

YOUTH RESTIVENESS IN A PLURAL RELIGIOUS SOCIETY: THE CASE OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Youth restiveness has become a disturbing phenomenon in Nigeria and indeed in many developing countries of Africa. Spurred by bad governance, discrimination and marginalization, uneven distribution of resources, unemployment, and poor knowledge utilization by government, the youth have voiced their concerns through demonstrations, destruction of properties and thuggery. The rise of religious and ethnic gangs like Fulani herdsmen, Boko Haram and the Niger Delta boys, have posed a more serious dimension to the problem, where abductions and murders have been commonplace. Incendiary statements from government officials and the political class, as well as instigative sermons from the cleric have only helped to aggravate an already fluid situation. The consequences of youth restiveness have been grave, manifested in economic, security and social dimensions. Youth restiveness can however, be handled if the right atmosphere is created. Consequently, the paper has suggested that right information on existing job vacancies, enactment of policies and programmes by government and political office holders, use of technical and vocational education for vocational knowledge and skill acquisition by religious bodies and NGOs, among others, will go a long way in tackling youth restiveness in Nigeria.

Key Words: Economic, Unemployment, Restiveness, Security, Social, Youth

INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, Nigeria has experienced a lot of challenges. Notable among the challenges are socio-economic and security challenges. The activities of religious terrorist groups and cults such as Boko Haram, the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) and bandits have increased tremendously. A lot of the criminal activities perpetrated by these gangs have resulted in mass abductions and killings. Bandits and Fulani herdsmen, for instance, have attacked passengers on the Abuja-Kaduna road severally and murdered scores of people and abducted several others. Communities in the States of Zamfara and Katsina have witnessed incessant bandit attacks where innocent citizens have been either taken captive or murdered (Ojewale, Badiora & Onuoha, 2022).

It does appear that the bandits and terrorists who carry heavy firearms invade not only the homes of well-meaning Nigerians but also government institutions. For instance, just recently, precisely on 6th June 2022, Nigerians woke up to the news of the advanced convoy of Presidential aides who were attacked by bandits as they headed to the President's home State of Katsina. A high ranking police officer was murdered in that attack. Just a day before, the Kuje maximum prison in the Federal Capital Territory was invaded by terrorists in which 49 Boko Haram leaders and 237 others were freed. ISWAP claimed responsibility for the attack. Aside from the activities of bandits and terrorist groups in the north of Nigeria, political thuggery, hooliganism and cumbersome activities of miscreants in the Niger-Delta region of southern Nigeria have also increased tremendously (Agbaji, 2018; Nwosu, 2021; Abdullahi, 2022; Nda-Isaiah, 2022; Babangida, 2022; Agbakwuru, 2022; Punch, 2022).

The concern about this social malaise is that many of the fugitives and terrorists are youths who have sacrificed their conscience on the altar of materialism and have taken to social vices to the chagrin of well-meaning citizens. The lucrative aspect of banditry and terrorism lies in the huge ransoms that are paid to the miscreants after abductions. Each time this gang of sociopaths abducts innocent citizens, they demand huge ransoms otherwise their victims' lives are at risk of

being destroyed. And sure enough there have been cases of murder. For instance, three Catholic priests abducted in Kaduna and Edo were gruesomely murdered when the payments the bandits demanded for could not be made. There were also other abductions and killings carried out by the bandits (Maiyaki, 2022; Akhaine, 2022; Independent, 2022, Morning Star News, 2022). Government's effort to curb the activities of these outlaws has yielded very little result. Day by day the groups have grown stronger and determined to carry out more attacks on innocent citizens (Ekwueme, 2014).

The Nigerian situation is a dire one. Unemployment, occasioned by bad governance and global economic meltdown has forced many productive youths to turn to crime. The streets of many cities in Nigeria are filled with youths roaming and hawking. The streets are filled with mendicants. Graduates from the universities and polytechnics are forced to take to some menial jobs which fetch them nothing significant. Many of these graduates, having spent many years in school due to strikes come out to discover that the labour market is saturated. Being disillusioned with the government that promised them so much but delivered so little, the youth are left with no option than to take to crime. As Ushe (2014) put it, "Disillusioned, frustrated and dejected, the youths seek an opportunity to express their anger against the state." This is in view of the level of poverty, deprivation and social injustice experienced by the youth.

