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Youth Involvement in Illegal Activities Consequences for Community Development

By Dinebari K Badey

University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Introduction- Man, by nature and sometimes nurture, is a very inquisitive being and this aspect of him can be brought to the fore when he encounters a situation that seems mysterious or which he finds pleasurable or profiting. He is therefore open to a wide range of activities which may or may not be socially acceptable. Some of such activities which are socially unacceptable may range from those that are simply frowned upon, irritable to those that contravene both written and unwritten mores, norms and laws; In every society, therefore, human action is always viewed against the backdrop of general acceptability, especially when the outcome(s) could be positive or negative, beneficial or not, to the majority of those found in that context. When the activities voluntarily go against laid down and written laws, they are regarded as illegal and therefore, a crime. For this reason, those who engage in such activities in clandestine or covert ways.

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YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES CONSEQUENCES FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Youth Involvement in Illegal Activities Consequences for Community Development

Dinebari K Badey

I. INTRODUCTION

Man, by nature and sometimes nurture, is a very inquisitive being and this aspect of him can be brought to the fore when he encounters a situation that seems mysterious or which he finds pleasurable or profiting. He is therefore open to a wide range of activities which may or may not be socially acceptable. Some of such activities which are socially unacceptable may range from those that are simply frowned upon, irritable to those that contravene both written and unwritten mores, norms and laws; In every society, therefore, human action is always viewed against the backdrop of general acceptability, especially when the outcome(s) could be positive or negative, beneficial or not, to the majority of those found in that context. When the activities voluntarily go against laid down and written laws, they are regarded as illegal and therefore, a crime. For this reason, those who engage in such activities in clandestine or covert ways.

While involvement in certain illegal activities may be suited to certain groups because of particular traits or characteristics (such as age, physical strength, height or gender) it is not the exclusive preserve of any group, be it male, female, young or old. For the purposes of this paper, however, our focus will be on youths. The question would also arise immediately; who is a youth?

II. WHO IS A YOUTH?

Various definitions have been given as to what or who a youth is, and these definitions are usually based on cultural, political; social, economic or even legal and psychological reasons but the website: ask.com defines youth as “the time of life when one is young, but often means the time between childhood and adulthood (maturity). An individual’s actual maturity may not correspond to their chronological age, as immature individuals can exist at all ages. Youth is also defined as “the appearance, freshness, vigor, spirit etc, characteristics of one who is young”. (2013). This goes to confirm that there are different criteria for labelling an individual as a youth and this would depend on the purpose for which the definition is being given. This point is brought to the fore when we view the definition by the UNESCO (2013) which defines youth as being

“best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age group... The UN, for statistical consistency across regions, defines ‘youth’, as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member State... For activities at the national level, for example when implementing a local community youth programme, “youth” may be understood in a more flexible manner. UNESCO will then adopt the definition of “youth” as used by a particular Member State. It can be based for instance on the definition given in the African Youth Charter where “youth” means “every” person between the ages of 15 and 35 years”

From the definitions above, it would seem that youth are those who are young in terms of age, very much impressionable and who are still in need of guidance but the African Youth Charter which stretches this category to 35 years of age would also suggest that they at least a part, are a mature group who know what they are doing and why. And so, if they engage in any illegal activity, one can conclude that they do so voluntarily and are well aware of the consequence(s) of their action.

III. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

For one to discuss the concept of community Development, it might be necessary to take a look at the two words that make it up.

a) Community

According to ‘Community Tool Box’ (2013), “while we traditionally think of a community as the people in a given geographical location, the word can really refer to any group sharing something in common. This may refer to smaller geographic area.. a neighbourhood, a housing project or development, a rural area.. or to a number of other possible communities within a larger, geographically –defined community”. On the basis of this we can have as many communities as we can possibly conceive of to cover whatever range of issues we desire. For example, a community of Christian, Muslims, academics, musicians, etc. the essential thing is that there are certain commonalities binding them together and distinguishing them from others; as it were there could

Author: University of Port Harcourt. e-mail: mails4dine@yahoo.com

be boundaries in a larger collective, such as the Ogoni community in Lagos State. The view is supported by Mark Smith (2001) who believes that concept of community can also be “approached as a descriptive category or set variable”.

