holding at the Dominican Institute of the Archdiocese of Ibadan. This yearly training/programme bring together each time the over 100 young Church future leaders from about 12 different Congregations from the neighbouring Dioceses of Oyo, Ondo, Oshogbo, Ijebu-ode, Abeokuta as well as Lagos and Ibadan Archdioceses. Similarly, the programme is also being organized in most religious Seminaries, Convents and Parishes across the Country as well as other faith based groups, NGOs and Government MDAs.

In July 2010, the Catholic Archbishop of Ibadan, Most Rev. Dr. Alaba Job invited DELES to extend the four phased circle training to both the Priest and Seminarians of the Archdiocese. The first

phase of the workshop, which took place from July 4–10, 2010, saw 40 participants in attendance. The Archbishop, while declaring the workshop opened, challenged the participants to see DELES Programme as providing them with additional skills on growth in self-esteem, self-confidence and the competences needed to interact well and fruitfully with others that are foundational. The second and third phases of the training came up in December 2010 and July 2011 while the fourth and final phase of the first cycle took place in July, 2012 at the SS Peter and Paul Major Seminary, Bodija-Ibadan when the school is on vacation. Another round of the training will begin with a new set of Seminarians by December, 2014.

DELES IN THE NIGER DELTA STATES

In searching for the kind of development that liberates, empowers and leads to the self-growth of the Anang, Ibibio and Efik people of the South-South zone of Nigeria, and to train animators or development agents to carry out the task of societal transformation in order to bring to the people the liberating influence of the gospel, Very Rev. Fr. Jim Sharkey, SPS (Obong Uwana Ikono), has committed a lot of resources and energy to organize and facilitate DELES programme in the dioceses of Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Ogoja and Calabar. After passing through the programme and a similar training called DELTA in Kenya, he got in touch with the DELES office in Lagos in the early 90s and till date, the training is still running for Priests, Religious, those in Formations and the lay faithful including those outside the Church. Through this training, many have discovered a new respect for work, acquired a new mentality that is turned resolutely towards the future and the competences needed (by each person at his or her own level) for the functioning of a society in which all have a good life and to learn, above all, that the primary need is a new morality.

From the point of view of DELES training going on in almost all the dioceses, I am led to believe that the Church met well in the area of human development because any development that leads to self-growth engenders greater self-determination and self-reliance. Such a development leads the people to acquire a sense of confidence about their own dignity. It is hoped that there will be a progressive liberation from evils of various kinds, especially from the classic evils of poverty, ignorance and disease as well as societal tensions and cultural arrogance.

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