In view of the above, the paper looks at the youth and youth restiveness. It considers the types of youth restiveness. The paper discusses the causes and consequences of youth restiveness. Finally, the paper looks at ways for curbing youth restiveness in Nigeria.

The Youth

The youth refer to young men and women who are no longer children but who are not yet adults (Uriah, Egbezor & Ololube, 2014). UNESCO (2017) saw the youth as a period of transition from childhood dependence to childhood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. UNESCO further defines the youth as "...often indicated as a person between the age where he/she may leave compulsory education, and the age where he/she finds his/her first job." The African Union Commission (2006) in African Youth Charter describes the "youth" or "young people" as "every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years."

The youth refer to a period of change from reliance of childhood to adult's freedom and the awareness to cooperate and work with others towards the achievement of societal goals (United Nations Youth, 2019). The National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN, 2014) sees the youth as those persons belonging to the age bracket of 16-30 years. With this age bracket, the youth can therefore, be mostly found in the secondary and tertiary institutions. A youth can also be seen as one who is 12 years old but not more than 40 years (Nwanna-Nzewunwa, Girigiri & Okoh, 2007).

The youth perform several roles in the society. These roles include maintenance of law and order, promotion of knowledge, preservation of societal culture and tradition, development of projects, participation in sporting activities, and undertaking burials of community members (Akpokigbe & Ejovi, 2020). The youth also form the foundation of a society. The energies, inventiveness, character and orientation of the youth clearly define a nation's pace of development and security. The youth are also the major determinants of peace and stability of a nation, which means that they are also responsible for disorderliness and instability (Ozohu-Sulaiman, 2006; Anasi, 2010).

Youth Restiveness

The youth are known to be restive. By this, they possess a lot of expendable energy. By their vitality, idleness is an enemy. Because they are seen to be up and doing, they are also known to be the vanguard against injustice, oppression and exploitation. Where they are sidelined and kept out of the scheme of things, they channel this vast energy which they possess by engaging

in hostage taking, kidnapping, rape, cheating, prostitution, demonstration and wanton destruction of properties (Urah, Olulobe & Egbezor, 2015).

The term "restiveness" has been variously defined by several authors. For instance, Agina-Obu (2008) saw restiveness as a kind of "human behavior geared towards the realization of individuals or groups" needs. It emanates from individuals or group failures or inability to meet their needs through institutional provisions. The term also means an inability to stay still, or a desire not to be controlled, especially because one feels bored or not satisfied (Soannes & Steveson (2010). For Ogbeifun (2007), youth restiveness centres on such issues as unfaithful implementation of life affecting programmes; ethnic marginalization and insensitivity to the plights of the people suffering the multiple negative effects of environmental degradation by way of oil exploration, gas flaring and oil spillage. Buttressing this, Ejumudo (2014) argued that youth restiveness relates to agitation by youths over issues of deprivation, neglect, marginalization and feelings of dissatisfaction. Restiveness is a form of agitation by the youth for the restoration of their rights.

Types of Youth Restiveness

According to Ogbeifun (2007), there are three types of youth restiveness. These are 1) youths engaging in genuine agitation for their rights and restoration of the dignity of their group or race; 2) youths engaging in self-seeking and criminal activities such as kidnapping or hostage taking in exchange of levied ransom; and 3) youths seeking revenge for oppression or for "use and dump" attitudes from members of the elite class or a manner of responding to a repressive regime.

Theories of Youth Restiveness

Common theories used to explain the concept of youth restiveness are the Strain and Frustration Theories. The Strain Theory was propounded by Merton and argues that deviant behaviour of youths results as a consequence of the structure of and culture of societies. Because societies are stratified in the social status continuum, certain classes are deprived access to the rights, privileges, shared values and goals. These shared values and goals translate to educational attainment and material gain and others in the societies. Where these rights and privileges are denied individuals, the youth particularly, feel strained and resort to deviant behaviours (Ejumudo, 2014). The Frustration Theory, according to Ejumudo, on the other hand, holds that persons' desire to reach their life goals and ambition are being blocked, delayed, or even interfered with, such that those persons encounter frustration. This leads to confusion, bewilderment, annoyance and aggression. On the whole, with the strain or frustration theory, this leads to dissatisfaction which can express itself in restiveness. In other words, where youths are prevented from expressing themselves or denied opportunities to realize their life ambitions, they are either strained or frustrated and what follows is armed burglary, street demonstrations, arson, highway car snatching and suicide activities (Otunu-Ogbisi & Tedjere, 2014).

