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Curbing Youth Restiveness in Nigeria:The Role of Information and Libraries

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Introduction

Youth restiveness in Nigeria has been a prominent issue in recent times. There has been an increase in the occurrence of acts of violence and lawlessness, including things like hostage-taking of prominent citizens and expatriate oil workers, as well as oil bunkering, arms insurgence, cultism, etc., especially in the Niger Delta region. Nevertheless, youth restiveness is not a recent phenomenon. Various forms of youth restiveness that are economically, politically, or religiously motivated have existed for a long time. Elegbeleye (2005) vividly captures the landmark cases of youth restiveness in Nigeria.

Young people all over the world are a vital and important segment of the society in which they live. A disciplined, focused, and law-abiding youth can create a bright future for any nation. Conversely, a lawless, indulgent, and violent youth is a great threat to a nation's peace and security.

Libraries play a crucial role in inculcating positive values, attitudes, and behaviours that promote harmonious relationships. Libraries help ensure that people have access to information that will help them make informed judgments and decisions.

Definition of Concepts

The National Youth Development Policy (2001) defines youth as people aged 18-35. They constitute about 40 percent of the more than 140 million people of Nigeria. The total population of youth between 10 and 24 in Nigeria was 45.4 million in 2006, which is 34 percent of the total population.

Elegbeleye (2005) defined youth restiveness as “a sustained protestation embarked upon to enforce desired outcome from a constituted authority by an organized body of youths.” It is marked by violence and disruption of lawful activities.

Information is new ideas or knowledge extracted from the environment for human use with the aim of modifying behaviour, effecting changes, and enhancing efficiency in all human endeavours (Ajegbomogun, 2008). Information helps create enlightened and responsible citizens. The library is the gateway to information. It is a place where information is acquired, processed, repackaged, preserved, and disseminated.

Relevance of Youth

Youth occupy a prominent place in any society. Apart from being the owners and leaders of tomorrow, they outnumber the middle-aged and the aged (Onyekpe, 2007). Besides numerical superiority, youth have energy and ideas that are society's great potentials (Onyekpe, 2007). The National Youth Development Policy (2001, p.1) asserts that:

Youth are the foundation of a society. Their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides in economic development and socio-political attainments. In their dreams and hopes, a nation founds her motivation; on their energies, she builds her vitality and purpose. And because of their dreams and aspirations, the future of a nation is assured.

The statement above acknowledges the role of the youth in the peace and security of a nation. As the most active segment of any society, youth are the major determiners of peace and stability of a nation (Ozohu-Sulaiman, 2006). Conversely, the degree of disorderliness and instability in society is also determined in part by youth.

Peace is a precursor of development. The absence of peace means that no meaningful development can take place. The National Youth Policy (2001) affirms that the extent of the youth's "responsible conduct and roles in society is positively correlated with the development of their country".

Causes of Youth Restiveness in Nigeria

A number of studies have identified factors responsible for youth restiveness. Elegbeleye (2005) identifies three major factors: the peer motivated excitement of being a student, the jingoistic pursuit of patriotic ideas, and perceived victimization arising from economic exploitation.

Another study carried out in Niger Delta region by Ofem and Ajayi (2008) identified lack of humanitarian and social welfare, lack of good governance, corrupt practices of government officials, inadequate training programmes, unemployment, inadequate recreational facilities, lack of quality education, and so on, as the reasons for incessant youth restiveness. This implies that a catalogue of closely-related factors are responsible for youth restiveness.

Bad Governance

Good governance is required for the growth and development of any nation. Unfortunately, in Nigeria bad governance is more common than good, resulting in disjointed development. The World Bank (1992) identifies the main characteristics of bad governance to include:

- failure to properly distinguish between what is public and what is private, leading to private appropriation of otherwise public resources;
- 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;
- excessive rules, regulations, licensing requirement and so forth which impede the functioning of markets and encourage rent-seeking;
- priorities that are inconsistent with development, thereby resulting in misallocation of national resources; and
- exceedingly narrow base for, or non-transparent, decision making.

These and more are the features of most administration in Nigeria. For instance, Onyekpe (2007) observes that successive administrations in Nigeria have not allocated much to the needs of the youth,

and, worse still, the meager allocation are often diverted by government officials to their private accounts and projects. Thus, youth are restive and agitated when they perceive that resources meant for them are being wasted by those in authority.

