

Attitudinal, Behavioural and Change (ABC).

What roles can Attitudinal, Behavioural and Change institution play in shaping peoples' attitude and behaviour in Sierra Leone?"

It is no surprise that the new Attitudinal, Behavioural and Change (ABC) concept has sparked an intellectual debate, which I am pleased to contribute to. Sierra Leoneans have had too many promises in the past about positive change in their country. I will start with former President J.S. Momoh who mentioned in one of his presidential speeches that he planned to build a bridge that would connect Lungi and Freetown for the benefit of trade and easy movement of people. Captain Strasser (Retd.), as Head of State and Government, promised to address both the issue of the child mortality rate in Sierra Leone and the issue of ghettos. Major Johnny Paul Koroma (Retd.), the leader of the Junta regime, gained support by rallying young people living in ghettos and promising to alleviate their problems. President Tejan Kabbah promised to make Sierra Leone free from hunger (target date set as 2007). In his visit in Berlin, Germany in 2003, where I was the Public Relations Officer (PRO) and privileged to Chair his meeting with the Sierra Leone community, he called on his fellow Sierra Leoneans to return home and take part in the new concept his government had introduced, which was "Free Trade". He was asked about the lack of electricity and he said measures have been put in place to provide permanent electricity by the end of 2003. The Former Sierra Leone Ambassador Alpha Wurrie in Germany backed the president statement by saying that he was in talks with the Italian authorities to speed up the process of electricity provision. All these leaders have come and gone yet their promises remain unfulfilled.

In 2008 President Ernest Bai Koroma set forth his vision for his new government, on the State Opening of the Third Parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone at the Chamber of Parliament, Tower Hill. The President, among other things, said his government has a broad outline of priorities in its plan of action that would move the country forward. Moreover,

he stressed the need to fight dreaded corruption as well as instilling discipline and maintaining the hard won peace and national security. In his words:

A new dawn has broken on the horizon of our nation, forth a new Sierra Leone, a new era of peace, security, stability and socio-economic progress in our country. A new Sierra Leone, where there are no ethnic or regional boundaries. A new Sierra Leone where we work harder than we did before. A new Sierra Leone where our children learn better in school. A new Sierra Leone where market women and men prosper in their traders [trades?]. A new Sierra Leone where the youth train and work to live productive lives.

When I first read the speech from the websites of various newspapers, I noted that a new campaign would have to be launched to achieve the above goals. In most of his public speeches he repeated the same words: Attitude, Behaviour and Change. Is President Koroma going to keep his promise through this new noble institution? This paper will:

- ❖ Examine the concept of Attitude, Behaviour and Change from sociological perspectives.
- ❖ Identify some of the negative attitudes and behaviour in Sierra Leone.
- ❖ Suggest ways in which our attitude can be changed and contribute to President Koroma's good intentions for the nation.

The construction of attitudes towards a society is not one-dimensional, but composed of several factors, namely the belief that corruption is immoral and that the practice is a deterrent to the continuity of positive mainstream social values and economic prosperity in society. From sociological perspectives mainstream attitudes in society could be influenced by gender, belief systems, precedents, customs and norms. It is these perceptions that influence behaviour. In an attempt to challenge classical attitude theory, Devine (1989) has suggested that people's attitudes are underpinned by implicit and

automatic judgments of which they are unaware. Devine calls these construals and argues that because they are automatic and unconscious people are less influenced by social desirability bias. That is how others might judge their response. These descriptions tend to fit with the way social attitudes operate in Sierra Leone. President Koroma himself has identified and described the way corruption operates in the Country. For example, he identified:

- ❖ Corruption in schools , where he appealed to teachers to stop asking school children for petty cash,
- ❖ Corruption within the Police and again he appealed for law enforcement officers to stop asking drivers for bribes when they brake traffic rules and
- ❖ Corruption within the Health Service. He urged Medical doctors to consider life first before money.

