

YOUTH RESILIENCE: THE FUTURE'S ANCHOR BY DR. W. E. AKODA
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Our definition of youth is those between the ages of 16 and 40 and the term Resilient is the ability of a youth to adapt to situations or overcome situations in the face of challenges. Nan Henderson says, it is the capacity to spring back, rebound successfully, and develop social, academic and vocational competence inspite of exposure to severe stress inherent in today's world. Lifton (1994) believes that it is the capacity of individuals to transform and change no matter the risk. Stephen and Sybil Wolin see it as a mean by which children and adults can rebound from hardship and emerge as strong healthy individuals able to live gratifying lives.

You must agree with me that the youths today are exposed to many challenges, and obstacles in which, if we are not careful can help in derailing them from having a good future. Many youths live in environments that are not conducive for their well being and for their proper physical, psychological, social and academic development. In an ideal society, youths should be able to scale through their youthful lives successfully to be able to reach adulthood, achieve their goals in life and exercise their God given talents satisfactorily. Hence it is important that, a conducive environment be created for them to achieve these dreams. But here we are today, where our youths are faced with so many challenges. Some of these challenges include:

1. Exposure to family conflict. Youths today are exposed to broken homes/marriages, a situation that leaves most of them traumatized psychologically. Some have to go to the extent of fending for themselves simply because both parents shelve their responsibilities of caring for them. A youth's home is his first constituency and where he/she is denied the love and care of his parents/ family; he may look elsewhere - possibly negative areas- for that love/care

that was denied him. This situation can also lead to emotional stress, drop-out syndrome, homelessness.

2. Limited access to the basic things of life that should be provided by the community or (government) in which they live e.g. good roads, constant electricity supply, good health care facilities, pipe borne water and safe neighbourhood. I daresay, many youths, because of the lack of these basic amenities fall victims of stress, unhealthy physical and mental development, road accidents, armed robbery, which in turn impacts negatively on their future lives.
3. Lack of unemployment- Many graduate youths are victims of unemployment in Nigeria today. It is disheartening to note that after many years of toiling in tertiary institutions, a great majority of youths today roam the streets searching for employment. This situation can lead to negative behavioural patterns like alcoholism, drug addiction and armed robbery.
4. Youths also find themselves in unpleasant positions where they are exposed to violence in schools, cultism, bullying, sexual abuse, intimidation, and peer rejection. Bullying and intimidating a young man will make him loose self esteem or self confidence. Peer rejection will lead to a withdrawn personality /an introvert. Violence and cultism also have grave consequences for the future of youths, among others.

The challenges mentioned, and many more, hamper youth development and constitute a hindrance towards the road to greatness. One thing I must ask is this: What are the dreams and aspirations of a great majority of youths in Nigeria /Cross River today? If I must speak the minds of youths today, then I will say that the dreams and aspirations of youths today include: sound education, meaningful careers, ideal marriage, warm relationship

with family and friends, and self sufficiency. There is no youth in this hall today that will not like to have a happy marriage, plum job and ride in exotic cars. I stand to be corrected.

If this is the case, how can youths overcome the challenges earlier mentioned and achieve their dreams? In other words, how can we create a resilient youth? A youth that would emerge victorious inspite of the entire ordeal he is going through?

Adults, comprising parents, elders of the community/relatives have a great role to play in helping the youths develop resilience by creating the enabling environment for them to feel secured, loved and cared for. They need to show them love and give them the autonomy to express themselves and their God given talent. Parents need to provide physical environments where youths feel safe and unmolested and their basic needs provided for. They also need to provide them with a sound social environment where they can learn the necessary skills which will equip them in globalized society and influence their academic progress. In other words, parents need to support their youth, guide and direct them and create a satisfactory environment for their future success.

Indeed the youths of today are the leaders of tomorrow. The role of government in creating strong, healthy, educated, individuals for the nation cannot be over-emphasized. Our government needs to open up opportunities for youths to be resilient and to be able to exercise their talents. Accordingly, the fallen standard of education should be revived, jobs should be created, security beefed up and the basic amenities- water, light, medical services, good roads, should as a matter of urgency be looked into. Should the above support and opportunity be created, then the dream of our youths which include to be able to function positively in the society now and if the future would not be in vain.

Lastly, every youth worth his salt has to look inwards and attempt to be autonomous. A resilient youth must have the will

power to say no to negative vices and temptation. Youths must attempt to create the kind of life and identity they would want rather than accept their situation or the lives they were born. You must be able to make your mark and develop your self respect and competence inspite of being exposed to negative attributes and severe stress. You must be able to adapt to situations in the face of adversity. Youths must strive to have a strong sense of independence and power and try to separate themselves from an environment that is dysfunctional. A resilient youth must overlook problems and think of solutions. You must be flexible, knowing that you are only passing through a temporary phase in life. A resilient youth must remain focused and persistent. He must set targets or goals for himself and strive to achieve them inspite of all odds. In trying to achieve his goals, he must overlook obstacles, work hard and pray hard. Bear this in mind: Set backs are inevitable and failure is a stepping stone to success- hence you must never give up in anything. Try, try, try again and success must surely come.

Shiv Khera, the author of *You Can Win* said- "Be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind. Look at the sunny side of everything and stay away from negative people. Think only of the best, work only for the best and expect only the best". Above all "give everyone a smile". That is to say have a sense of humor. In spite of your challenges, stay focused, build a positive attitude to life and develop an attitude of gratitude- count your blessings and not your troubles. It is said that: Your Attitude to Life, and not your Aptitude determines your Altitude.

My dear CAMSA members thank you for listening. Beyond the sky is your limit. You will all get there. God bless you.