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## **A Communication on Youth-violence in Nigeria**

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**ABSTRACT** - This article is a reflection of the author's interest in the increasing culture of violence, which is acknowledged as being prevalent among the youths in Nigeria today. The article examines the underlying causes of youth violence and offers the measures which are needed to curb the escalation of violence. It advances youth welfare programmes that may be embraced to reduce or eliminate the recurring of youth-violence in Nigeria.

**KEYWORDS:** youth, violence, poverty, Nigeria

### **INTRODUCTION**

The interest of the author in the psychology of adolescence and the recurring ethic violence involving the youths in Nigeria stimulated this article. One is not in doubt that the escalation of youth violence is currently a major public health concern of the Federal Government. Indeed, the current democratically-elected Executive President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was reported by Lampe (2000) to have remarked that Nigerians seemed to have imbibed a culture of destruction, culture of killing, culture of disregard for life, culture of disregard for property, culture of not adequate consideration for our fellow human beings, our brothers and sisters. It is sadly true that violence has become a disturbingly significant element of the Nigerian culture. It now seems that the youth have realised that they possess an identity, and therefore, could no longer rely on their elders in order to fight for the cause of their communities. Hence, the youths are gradually



taking the mantle of leadership in their various communities, and thereby relegating elders and often their traditional rulers to the background.

Eduvie (2000) had reported (on Thursday, January 20 of the year 2000) that aggrieved youths in Evwreni, Delta State murder their traditional ruler – Ovie Owin Kumaine – over a prolonged communal crisis. Similarly, (on Sunday, June 18 of year 2000) armed youths in Otor Owhe in Isoko North Council Area of Delta State, masquerading as hired assassins killed their traditional ruler – Chief Oke Isoje 1, at his Ughelli residence, after a fierce exchange of gunfire that lasted several hours. Chief Oke Isoje 1 was killed by irate youths in his domain because he dared to vow that he would not tolerate youth extremism, which routinely included armed robberies.

Besides, owners of oil-service companies have perhaps the scariest storeis to tell. Eduvie (2000) reported that on Friday, June 16 of year 2000, armed Ijaw youth kidnapped 22 Nigerians and 2 expatriates working for two contracting oil firms, without giving any tenable reasons for their reasons for their actions. Within the same week, militant youth believed to be sea-pirates, struck between Sapele and Obaghoro of Delta State, leaving operators of a passenger boat and the passengers seriously injured. The foregoing account produces a negat picture of youths in Nigeria today. Newman (1985) had contended that the present youths are exceeding impatient of restraint, and that if youths are always obnoxious, thereby may be needed to break the deadlock. The opinion of the author corroborates Newman's contention and further reinforces the concern of the author in advancing welfare measures for curbing youth violence. In the light of the foregoing, one may ask: what are the underlying causes of destructive tendencies and restiveness among youths in Nigeria today.

### **Aetiology of Youth Violence**

Within the context of the reflections of the author, youth destructive tendencies and restiveness in present times may be due to the following factors:

First, the military regimes in Nigeria nurtured a violent culture, which spread from the mid-sixties to the late nineties when the newly-eleted democratic government came into office on May 29, 199. The wounds inflicted on the psyche of an average Nigerian, included reckless abuse of fundamental human right and flagrant suppression of voices of dissent. In the process, people gradually built up the culture of resistance which have culminated in the current culture of violence now known to be prevalent in the country.

Second, Nigeria is increasingly having many urban youths, who are facing a life of hopelessness arising from unemployment. Such young people with stressful experiences of life tend to join gangs, under the aegis of various illegal associations to perpetrate crimes. Such as criminal activities include: vandalism, armed-robbery, drug-trafficking, smuggling and murder.

Third, it is known that many youths believe that the only way to avoid being victims of poverty or unemployment is to commit acts of brutality that can display their power and identity. In essence, youth violence often stem from intense anger which is in turn sparked by unremitting poverty or chronic unemployed opportunities. Consequently, the unemployed youths in the country's oil-producing areas, often embark on the vandalisation of oil pipe-lines in order to illegally siphon petroleum resources which can help them make a living. In the process many youths have experienced violent deaths.