Causes of Youth restiveness

Several studies have been conducted to determine the causes of youth restiveness. For instance, the study by Agbaji and others (2018) found that youth restiveness engenders political instability, creates general insecurity and militates against investment by local and foreign investors. The study also found that youth restiveness was caused by high rate of unemployment, poverty, exclusion of the youth from mainstream political participation, corruption, bad governance, inequitable distribution of goods and services among youths. This finding has been buttressed by Chukwuezi (2009) and Chukwuemeka and Aghara (2010) who identified ethnic cleavages, corruption, lack of governance, inequity and unfairness as factors responsible for youth restiveness. Elegbeleye (2005) also identified the following as the causes of youth restiveness: Peer motivated excitement of being a student, the jingoistic pursuit of patriotic ideas, perceived

victimization arising from economic exploitation, parenting style, lack of basic infrastructure, inadequate educational opportunities and resources, inadequate communication and information flow, and inadequate recreational facilities. Other writers like Chukwuemeka, Anazodo and Nzewi (2011) attribute youth restiveness to family (home) grievances, school, society and the perception of and the youths' relationship with the Church/Mosque.

In another study, Mezieobi, Nwaubani, and Anyanwu (2012) found that in South Eastern States of Nigeria, youth restiveness was caused by factors such as sponsorship by interested groups, inadequate possession of skills for life sustenance, gangsterism, influence of hard drugs, and economic purpose of enrichment, among others. A study by Agu and Eke (2021) examined the landscape of inequality and social injustice through the lens of restiveness among the youth of Ohaji/Egbema communities in Imo State. The study found that the youth had rejected the existing power structure and injustice in handling of oil and gas business in their communities. The study found generally that youth restiveness is predicated mainly on socio-economic factors, inequality and social injustice.

The unjustifiable use of resources like land, labour and capital forms the basis for social contention and stratification (Agu & Eke, 2021). This has led to communal clashes and other social vices like cybercrime, drug abuse, drug peddling, youth unrest, armed robbery, advanced fee fraud and militancy (Akujo & Jack in Agu & Eke, 2021). Again, economic marginalization, corruption and unfavourable distribution of resources in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, have led to militant activities. The militancy in many cases leads to sea piracy, hooliganism and pipeline vandalization (Ibaba, 2008; Ojo, 2015; Ubleble, 2019)

Most cases of youth restiveness can be attributed to bad governance. Characteristics of bad governance, as identifies by the World Bank (1992) are:

1. failure to properly distinguish between what is public and what is private, leading to private appropriation of otherwise public resources;
2. inability to establish a predictable frame work for law and government behaviour in a manner conducive to development, or arbitrariness in the application of laws and rules;
3. excessive rules, regulations, licensing requirement and so forth which impede the functioning of markets and encourage rent-seeking;
4. priorities that are inconsistent with development, thereby resulting in misallocation of national resources; and
5. exceedingly narrow base for, or non-transparent, decision making.

Speaking on bad governance, in the South-South of Nigeria, for instance, Chukwuemeka, Anazodo and Nzewi (2011) wrote: "The dissatisfaction of the people..., especially the youths on the level of attention given to development of the region and the damages to their ecology by oil (are) the major causes of the alarming rate of youth restiveness." Agbaji and others (2018) are of the view that lack of youth participation in Nigerian politics, peer pressure, poor attitudinal disposition and wrong youth mindset are some of the causes of youth restiveness.