For the purpose of today’s presentation, we will look at the Bodo City Community, located in the Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State in Nigeria, and if we do, we will discover that there are certain values or characteristics that bind us together such as language, Geographical contiguity, culture and the fact that we willingly relate with one another and perceive us as one. These could make ‘other’ and ‘ourselves’ view us a community.

b) *Development*

The concept of ‘Development’ is one which people love to love because it connotes things getting qualitatively and quantitatively better than they were before, for an individual, group or people. The problem usually is that what is considered good or beneficial by an individual or group may be perceived or described as bad by another. The essential thing however, is that it refers to the preference for or pursuit of conditions which are favourable, so if the actions of one group makes it impossible for another to have satisfactory living conditions, it cannot be described as development; which is why Anikpo (1996:6), a professor of Sociology defines development as “the attempt by man to overcome both natural and man-made obstacles”. It is for this reason that the United Nations through the ‘Brundtland report’ titled ‘Our Common Future’ defines Sustainable Development as ‘Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. (c.f. Elliot,2006:7). Any activity, that benefits one individual or group and negatively impacts another cannot be referred to as development and should, therefore, be halted.

c) *Community Development*

Having known with its constituent parts mean, one could refer to Community Development as the activities undertaken by ‘a Community’ to better their life circumstance in the face of natural and man-made challenges, be it the political, economic. Religious or whatever realm, because any attempt at development, indeed, must be holistic. If a community (Bodo City, in this instance) wants to develop, it must take a multi-disciplinary approach by noting what its challenges are (in terms of what is being done wrongly, what is not being done) and what would be the best way to overcome those challenges (utilizing both internal and external resources). Foe www.ask.com (2013), community development “is a broad term given to the practices of civic activist, involved citizens and professionals to build stronger and more resilient local communities. Community development seeks to

empower individuals and groups of people by providing them with the skills they need to effect change in their own communities. These skills are often created through the formation of large social groups working for a common agenda. Community developer must understand both how to work with individuals and how to affect communities’ positions within the context of larger social institutions”. This is particularly necessary because as Andy Tamas (2000:1) “Community Development is a very complex activity- there are so many elements involved that it seems indeed a very complex field, there is a method which can be used to identify many of the components and processes involved in this work”.

In line with the above, if Bodo will develop, we need to, while x-raying any illegal activities of the youth, take cognizance of the state of our infrastructure (such as roads, schools, water pipelines, electricity- ensuring that those who are awarded contracts the jobs for which they are paid or have received payment), patterns of settlement, demographics, culture and history, local governance structures (to ensure that only credible people occupy sensitive positions) like the Mene Gan, Tor Bon, Mene Gio, Mene Bon, etc) institutions, economic activities, social structure and our attitudes and values. A situation where people struggle to occupy positions because of anticipated gains will not make for development because in the struggle, they will want to shut out their competitors or any other that might pose a “threat” to their goals. And in shutting them out will not be able to maximally harness the potentials and resources of others.

d) *Illegal activities of youths*

Overtime, there has been an erroneous perception which attempts to tie commission of crime or illegalities to youths, viewing them as being on the ends of a continuum in which they are either lazy, laid-back and helpless or they are violent, headstrong and destructive. This is sometimes the outcome of ‘adulthood’ which can be defined as “all behaviours and attitudes that flow from the assumption that adults are better than young people” (youth Organizers United, 2004, Making sense). This view might not be unconnected with the fact that youths can be given to ‘deviant behaviour’ as siegel L.J (2008:44) points out, “Regardless of economic status, marital status, race sex, and other factors, younger commit crime more often than older people do”.

