

People

RESEARCH into nomadic education started in Nigeria in 1972. It was the result that came with the interaction with these cattle herdsmen at Oturkpo, Benue State. Then the thought of bringing these people into the mainstream of life was born. Presently, this thought which is known as nomadic education has attracted world recognition. The man who began it all, is no other person than Dr. Chima Ezeomah and associate professor in Educational Planning, University of Jos.

Dr. Ezeomah born in March 1937 in Umuahia of Imo State, had his primary education in 1950-52 in Oturkpo, where he lived with a police elder brother. It was here that he first got to know these cattle rearers. He saw their plight as 'being deprived and under-privileged, yet important people that need attention for a better society'. Ezeomah, a young child, could not resist the feeling of pity for this people. From there the spirit of self help project into helping or improving the conditions of these people got hold of him.

After his primary education, he went, instead of secondary school to Teachers Training College at Kaltungo Teachers' College, 1955-57 where he passed out in Grade III. He later thought in the school from 1958-61. It was during this period that he got to know them the more. The way he sees this period is that, 'the exposure made it possible for him to acquire competence in writing and speaking Hausa fluently, which was more of a preparation to what I am doing now. So, my childhood experiences prepared me for my adult life.'

Dr. Ezeomah sat for his GCE 'O' and 'A' Level and cleared five and two papers respectively at a sitting. In 1965, he passed out of the University of Nigeria Nsukka. While in the university, he was sponsored by the Sudanic Mission Adventure. Even as a graduate, Dr. Ezeomah found out that he still had the spirit of helping the nomads. To him, the fire has not yet died out.

In the same way the nomads are found in all parts of the country, so is the friends of Dr. Ezeomah. He has them in all fields of life. The first military Governor of Benue Plateau, the late Joseph Gornwath was his classmate. Dr. Ezeomah does not only identify with the 'big shots' of his friends, he prides himself in his relationship with the nomads, whom he said, 'supplied them milk while he was a classroom teacher and vice-principal of Ikwoye Girls Secondary School. This extension of hospitality informed Ezeomah that the sorry condition of this intelligent and amiable people is a challenge to him.

In 1971, he introduced adult education classes among them. The more intelligent ones were produced to help in the teaching and educating others on how to read and write. It was during this initial exercise that it 'was proved beyond all reasonable doubt that they are very intelligent group, and given the opportunity any other person has in education, there was no doubt that they would excel'. While at Nassarawa and Miango he continued with the programme.

For his master's degree programme, he went to ABU, Zaria 'to investigate the attitudes of this people towards formal education... to take a broader outlook on their life pattern'. Honestly speaking, Dr.

Ezeomah did not make an inch towards realising his desire. This was caused by lack of finance. But while as a teacher at ATC, Zaria, he continued to remember that he had a duty to these nomads. This made him write 'the first proposal on nomadic education which still lies at the Institute of Education, ABU, Zaria'. His work was recognised. The institute gave him a mere sum of N200.00. This amount could not support any research work, so his research into the field was limited.

The University of Jos accepted him in 1976. He revised the earlier proposal and presented it to the research committee of the institution. He received N1,800 with which he went into the bush, following, sleeping, chatting and conversing with the fulbe nomads of Plateau, Gongola and Bauchi States. Contrary to people's opinion, it wasn't crazy for him to research into the life of this nomads, which many consider as fixed. His moral was further boosted by the former Dean of his Faculty, Professor Cooper. The result of his research to which part of it was published, started to create an awareness. To go further, in his research, the problems that hinders this people from being educated and the strategies to adopt formed his Ph.D. thesis.

Dr. Ezeomah is a 'pusher' too. While the Federal Government, in 1978 was talking about adult education, he wrote the Federal Ministry of Education that "if they are talking about every Nigerian, they must not fail to include the nomads." He was invited to Lagos. There, plans and arrangements reached a stage where it was not only accepted by the Ministry of Education, but the UNESCO, too, was written for help. It was a tortuous journey, "for, since 1979 when they initiated the idea to UNESCO, it was in 1984 that UNDP/UNESCO grant for the project came. Dr. Ezeomah and group were mandated to bring out an indepth study on how to educate this people and their total life pattern.

The group divided their work into eight parts viz demography, socio-cultural aspect, communication, economics, human aspect, animal health and husbandary. The groups comprise medical doctors, educationalists, sociologists, pharmacists, economists etc. They based their reports on what they got from Plateau, Gongola and Bauchi States. The groups are yet to submit their findings compiled in eight volumes to the UNESCO. The interest shown by the UNESCO attracted the Federal Government to the programme. It was launched in 1987 in seven states including Abuja, Plateau, Bauchi, etc. From the statistical survey, Ezeomah conducted for the Federal Government, which he has submitted for long, showed that there are about 6.4 million nomads in the ten northern states.

Sense of unity and hospitality dominate Ezeomah. I marvelled when I saw, on reaching his house for this interview, that the people discussing with him were all nomads. They came to solicit for his advice in their problems. That was all. Aliyu Ibrahim, Plateau State School of Accountancy and Management Studies, Jos, a Fube Fulani, now living with Ezeomah spoke to tell me that six of them

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By Nnadi Ani

live with Ezeomah. "He pays our school fees. As an Igbo man. There is no discrimination in his dealings with us. He is good," he concluded.

In Ezeomah's opinion, the peasant

of the nomads could not hold for the migrant workers and fishermen of the South because there is no research in that field. "We have passed that stage in then, they should as well make effort to provide them with education, ammen-



Dr. Chima Ezeomah

farmers or fishermen could receive similar attention as the nomads, if really their workday affects the education of their children and when enough research must have been made. In essence, Dr. Ezeomah was saying that the same situation

lies, health and what have you." Where they are, there my heart lies," seems to be Ezeomah's speech. And by the time I know it, there is already a car waiting for a journey into the bush.

Dr. Ezeomah, slightly light in comple-