Consequences of Youth Restiveness

Youth restiveness results in security, social and economic consequences. Economically, from 2015, the Nigerian economy has experienced a downward slight. Duke et al. (2016:223) put it succinctly:

...the Nigerian economy lost a whopping N1.33 trillion Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) owing to Boko Haram's activities. FDI flows to Nigeria have been depleting over the years... FDI flows fell to 4693.83 million USD in 2014 from 5608.45 million USD in 2013, and further fell to 3064.17 million USD in 2015. These statistics are quite similar to the World Bank's where FDI flows fell from 8841.11 million USD in 2011 to 7069.93 million USD in 2012, 5562.87million USD in 2013, and to 4655.85 million

USD in 2014 ... Thus, a downward slope in the FDI flows is the only available reality. Also, businesses have been closed, abandoned or destroyed in affected states. Former Minister of Information, Mr. Labaran Maku, purported that Boko Haram's attack on Kano State especially is so significant because it affected the multi-billion naira Kano Textile Market, otherwise called the Kanti-Kwari Market, regarded to be the oldest and biggest textile market in sub-Saharan Africa, and as such it affected the foundation of economic and social well-being of the northern region...

Youth restiveness breeds lawlessness as it disrupts social order. This gives rise to increase in social vices like gangsterism, rape, hooliganism, cultism, kidnapping and armed robbery (Agbaji, 2018). Regarding security consequence of youth restiveness for a developing country like Nigeria, in 2015, youth restiveness led to 2,152,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Internal Displacement Management Centre, IDMC, 2016). By 2017, over 100,000 people had been gruesomely murdered by Boko Haram (Tukur, 2017). Amnesty International, by 2015, had estimated that the Nigeria military had executed 1,200 people, detained at least 20,000, and at least 7,000 had died in military detention camps (Agbaji et al., 2018).

How to Curb Youth Restiveness

A number of measures have been recommended in literature for curbing youth restiveness. Akpokigbe and Ejovi (202) saw favourable government policies, job opportunities, good infrastructural facilities, adequate information as viable ways for dealing with youth restiveness.

One vital way to deal with youth restiveness is to provide the right information to the youth. Unfortunately many governments fail to provide the right information about the activities of government. This creates disaffection in youths. Youths acquire the feeling that their leaders are not sincere and therefore, are misruling them. To address their grievances, the youth feel it right to disturb public peace by holding demonstrations which more often lead to the destruction of public property. Therefore, government officials need to create avenues where correct information about governance needs to be disseminated to the public of which the youth constitute a very high percentage. The information, according to Onyekpe (2007), should tailor towards:

- a) creating the awareness that the future belongs to them and that it must not be destroyed by them;
- b) sensitizing them to the fact the future and its nature depend on the decisions and choices they make;
- c) creating in them a sense of history, especially of the noble and heroic contributions of the youth in the past to the development of Nigeria, in comparison with the ignoble role of many youths today;
- d) sensitizing them to embrace the rule of law and democratic ideals;
- e) liberating them psychologically and mentally from the control of self-seeking business and political elites.
- f) encouraging them to raise issues relating to unresolved problems of nationbuilding and the problem of neglect of the youth in the development process at every fora;
- g) mobilizing them against abuse of the system through sanctions;
- h) sensitizing them to seek greater employment and educational opportunities as a means of redirecting their energy and ideas from anti-social activities to creative efforts.

Speaking on providing the youth with right the information, Onyekpe (2007) held that making the youth to understand that the future is theirs and for them to keep and maintain should be able to create the awareness in the youth that the choices they make today affect their future. Consequently, they will be able to seek democratic ways to resolve their grievances and preserve their future rather than resort to unsavoury ways which have the propensity to destroy their future.

Another vital way to deal with youth restiveness is through the guidance counsellor. The guidance counsellor can provide useful information to youths which will assist them in understanding that the information their peers or even the adults in the society give them is somewhat exploitative as that tends to ginger the youth towards taking up destructive jobs in order for the adults to achieve their personal and political gains. Therefore, the guidance counsellor can organize "workshops, talk shows and seminars for youths in schools, youths in organizations and youths in religious settings" (Ibo & Ikpa, 2013). According to the authors, the topics that could be discussed during these occasions would include citizenship education, patriotism and the rule of law.

Tolerance is a vital virtue that can assist in Nigeria's unity and continuous coexistence. Tolerance can be used to deal with youth restiveness spurred by religious intolerance. Oft times, intolerance is related to differences in religions and beliefs. The friction which exists among people is related to religion, ethnicity and group interests (Widodo et al., 2019; Mwawanah, 2018). In a religiously pluralistic country like Nigeria, religious and political leaders must preach messages of peace and tolerance. Again, as Widodo and others (2019) advocated, "institutions of learning play an important role in instilling the attitude of harmony and tolerance. Collaboration between educational institutions and all elements needs to be done to create tolerance attitude in schools."