Unemployment

Unemployment is a hydra-headed monster which exists among the youth in all developing countries. Experts believe that the number of jobless youth is twice as high as official estimate. Ozohu-Suleiman (2006) notes Nigerian youth are trapped by unemployment. Zakaria (2006) believes that "the rising tide of unemployment and the fear of a bleak future among the youth in African countries have made them vulnerable to the manipulations of agents' provocateurs". These include aggrieved politicians, religious demagogues, and greedy multinationals that employ these youths to achieve their selfish ambitions. Zakaria (2006) strongly believes that the absence of job opportunities in developing countries is responsible for youth restiveness with disastrous consequences.

Poverty

Poverty connotes inequality and social injustice and this traumatizes the poor. More than 70 percent of people in Nigeria are in abject poverty, living below the poverty line, and one- third survive on less than US $1 dollar a day (Zakaria, 2006). This figure includes an army of youth in urban centres in Nigeria who struggle to eke out a living by hawking chewing sticks, bottled water, handkerchiefs, belts, etc. The sales-per-day and the profit margin on such goods are so small that they can hardly live above the poverty line. Disillusioned, frustrated, and dejected, they seek an opportunity to express their anger against the state. Aworawo (2000) and Zakaria (2006) agreed that there is a link among poverty, loss of livelihood, inequality, and youth restiveness as evidenced by the numerous violent protests against the wielders of power in Nigeria.

Inadequate Educational Opportunities and Resources

Quality education has a direct bearing on national prestige, greatness, and cohesion. The knowledge and skill that young people acquire help determine their degree of patriotism and contribution to national integration and progress. Between 2000 and 2004, about 30 percent of Nigerian youth between 10 and 24 were not enrolled in secondary school (Population Reference Bureau, 2006). Perhaps the prohibitive cost of acquiring education is responsible.

The aftereffect of this situation is that thousands of young people roam the streets in cities in Nigeria. Those who manage to complete secondary school have no opportunities for tertiary education. Having being denied the chance to reach their potential, they are disorientated and readily available for antisocial actions (Onyekpe, 2007).

Worse still, some who struggle to enroll in various educational institutions drop out due to lack of basic learning facilities. This situation is attributable to the dwindling resources of government at both federal and state levels as a result of an economic meltdown.

Lack of Basic Infrastructure

Most rural communities and urban slums in Nigeria have no access to potable water, health facilities, electricity, communication facilities, industries and commercial facilities, etc. Behind social unrest and youth restiveness in the country is the agitation for equitable distribution of resources.

Inadequate Communication and Information flow

Communication creates room for sharing information. It helps people express their thoughts and feelings, clarify problems, and consider alternative ways of coping or adapting to their situation. Such sharing promotes social cohesion.

People must have access to communication facilities, to communicate with the people making the decisions that affect them. Sadly, rarely do people in Nigeria participate in decision-making processes on issues that affect their lives. Ifidon and Ahiauzu (2005), in their study of Niger Delta, revealed that inadequate communication and information flow is one factor responsible for youth restiveness in the area.

Role of Information in Curbing Youth Restiveness

Information is a critical resource for individual and collective emancipation and advancement. Sokari (2006) agrees that information is necessary for people to be liberated from the shackles of ignorance, misconceptions, economic stagnation, social unrest, and political instability. Social cohesion cannot be achieved without timely, accurate, and relevant information.

Information has been likened to a stimulus that can condition a person to a certain behaviour (Curras, 1987). According to Ifidon and Ahiauzu (2006) information is "structured data that causes a human mind to change its opinion about the current state of real world and contribute to a reduction in the uncertainty of the state of the system". Information is a change agent, a reinforcer of ideas and opinions. It is the responsibility of leaders to ensure that youth have access to information that will guide their actions. Clearly, most Nigerian youth who participate in protests across the country are uninformed.

Information plays a vital role in wealth generation. Information is the critical economic resource in today's world (Sabaratnam, 1997). Youth must be economically empowered through access to business and economic information. They need information on employment opportunities in all nations and communities. Access to entrepreneurial information will make youth inaccessible to those who want to recruit them for anti-social actions.