Some of these behaviours are unconsciously executed with less regard than for the impact on the victims. It is often the case that a medical doctor would see someone dying of a treatable disease, but because the person didn't have money at the time to pay for the treatment he would be left to die. In such cases this person would be a victim of construals attitudes.

The word attitude came from the Latin word aptus meaning, "fit and ready for action" (Hogg and Vaughan, 2002, p, 145). This ancient meaning refers to something that one can see e.g. the attitude of football players in a football field. McGuire (1989) has put forward three components of attitude, which have sparked interesting discussions amongst social psychologists. But for this paper, I am more interested in the third, which defines attitudes from an ancient philosophical model as:

The trichotomy of human experience into thought, feeling, and action, although not logically compelling, is so pervasive in Indo-European thought... as to suggest that it corresponds to something basic in our way of conceptualization, perhaps ... reflecting the three evolutionary

layers of the brain, cerebral cortex, limbic system, and old brain.
(McGuire (1989), cited in Hogg and Vaughan, 2002, p, 147)

This model of definition has attracted other social psychologists like Himmelfarb and Eagly (1974) who defined attitude as a “relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups events or symbols” (cited in Hogg and Vaughan, 2002, p, 147). This definition emphasizes that attitudes are relatively permanent, which means they are influenced by time and situations. Attitudes are also directed to socially significant events or objects and are generalisable, which involve some degree of abstraction. These definitions give a mixture of complex and common sense understanding of what attitude is all about.

In Sierra Leone it is reasonable to suggest that negative attitudes have become permanent and directed towards the national resources that are meant for equal distribution to all for the good of all. Until our way of life and beliefs is changed I am afraid we will continue to see and believe that corruption is a way of life and therefore acceptable.

While I am proud that Sierra Leone is one of the few countries in the world that accepts religious and cultural diversity, together with the freedom to decide who you want to live with, I am concerned about our attitudes and behaviours that dictate the way we run the country. I must admit that during my secondary school days I was impressed by political speeches full of political rhetoric. Although the late President Siaka Steven was known for his political shrewdness - those around him were well-known for and exceptionally competent at impressive political rhetoric with no substance. I, like many Sierra Leoneans, was dazed at the words they used. If I could remember the words of former Anthony General Abdulia O Conteh before sentencing F.M. Minah and others for attempted treason, he said: “...Ambition is not an offence,... ambition is not a crime, but in the case of Julius Ceasar it was... and he was therefore punished accordingly.... To you and others your

ambition posed a threat to the state...., which is punishable by the law of the land”.

President Koroma has stated that he is committed to promote a new culture that is consistent with the norms and values espoused by a modern democracy. To achieve this, his government would be characterised by effective management and discipline.

In my opinion some of the negative attitudes I would like weeded from our society are low national esteem, the way state institutions operate, the glorification of people in authority before they deliver the goods and overall rooting out corruption even at the lowest level.

Great philosophical thinkers like Marx, Weber, Devine and Giddens have all, in their individual ways, stated that common shared values and norms could produce a strong and effective society. Giddens stated that “A society is a system of interrelationships which connects individuals together” (Giddens, p, 22). This is where the aspects of culture which are learned play an important role in bringing individuals together to form an ideal society. Culture in simply terms means: the values and ways of life shared by particular nations, groups and classes. **So what new ways are we going to learn from the new ABC concept?**

In the early 1950s, most of the countries in the Asia-pacific were economically and politically insignificant. In the 1980s, most of these same countries introduced a new cultural attitude, which led to economic prosperity. With the emergence of Japan as a new economic regional power due to hard work, discipline and good organisation. Some South East Asian countries such as Malaysia introduced a ‘Look East Policy’, which was meant to adopt Japanese economic culture and business discipline. Singapore introduced a new concept called the ‘Asian Way’. All these concepts paid off as the Asia-Pacific is no longer considered to be a marginalised region by the West when making decisions on global economic and political issues.

