

# YOUTH VICES: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

Youths in Nigeria, like elsewhere, are the leaders of tomorrow. Their talents are the gateway or veritable tool for nation-building. Quite unfortunately, Nigeria is today experiencing a high degree of youth decay which manifests itself in such vices as the embezzlement of public funds, smuggling, vandalization of oil pipelines, involvement in communal clashes, armed robbery, political thuggery, assassination, cultism and examination malpractices, sexual immorality and designer drug abuses. This paper explores the major causes of these social maladies and highlights the dysfunctional relationships between these vices and development. Among the causes are excruciating poverty, moral laxity on the part of parents and the peer group influence. Among the consequences are loss of lives and property, dwindling government revenue and the weakening of national security. It recommends family support and viable youth welfare programmes in Nigeria.

## Introduction

Nigerian youths constitute the most active segment of the entire population. They are also the most vulnerable social group. Nigeria, with a population of over 100 million has teeming millions of her youths scattered over rural and urban centres. Most developing countries are faced with the paradox of shortage of persons with critically-needed skills and surplus of unskilled labour.

In describing youths in this context more attention is given to functioning sub-grouping as students, out-of school youths and others rather than ascribing too much significance to rigid chronological classification in an effort to isolate "youth phenomena".

The youths are the social engineers and a veritable channel or catalyst for positive changes in the rural community, in school or urban setting. In Nigeria, we have the educated unemployed who desperately hunt for any occupation that would give them a living. Added to this number is the unfortunate multitude of school and college dropouts. There is therefore a wide gap between the aspiration of young people and the opportunities offered in the market.

These youths need love and a fair share of the national wealth. Alajuronye (2002) asserts that the youths are people who have high hopes, great expectations from parents and elders in the society. Unfortunately, youths in their millions have been disappointed in this direction. Ayantunji (2002:68) laments that:

Global statistics on virtually every aspect of life paint a dismal picture of the plight and future of the youths in the world. This is because youths bear the brunt of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, poverty, war and famine that ravage most parts of the African continent. Thousands of youths who drop out of the school system every year in Nigeria are especially not well equipped to cope with the challenges ahead for a desirable future.

In an attempt to be socially recognized most Nigerian youths sink into vices: corrupt practices like the embezzlement of public funds, smuggling, pipeline vandalization; armed robbery, political thuggery and assassination, cultism and examination malpractices in schools as well as designer drug and sexual abuses with dire consequences not only on their lives but also on the lives the teeming millions of other Nigerians. Olajide (2002:72) laments that:

In Nigeria, armed robbers have become kings, issuing orders, dictating pace, demanding the impossible, desecrating holy places, violating people's privacies, and taking human lives with seeming provocations. Armed robbers have created a definite culture of fear and helplessness on the one hand and one of bravado and hopelessness on the other. When they strike, we remain numb, immobilized with fear. Our response induces a drunken

callousness which defined rape, machete cuts, gunshots and arson as mere pastime.

### **Causes of Vices Among Youths in Nigerian Society**

Many laypersons think that these vices are mere manifestations or expressions of youthful exuberances. Sociologists have, on the other hand, agreed that actions are not only events in the biographies of individuals (things that individuals do); they are also events located somewhere in the school system or structure; in the family; a neighbourhood, an organization or a country. Vices among youths depict the life-styles in families, peer groups and the larger society.

1. **The Families:** Attitude of parents is significant in this direction. This can be noticed in
  - (a) Weak parent-teen relationships.
  - (b) Poor church attendance by parents or mixed faith. Lack of deep-seated religious belief and shallow moral commitment to the ethical imperatives of an orderly, law-abiding society among some Nigerian parents.
  - (c) Broken home/denudation: Lone parentage as a result of death, divorce or separation. A family, in which there is a continued marital conflict, or separation, is likely to produce children with problems of personal adjustment, (Goode, 1964). The child whose parents are not living together feels embarrassed because he is “different”. This is damaging to his self-concept (Hurlock, 1959).
  - (d) Prescribing academic courses for their children. By and large, examination malpractices in our campuses are a result of lack of adequate preparation for examinations on the part of the students as well as their desperate efforts to meet the desirable but unattainable academic heights handed down to them by their parents.
  - (e) Political motives. Indeed, our politicians have turned the educational campuses into theatres of debasement as they sponsor terrorist activities for selfish reasons. Others leave their wards with surplus funds to waste on useless ventures.
  - (f) Less supervision of the children. To supervise is to ensure that children do their work properly and demonstrate acceptable social behaviour. Any act of deviance therefore usually attracts from parents’ appropriate negative sanctions such as verbal disapproval or reproach, corporal punishment, temporary starvation and curtailing a child’s movement, freedom and liberty. Fan (2002:156), regrettably, laments that:

Some parents with children in primary and post-primary schools hardly call at such schools to check their children’s progress. Others fail to moderate the type of literature read, the films watched and the companies kept by their children. This situation allows ample opportunities for such children and wards to play truant in school, read pornographic materials, watch films depicting violence or keep delinquent gangs.