Fourth, today's youths gang up under a common identity to fight injustice in the land. Ogundolapo (2000) reported the critical views of Ijaw youths in Bayelsa State as follows:

"Bayelsa produces oil. It has only 8 local government, while Kano, which produces virtually nothing, has 44. How do you think that we can continue to stomach this nonsense?"

Ogundolapo (2000) stressed further that the incessant kidnap of oil-workers in Bayelsa State and the disruption of activities of the oil-companies are due to the fact that the youths are jobless, they have no school to go, and therefore roam the street and the bush. The Ijaws youths still contend that there will be no peace in Bayelsa State, until the Federal Government brings about total change to the people.

Fifth, today's youth have been well-exposed to violent actions perpetrated by youths in other parts of the world, through the media. For example the youth in Indonesia swept President Suharto away from power, while the youth in Ivory Coast against General Guei becoming the Ivorian President.

Besides, through the media, youth have become exposed to the art/science of bombing public institutions. The records of incessant bombing, assassinations and destructive tendencies under the military era further reinforced the present restless and aggressive behaviour of youths in Nigeria. Through the media, the youths have been able to imbibe the culture of violence. In the light of the underlying causes of youth violence in Nigeria today, the author believes that ignoring their needs now, could further have serious consequences in terms of rising costs of youth crime and loss of human capital. hence, this article has chosen to prescribe welfare programmes

that can be used to gradually reduces or eliminate youth violence in the country.

### **Youth Violence: The Way Out**

Youths all over the World are particularly vulnerable, and constantly need attention in today's rapidly changing social and economic environment. In making efforts to transform a community and its youths, one must be prepared to guide the people in the direction of peace, by finding out what they need and be guided by what they want.

Youth violence is deadly and often due to justifiable reasons of deprivations, marginalisation, joblessness and poverty (Ayomike, 2000). It needs to be controlled now before our youths become more military than soldiers. Consequently, the establishment of welfare programmes for sustainable peace among the youths seems imperative. This considers a discussion of four viable welfare programmes for the youths: (i) Community Guidance and Counselling Centres; (ii) Centres for Conflict Resolution; (iii) Employment/Life Skill Centres and (iv) Public Enlightenment Centres.

#### **Community Guidance and Counselling Centre**

Ignorance is often seen as a disease of mind. Hence, the provision of community guidance and counselling centres in all 774 local government authorities in Nigeria may help to serve as catalysts for the promotes of mutual understanding among the grass-root people. Counselling as a profession has the task of behaviour and attitude change as one of its goals.

Consequently, at the grass-root level, it is viable to enlist the support of psychologists, educationists, lawyers, traditional rulers, clergymen and elder statesmen who are transparent in the promotion of peace among the people.

#### **Centre for Conflict Resolution**

People help one another in numerous ways in everyday life and indeed people do change as a result of formal and informal assistance. Hence, Centres for Conflict Resolutions may be established in the 36 States of the country and should be known to the people.

Each Centre should operate within the legal framework that may be used to establish it by the Federal Government. Such Centres are not in existence yet in Nigeria. Often, judicial panels are set p to resolve crises in the country and usually much damages might have been done. Hence, there is an urgent need for an apparatus (at each State level) which would monitor and quickly invite actors/actresses planning to forment violence. In this

context, a close link should be available between the ~~Community Outcomes~~ and Counselling Centres and the Centres for Conflict Resolution.

### **Employment/Life-Skills Centres**

The existing Poverty Alleviation Programme in the country to appear not to meet the yearnings of youths whose monthly income per head is put at three thousand and five hundred naria only. The Poverty Alleviation Programme does not train the youths in the acquisition of specific skills for employment.

The author believes that the establishment of Employment/Life Skills Centres may be seen as useful tools for addressing the problems of unemployment, often seen as a catalysts for youth violence. Each local government may be allowed to register unemployed youths who be indigenes. The exercise will allow greater drift of youths from the cities to the rural centres of the country. The current identity-card exercises may be used to categorize the employed and unemployed citizens, at both local and State government levels. This exercise may reduce armed-robbery vandalism cultism and other forms of criminal activities in the country.

### **Public Enlightenment Centres**

It is an understanding to assume that the media often do not have any role to play in curbing or preventing violence. Investigations of conflicts, violence and wars, show that misconceptions, miscalculations can seriously affect conflicts (Kelly and Stahelski, 1970; White 1966).



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