IN our context, youth have been known to engage in robberies (armed, burglary, ect) violent protest, rapes, killings (as the Dey Well and Dey Bam episodes in our recent past attest) and prostitution (Ashawo market) AIDs after the Oil spill caused by equipment failure of the Shell Petroleum Development Corporation, a new phenomenon of kpoo-fire (illegal refining of crude oil) is emerging. While the law would

naturally frowned on all illegal activities, the latter requires a lot of urgent attention by relevant security agencies because of its ability to negatively impact the physical/natural, social, political and economic environment. When crude is refined in the modernized refineries, over a long period, its impact can be devastating as practical experience has shown us in Ogoniland (what with toxic rain and effects of gas flaring etc) being to imagine its impact when crude, unsophisticated methods are used to refine crude oil without the attendant health and safety safeguards. It will be horrendous to say the least.

Permit me to quote copiously from the work of Mohammed Tawfeeq Ibrahim (2019:9-14) who tried to show the effect of crude oil refining in Abulhool in Egypt.

"Refineries ... discharge a lot of different types of oil effluents with high concentration of organic and non organic compound which a high toxic and persistent such as (sulphides, NO_x, SO_x, CO_x, NH₃, phenols, soot and dust, volatile hydrocarbons and heavy metals like chromium, iron etc) which make up a violent attack directly to an equilibrium system of quality, quantity and special properties of environment main components (air, water, soil) by different ways like evaporation, spreading, drifting, oxidation, sedimentation, natural dispersion etc affecting directly to O₂ concentration. And to the acidity (PH) of water and soil increasing the toxic and dangerous of hydrocarbon compound for the humanity. And other organisms such as phytoplankton and algae, invertebrates and fishes by different ways through coating and asphyxiation, contract poisoning or through exposure to water.. soluble components. And also cause the destruction of the food organism wiping out population. Lastly all effluents are capable of causing sublethal and stress effects, carcinogenic and mutagenic effects and can affect the behaviours of individuals. The order of toxicity was determined starting with the most toxic NO_x fuel oil > sulphides > ammonia > phenol > chromium > kainite, other studies have also shown that the refineries effluent have a direct effect on the different types of soil (sandy, lime, rocky) which observed that the area of high contamination is often localized to the vicinity of the outfall and decrease with distance and also shown that the changes in the species within these areas. And also these effluents caused acidic rains which are affected to the quality of farming yields by attacking the nutrients of the plants and also effects to the (PH) and salinity of water and acts also to disintegrate and corrosion of rocks, limestones, iron-tower and housing building as occurred to Abulhool in Egypt.

Now imagine the impact again when untrained person who do not know the full effect of their actions engage in the business of kpo -fire!! in our case, the UNEP reports speaks volumes, and at a time when both the Rivers State and Federal Government are dilly-dallying over our collective fate, with extinction staring us

in the eyes, anyone who engages in this illegal activity with the hope of "developing" him (her) self financially or otherwise is doing the Community a great dis-service in her bid to be developed and mortgaging the future of generations yet unborn. Nay. Assuring the generations yet unborn of a life of misery and penury because without a healthy environment, a meaningful attempt at development can succeed.

e) *Education and Vocational Training*

1. Why are leaders not sponsoring (empowering young members of Bod
2. How can youths personal and structural discrimination be involved when only those who are loyal to government are chosen (come forward, be positioned, numbers) media-step up. Distinguished between loyalty and servitude (Elections)
3. Dynamics has changed. What, where and how should the process go?

f) *The Way Forward*

1. Youth should be permitted to participate in decision-making at all levels to facilitates inclusion and buy-in.
2. Creation of and facilitation of employment opportunities to divert attention from illegal activities as a sources of livelihood.
3. Organize enlightenment campaigns to increase people's knowledge of themselves and their society and of their physical environment with a view to helping them utilize their skills, (mental and physical) toward acceptable and legal activities that will ensure Community Development.
4. Improve the efficiency of security agencies to ensure deterrence and punishment through providing actionable information arising from community policing.

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