Similarly, Nwa-Chil (1991:97) warns that:

The personality that the child takes to the school and to the outside world is formed at home. If this foundation is weak or improperly formed, the school and the other agencies of education will have little or nothing to build upon and the entire society may suffer.

2. **Poverty:** This is the inability for one to meet one’s needs in terms of food, clothes and shelter. Among the poor are those who are able-bodied but cannot work because the jobs are not available or are barred from working because of discriminatory factors like age, sex and place of origin. There are others who come across vacancies for employment but cannot work because they lack the prerequisite qualifications. In this direction, Fan (2002:206) opines that:

Selection and preparing for an occupation are critical problems confronting an adolescent from different socioeconomic backgrounds. They may not have the required training in the chosen field because of financial

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involvements in long training. Often, where they are lucky to acquire the requisite training, they may not have godfathers and mothers in treasured and honoured positions to champion their cause.

Indeed, poverty tends to weaken one's moral principles. In school for instance, delayed benefits create an enabling environment for all manner of "sharp" practices among academics.

**3. The Peer Group Influence:** Age groups exert a lot of influence on their members. Musgrave, (1973). Siann and Ugwuegbu, (1980) have identified four types of peer groups: fun, academic, vocational and delinquent, Ojiokor and Unachukwu (1996:189) submit th@

Among the reasons for delinquent behaviour of children and young persons are the breakthrough of aggressive impulses, rebellion, feelings of low esteem, reaction against depression, thrill-seeking, deprivation, crowd behaviour and peer group influence.

**4. Lack of Viable Youth Programmes:** Nigeria lacks commendable youth programmes in every sense. Apart the National Youth Service Corps Scheme (NYSC) and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) which are elitist and selective, there is no programme that competes with the Small Industries Development Organisation of Tanzania which Fan (1978:26) describes as follows:

Small-scale industries require less capital investment and shorter gestation period and provide employment to a large number of people. They help in taking industries close to the resources in rural areas and thus favour balanced regional development and high level of communal participation.

Such industries help reduce economic disparities and bring about an equitable distribution of national wealth. The promotion of small industries is now a major element of the national policy in creating technological revolution in the rural areas based on control of industry by the people, using existing skills and materials and avoiding heavy capital expenditure.

**5. A Godless Education in Nigeria:** Christian Religious Knowledge is an optional subject in Senior Secondary School, SSS I - III in Nigeria. This godless education at such a level is damaging to the moral growth of adolescents.

### **Implications of Youth Vices on Development**

Development means the optimal utilization of available resources towards enhancing the standard of living for the people. This connotes:

- a. The ability of government to provide infrastructural facilities like roads, water, schools and hospitals.
- b. The ability of the people to solve their socio-economic as well as political problems, and
- c. The abilities of individuals to live a fulfilled and dignified life.

Therefore, as Nnonyelu (1996) posits development is directly related to overcoming obstacles that stand in the way of a people wishing to transform their physical, cultural, and socio-economic environments for the good of everybody. Vices among Nigerian youths are an anathema to this trend by;

- a. Creating societal disorder. Order and peace are a condition *sine qua non* to any meaningful development.
- b. Threatening foreign investors. No foreign organisation would wish to invest in a crisis- stricken socio-political environment
- c. Leading to loss of lives and therefore reducing the level of future manpower supply. Riotous youths sometimes lose their lives; others kill innocent people.
- d. Weakening the national security network. Smuggling and other corrupt practices weaken the security control of our territorial boundaries. Contraband goods, undoubtedly, destroy the market for the local industries.

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- e. Leading to loss of revenue. Siphoning public funds by a youth who is a clerk in the office is a great disservice to the nation. This practice thwarts government development efforts. Besides, such culprits might be tempted to set fire to documents or even government buildings to avoid detection by a Commission of Enquiry.
- f. Cheapening the academic standards. According to Ijioma (1997:119).

The social implication of examination malpractice to the Nigerian students is that at the end they are ashamed of defending what they claim to have learnt. This is because their shame is borne out of fear of not knowing what to defend. Also, the larger society, conscious of the malpractice rate in the Nigerian society will begin to accept the Nigerian certificate with a pinch of salt.

- g. Disrupting the academic calendar. Students' riots quite frequently lead to the closure of schools abruptly thereby disrupting the academic calendar. Consequently, students spend longer periods in a programme and parents are forced to pay extra fees instead of investing in business ventures.

### **Conclusion**

Youth talents are the gateway or veritable tool for nation-building. Nigerian youths have rebelled because parents have failed them and successive governments have ignored them in their programmes. It is high time various governments started reorienting public policy towards the support of the family, the youth welfare and the success of the entire society.

Parents ought to lead their children by godly examples. Unachukwu (1996:196) warns that: Antisocial and irresponsible behaviour includes drunkenness, fighting and sexual immorality, cheating, lying and stealing, children born by parents who are involved in such behaviour could practise the same behaviour in school.

The youths themselves should be creative by using the bottled-up energy in sports and arts that can win laurels for the nation. They should also stick to the religious tenets so as not to be distracted from their focus of nation-building.

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