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Angry Letter To The Nigerian Youth (2)- There Is Opportunity In Adversity

My dear Nigerian Youth,

I'm still on your case. I'm not about to relent so soon because you represent immense potential and you sit on a gold mine yet you know it not.

You account for at least 43 percent of Nigeria's population. You are over 72 million strong. Unfortunately, what is a blessing is turning to be a curse. Your situation brings a scripture to mind: man that is in honour, and understands not, is like the beasts that perish.

You still wonder why I'm miffed? I sat across one of you- a young lady- today and listened to her tale. She had spent 2 years living in Dubai and slaved away for a real estate company. After 2 years, she's back to Nigeria- broken and penniless.

She regaled me with stories of how more than 75 percent of her income went to rent and she couldn't even afford a decent accommodation. She had to 'collabo' with two other ladies to rent a studio apartment. But now she couldn't stay in Nigeria anymore.

She complained so much about the road and heat that I wondered if she was born in Dubai! She also complained of lack of capital when I asked why she couldn't settle down to do something in Nigeria. I told her no one has 'capital' problems but what people have is 'idea' problem.

And now- wait for this- she's planning to travel to the United States again- in search of the proverbial Golden Fleece. She had spent N800,000 to process the US visa. She was elated but I deflated her misplaced enthusiasm. What she had in excess cash she lacked in common sense.

I told her the story of Jasper Chidera, the Cucumber farmer and how one can start a cucumber farm on one acre with not more than N250,000. I told her the story of Ayo Fatoki, a former banker who decided to start a business of frying 'akara' with his last salary of N50,000.

I told her the story of Tope Daramola, my own sister-in-law who graduated from Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye but has never worked for anyone-

rather she started as a make-up artist, gradually worked up her way to the extent that she handled notable jobs like "Celebrity Takes 2" and some Glo adverts and has now diversified to having a clothing line called 'Asogidi by Temidara'.

All she had when she started was a box of make-up powder and brushes she purchased from Tara. She now employs tailors and seamstresses to handle clothes for clients- all from the comfort of her house.

I told her the story of Olawale Perfect, a first class Biochemistry graduate of UNILAG who started an internet radio station (WIGRadio) with the seed capital he got from the sales of his personal laptop.

I told her the story of Hanson Salami, my former staff who walked into my office and told me he was tired of the banking rat race and wanted to follow his passion. He started 'Hanson Couture' where he sews clothes especially for men.

I told her the story of Diamond Akpanika who used to go to Aba from Uyo to sew shirts for sale. Diamond would later start with a 'Singer' machine in a gatehouse and he has grown into a major clothing line with several outlets across Akwa Ibom.

Finally, I told her the story of a young lady I met on social media who was slaving away in a 'business centre' in Libya about 2 years ago. She had left South Africa for Libya thinking Libya would be better.

I persuaded her to come back to Nigeria when I learnt that she once had a salon but was convinced by her boyfriend that the grass is greener on the other side. She ended up travelling by road from Libya to Kano because she couldn't afford a flight ticket.

From Kano she made her way to Lagos. It was a story of frustration and I pitied her for the wasted years. Now, she's honing her skills as a hair stylist on weekends while working at a law office as a secretary during the week.

In spite of my prevarications, the lady I spoke to was still adamant. She claimed that she couldn't stay in Nigeria because she doesn't have the capital to start a business. But then she could raise N800,000 to travel abroad!

Listen up- your future success does not lie abroad, it lies above. Success is not a function of your location. If it was, there won't be homeless people in America. You can be abroad and be broke - you can be in Nigeria and be a run-away success.

Success is not a function of where you are- it is a function of who you are. Don't join the 100,000 people who queue for American visa weekly in Nigeria. You spend hundreds of thousands of naira to procure an American visa only for you to end up carrying the poo of white men.

How wise are you? For a mere pittance, you end up as a care worker while deceiving others back home that you qualified as a nurse. As if we don't know! If you must carry poo, why not do it like the late Otunba Ghaddafi who said 'shit business is good business'?