I salute the people of Sierra Leone who voted unanimously against the Sierra Leone People's party (SLPP) for failing to curb corruption, failing to create jobs and failing to improve the economy. They voted for substantial fundamental change, which the current regime must deliver on. I see the new ABC concept as a working tool that should be used by all for positive change in Sierra Leone. In the United Kingdom (UK) attitude and behaviour change is not centralised as President Koroma did in Sierra Leone. For example, in the UK the National Health Service (NHS) is campaigning to address the issue of "Obesity". People are encouraged to look at their diet and to participate in fitness programmes. Other State institutions are doing other campaigning on other issues for the good of everyone in the society.

I have no doubt that those in-charge of this new idea of attitude and behaviour change are skilled enough to effect change in people's attitude in Sierra Leone and help push the President's agenda forward. For example, I have heard of the new drive towards "Drink Drive Attitude". This is a good start and I would like to see the idea expanded to encourage everyone to hold a valid driving licence before they take to the road. The difference between the driver with a driving licence and the one without is great. The one with a valid licence would be more conscious in taking risk decisions because he or she would be concerned about losing his or her licence. The one without a driving licence has nothing to lose - hence his or her decision making in terms risk taking is worse. There is no doubt that the ABC has its aims and objectives, however, I am putting forward the following issues to be addressed if necessary.

Strengthen the institutions that characterize a true democratic country.

By this I mean civil liberty groups such as pressure and lobby groups. These groups must be financially independent to be unbiased and to avoid influence both from the powerful elites in society and from the ruling government. They must be in the position to be able to criticize any member of society including the Head of State and Head of Government if any wrong doing(s) is/are identified. The question is how do we strengthen the powers of these groups and make sure that it is not misused? In the first place the work of the groups

must be appreciated by society and it must be seen to be unbiased. Once confidence has been established any funding appeal to the general public would be welcomed.

ABC to be seen as neutral. I acknowledge the fact that an institution like the ABC would find it difficult to cast itself away from government influence because it is a government funded and initiated programme. But if the ABC is to succeed it must take a radical stand by prioritizing public opinion over that of individuals entrusted with state responsibilities. By this, I mean ABC must be in position to criticize any individual holding public office and whose behavior does not conform to the president's agenda for economic development.

Attitude change is an ongoing thing - therefore ABC must organize workshops across the country in schools, colleges, universities and other public places. The workshop should aim at increasing public awareness about corruption and sensitizing people about their rights towards public benefits. It is important for the awareness to go round that negative attitude involves pessimism, fear, anger, distrust, and fault finding which can create problems. Positive attitude means one who is eager, hopeful, confident and enthusiastic. Changing negative attitudes involves three important factors; first, cognitive which is what you think or believe about the person or situation. Second, the feeling , i.e. what emotions you have towards the person or situation and third, the behavioural part that is how you act as a result of the knowledge and the emotions you hold about the person. Therefore trying to change someone who holds negative attitudes in society requires a different approach.

Commission research projects to look at what had been achieved and what needs to be achieved. By doing so ABC is connecting itself to the people and they would be able to see things in real terms rather than assessing political rhetoric.

A change towards economic empowerment - ABC could influence the attitude of the banking system to empower indigenous business talent by

persuading banks to trust people with business ideas. A few weeks ago I was talking to one Neneh Bangura who has just joined her husband in the UK. She told me that the attitude of the banks is now changing. Sierra Leoneans now have access to business loans as long as they are proven credit worthy.

I conclude this paper with the hope that the current regime brings change in the way we see ourselves and in the way we distribute the national cake for the benefit of all. Changing negative attitudes is also not one-dimensional, but the use of different methods dependent on the particular type of situation or object. In this regard, it is my view that the implementation of the matters discussed above could contribute to a more positive approach in addressing the low national esteem, the way our government institutions operate and corruption. It is also important to say that there is no single method to effect attitude change in Sierra Leone, but a collection of different methods that adapt to the circumstances. This current regime has no excuse for failure. The voters will judge them in 2012 and it is not that far.



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