Social ills abound in poor and depraved societies due to idleness. The massive number of the youth population who use religion to serve as foot soldiers for the political class can be reached out. Technical and vocational education (TVE) can be used to reach out to those youths to abandon restiveness and acquire skills that can make them functionally engaged. From a religious point of view, sane governments must be able to settle down properly and map out ways to deal with the youth population who, in the name of religion, attack worship centres, and kill and maim innocent citizens. TVE can be used as a tool to deradicalize the youth who perpetrate social ills in the name of religion.

Similarly, in order to take the youth off the streets of crime, religious organizations (Churches, Mosques) and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can set up vocational training schools where the youth can receive vocational training in blocklaying, carpentry and joinery, automechanics, electrical installation, among other trades. At the moment however, with rising levels of unemployment, youths are forced to take on menial jobs such as okada riding, hair dressing, and labourer works at construction sites (Attah, Ujevbe & Oguguo, 2020). Therefore, technical and vocational education can be used as a means of evangelism by these religious organizations to reach out to the youth for two purposes: attitude change and gainful employment. That is deradicalization and self-reliance. Attitude change leads to behaviour modification manifested in strong values and norms such as honesty, integrity, discipline, responsibility, and trustworthiness (Rijneveld, 2006). In essence, religion provides a sense of hope for the future practice and benefit of TVE. This shows that the youth population who embrace TVE believe religiously that for them, the future is not bleak. With patience and perseverance, they will be able to make it in life through TVE.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The youth constitute a vital segment of a country's population. They possess energies that need to be harnessed and channeled for developmental purposes. In a country such as Nigeria, where the youth are dissatisfied with the state of affairs, especially as that pertains to their lives, they can resort to violence manifested in kidnapping, vandalization, armed robbery, bomb attacks, thuggery and destruction of lives and property. No country in the world can succeed without her youths. Political office holders and government, as well as the community and religious organizations must do all it takes to handle the youth population in such a way that they can realize their full potentials.

Political marginalization, discrimination, denial of rights, and corruption have been identified as some of the causes of youth restiveness. To deal with these and many other causes, the following suggestions are hereby made:

1. Government needs to utilize maximally Nigeria's diversity. Divisive tendencies, exhibited in programmes and policies of government need to be avoided. Similarly, political office holders need to avoid making incendiary statements capable of fuelling embers of ethnic disunity.
2. There is need to create employment and provide opportunities for entrepreneurial practice.
3. In tertiary institutions where youth restiveness is known to be prevalent, there is need to set up guidance and counselling units which will deal with the guidance needs of the youth.
4. There is need for equity and social justice in the distribution of the gains of democracy. In this connection, government needs to make policies that will lead to the even distribution of resources and eliminate marginalization, neglect, oppression and underdevelopment.
5. Organizations need to organize seminars, conferences and workshops for the youth during and after schooling.
6. Religious leaders, working in concert with guidance counsellors, need to preach sermons that will calm youths and counsel them on what life means to them. Religious leaders especially can use TVE to provide training to the youth to acquire useful skills and knowledge that will make them gainfully employed and self-reliant.
7. Political leaders and political office seekers need to appeal to the electorate to maintain peace and order, especially during electioneering campaigns and elections, instead of using the youth as political thugs in order to achieve some political gain. Equally, political office holders need to evolve programmes and projects in their constituencies that will keep the youth busy thereby taking them off the streets.
8. There is need to involve youths in governance and decision making. This will assist greatly in creating understanding between the youth and leaders.
9. The youth will need to have access to information regarding existing job vacancies, credit facilities and entrepreneurship development.
10. Government needs to evolve and promulgate laws and policies that will foster religious tolerance and harmony among the various religious bodies.
11. There is need for the youth to embrace dialogue rather than resort to violence as an expression of dissatisfaction with the way things affect them.
12. Orientation activities including lectures need to be organized for newly admitted students. The lectures should centre not only on cult activities in tertiary institutions but also on ways of channeling grievances by aggrieved students.

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