You share testimonies on Sundays of how God helped you to secure an American visa so you can live the dream. Unfortunately, for many of you, that dream remains just a dream. It is time you woke up to reality.

Poverty will continue to be your running mate if you continue to run from common sense. You don't even have any skills that could be in demand when you travel.

Have you ever wondered why Americans and other foreigners keep trooping to Nigeria and some other African countries in spite of negative travel advisories? It is because they see opportunity where you see adversity.

I once sat in a meeting with a white foreigner who was in the process of shutting down his construction company in Lagos and relocating to Kano, a hotbed of Boko Haram. I asked him if he wasn't afraid and he laughed.

He told me that if you live in fear, then you should lock yourself indoors and never come out.

He explained to me how the rainy season down south prevents him from working throughout the year while he must pay salaries and that the north has paucity of rains and that guarantees that he can work almost throughout the year.

He also mentioned the fact that there are more roads that need to be tarred and constructed in the north. As he spoke, all I could hear was OPPORTUNITY. Yet, you lock the door on opportunities out of fear. You are afraid you may not succeed.

That's true- success is not guaranteed. Not in Nigeria and not in America also. But won't it be far better to try and fail at home where you can still get some form of encouragement and not in a strange land where your failure can lead to depression?

Do you now understand why they keep kidnapping foreigners in Nigeria but the foreigners have refused to leave?

Take this with you- there is no country on the surface of the earth where you can go to bed a pauper and wake up a millionaire- except Nigeria. There is no country that is so disorganized to the extent that you can immediately profit based on the disorganization- except Nigeria.

You can get away with almost everything including murder in Nigeria. Barriers to entry for so many businesses are low. There are so many businesses you can do even with little capital.

Start a hairdressing salon. Ugochukwu George of Make Me Salon in Surulere started by renting a space for N15,000 and getting a client per day. He added innovation by offering clients beverage while he made their hair.

Start a car-wash arcade. Offer clients soft beverage while they wait for their cars to be washed. Offer to drop off their cars at home or the office- at a premium. Start a rental business- Nigerians love parties and events hold almost on a daily basis.

Have an 'asun' (fried peppered goat meat) joint. Do you see a few joints spring up every Sunday along Daystar Oregon Road? One of them told me he kills a goat every Sunday.

Consider food vending especially around offices. People must eat. I know a woman who sells food in 'take-away' packs during lunch hour around Ahmadu Bello Way in Victoria Island. She sells at a rate of N250 per pack and sells nothing less than 200 packs daily.

What she sells? Just rice and a piece of meat- on a side corner where she doesn't pay for any shop. Do you know how many people who eat in Lagos on a daily basis?

You can make 'smoothies' and freshly squeezed fruit juice. People are health-conscious nowadays and all you need to do is to keep a high level of hygiene. What of dog- breeding and dog-training?

I read somewhere of a dog trainer in Nigeria who charges N50,000 per dog just to train for a few weeks. Start an aerobic class. A physical trainer who assembles almost everyone on my street for exercises charges N1,000 per person per exercise routine. Photography and videography?

A good camera will launch you into business. You may be a Sunmi Smart-Cole or TY Bello in the making. If you can play musical instruments, offer music lessons. Start a viewing centre where people can watch matches over drinks.

Consider an internet radio station. A mixer, an amplifier, one studio microphone and a laptop is all you need. Start an online clothing store. You don't need a physical location. Affiliating with Jumia, Konga or Kaymu will do the trick.

Set up an ice-block production outfit. A generator and a good deep freezer will do. Offer laundry services- people have to wash their clothes. Think. The reason you are stinking is because you are not thinking.

God gave you a brain so use it. You don't have to start mega but you can think mega. You don't need to wait for perfect conditions to start. He that observes the wind will not sow.

Look around for a need and meet that need. Add some innovation and that is the secret to making it. And not running away to America. Those who run away live to run back to Nigeria another day. I hope the young lady understands this before it is too late. And I hope you do too

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