Nigerian youth as leaders of the future need access to a wide range of information which will help reposition them to take their rightful place in the comity of nations. Such information, according to Onyekpe (2007), should be geared towards:

- creating the awareness that the future belongs to them and that it must not be destroyed by them;
- sensitizing them to the fact the future and its nature depend on the decisions and choices they make;
- 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 youth today;
- sensitizing them to embrace the rule of law and democratic ideals;
- liberating them psychologically and mentally from the control of self-seeking business and political elites.
- encouraging them to raise issues relating to unresolved problems of nation0building and the problem of neglect of the youth in the development process at every fora;
- mobilizing them against abuse of the system through sanctions;
- 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.

Role of Libraries in Curbing Youth Restiveness

There is a body of evidence demonstrating the importance of the library in the promotion of peace and social cohesion. Recent articles by Omotayo (2005) and Echezona (2007) demonstrate the place of the library in curbing youth restiveness, in Nigeria in particular, and in Africa as a whole.

The primary role of the library is to acquire, process, preserve, and disseminate recorded information. It is therefore the responsibility of the library to enlighten the youth and other members of the community it serves by presenting them with factual information that will guide their actions and help make good conclusion that will promote peace. This will reduce the amount of youth violence, acrimony, and confrontation. Omotayo (2005) observed that:

In war situations in enlightened societies, use of libraries increases as users flock to libraries to find information to guide them. Information that can promote peace, unity, progress, peaceful co-existence, and harmonious relationship among all the communities must therefore be available in libraries. Librarians, therefore, in promoting access to this information, act as agents of the promotion of communal peace and reconciliation.

Libraries are positioned as hubs for formal and informal learning. School libraries, academic libraries, and public libraries support the education of the youth. Information obtained from libraries can change the behaviour, attitudes, and mindset of youth. Such libraries should not only be stocked with educational materials, they should have recreational facilities where pent-up energies and emotions can be dissipated. Elegbeleye (2005) strongly believes that:

Recreational facilities provide leeway for students to let off steam and become less stressed. Being stressed ... has always precipitated a feeling of frustration in this category of youths, a development that more likely than not is capable of predisposing them to take recourse to violence.

Libraries create opportunities for youth employment. For instance, in Nigeria, the University of Lagos Library and Federal University of Technology, Yola, Library employ students under a work study scheme to perform routine jobs such as packing and sorting books, shelving books, pasting book pockets, and cleaning the libraries. Once engaged, these students perform their duties with zeal and enthusiasm and without prompting. This initiative helps to understand the dignity of labour as well as alleviate the suffering of indigent students who could have dropped out of school (Ndagana and Ogunrombi, 2006). Youths who are gainfully employed rarely participate in antisocial activities.

In addition to providing job opportunities, many libraries create an environment for acquiring skills and for career development. Libraries may go beyond collecting books on various professions to organizing seminars and workshops on career development. These programmes provide career guidance and counseling and will help reduce the number of idle, frustrated youth who roam the streets aimlessly, and who might at the least provocation take recourse to violence.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has attempted to capture the place of information and libraries in curbing youth restiveness in Nigeria. The future belongs to youth who make productive use of information and knowledge. With adequate information and libraries, Nigerian youth can achieve their potential and participate actively in local and international affairs in a manner that eschews violence.

To curb youth restiveness officials should:

- enhance information flow among youth through seminars, workshops, and lectures;
- ensure equitable distribution of information and telecommunication facilities in both urban and rural areas;
- integrate available sources of information to enhance accessibility and visibility of youth information needs;
- ensure that every youth development policy has an information and communication component;
- increase opportunities for entrepreneurial development among youth;
- give access to credit facilities and other support mechanisms to young investors;
- increase allocations for youth development and youth-related programme;
- use all channels of information to enlighten youth on the adverse effects of acts of rebellion;
- partner with multinationals to ensure the development of functional and well-equipped libraries in all educational institutions;
- ensure accessibility of information for skill acquisition, self employment, job opportunities, and self-reliance among youth.

Librarians must present information on the consequences of youth restiveness as well as information on current employment and educational opportunities, locally and internationally. Finally, libraries must be repositioned to serve the leaders of tomorrow. The level of restiveness witnessed among youth will be drastically reduced if they have access to the right information at the right time.

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