



# Youths, Social Action and Nigeria's Socio-economic Development

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## **Abstract**

*This study investigated those socio-economic conditions that help promote social actions in Nigeria and how these impinge on Nigeria's quest to attain socio economic development. It was emphasized that youths who presumably are the leaders of tomorrow are being consistently and persistently alienated from the social wealth which leads to frustration. These frustrations are expressed through different forms of social actions. In employing Karl Marx's Political Economy paradigm, this study acknowledged the fact that there are indeed two classes constantly in conflict with each other in the process of production and that the estrangement of one class by the other breeds social actions within the State. The historical, analytical and philosophical research designs were adopted for the study. The study discovered that a lot of factors were responsible for the incessant cases of social actions in the country some which include bad governance, corruption, poor educational opportunities amongst others. The study therefore recommends that government at all levels should endeavour to address the issue of poverty as it will help address the development crisis in the Nigeria.*

**Keywords: Youths, Social Action, Youth Restiveness, Socio-economic development**

## **Introduction**

Social Action among youths globally and those in Nigeria has become a behaviour pattern which has degenerated into a topical global issue. Social Action portrays man's negative side of social development. This negative development is rather unfortunate and has become one of the many security challenges facing man in the contemporary society. In many occasions, lives and properties worth millions of naira have been lost or vandalized and some razed down by restive youths. As observed by Chukwuemeka and Agbara (2010), human society and in fact the entire universe is simply and squarely a complex entity. In view of this, individuals and groups have their complexities, needs, aspirations, hopes, goals, opinions, views and values which could be social, economic, religious, psychological or political. Consequently, there is bound to be restiveness among different groups of people especially youths who are at their prime age.



Source: [vanguardngr.com](http://vanguardngr.com)

## Review of Related Literature

### Concept of Youth

The term *youth* depicts a specific stage in the development of human beings. There are legal, physiological and chronological dimensions to the definition of the youth. Because of these dimensions, there is no standard definition for the term youth. Despite the lack of consensus among scholars, Nwanna-Nzewunwa, Girigiri and Okoh (2007), defined a youth as any person that is over twelve (12) years but not more than forty (40). Akinboye (1987) defined youth as any youngster between twenty and thirty years. Young (2001) explained that youth are boys and girls who fall between the age bracket of 15 and 27 years. The World Health Organization (WHO) viewed youth as anybody between the ages of 15 and 24. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004) officially placed the age bracket of youths between 16–30 years. What this means is that youth can be found in the primary and secondary schools as well as tertiary institutions. Yet there are others who are out of school with all its grave implications to the individual and the society (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2008).



**SOURCE:** [www.watchdogreporters.com](http://www.watchdogreporters.com)

Chika and Onyene (2010) observed that to be restive is to be unable to stay still, or unwilling to be controlled especially because one is bored or not satisfied with certain decisions, changed or existing laws considered to be unfavourable. Youth restiveness involves the combination of actions, conducts and behaviour which constitutes unwholesome, socially unacceptable behaviour exhibited by youths in the society. Youth restiveness has been a device used by the youth to get what they want from the relevant authority. Chika and Onyene (2010), asserted that youth resistance to conditions, issues and unwelcomed leadership regimes dates back to 1934 when Herbert Macaulay floated a political party to kick against dependency with fellow elite youths that had contact with the West. In addition, political parties like the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), the Action Group (AG), has their youth wings as vibrant as the other parties. Since then, there has been proliferation of youth association like students' unions, ethnic cliques, cleavages as well as clannish orientation among students which appear to have legitimized restive reactions among the youths on campuses.

The phenomenon of ethnic militia such as the Odua People's Congress (OPC) in the West, Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the East, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) in the North and Tiv Youth Organization (TYO) in the North Central, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Movement



for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) both in the South-South exemplify local forces which chain relevance in crime prevention and control but whose activities are parallel with State recognition, are threats to national security. Youth restiveness may be caused by a number of factors. Chukwuemeka (2008), observed that composite unemployment in Nigeria increased from 3.8% in 2006 to 4.2% in the first half of 2011. He further stated that structural unemployment results in talents not being used where they are available, hence an idle mind is definitely the devil's workshop.

Similarly, Coleman (1996) observed that psychological variables and deprivation is the basic product of conflict and restiveness of any kind. He further argued that the more widespread and intense deprivation is among members of a population, the greater is the magnitude of violence in one form or the other. In the foregoing therefore, one can argue that the unequal socio-economic development of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria led to inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts. For instance, Chukwuemeka, Anazodo and Nzewi (2011), found that dissatisfaction of the people of South-South especially the youths on the level of attention given to development of their region and the damages to their ecology by oil spillage are the major causes of the alarming rate of youth restiveness.

Youth restiveness may occur as reprisal attack. For instance, the Tiv youths did a reprisal attack on the Jukuns in Makurdi following the Tiv massacre in Taraba State and in Zaki-Biam by Nigerian soldiers. Chika and Onyene (2010), in their study attributed youth restiveness to adults' coercive control over their children, denial of participatory opportunities to youths, resource scarcity and financial constraints and leaders failures, peer groups, and foreign interferences. The obvious effects of youth restiveness on the Nigerian society are loss of lives and properties, which constitute a major threat to security of the state as well as its corporate existence. It also discourages genuine economic and democratic development. Strategies employed include mass agitations, protests, demonstrations, looting, vandalism, cultism, ethnic militia, political thuggery among others. This trend of events demands for urgent and timely intervention. Therefore, counseling intervention becomes a compelling necessity for the Nigerian youths. Hence youth restiveness stems from thinking (cognition), the use of cognitive behaviour restructuring is eminent (Samuel Ulman: 1978).



**SOURCE:** *avacubes.com*

Recent media reports and personal observations indicates cases of armed conflicts, killings, wanton destruction of lives and properties kidnappings, lootings, pipeline destructions among others in most Nigerian States. The issue of insecurity in the country is of upper most concern to the Nigerian government and religious leaders. Recently, Federal and State legislators were killed in cold blood in Plateau State. Churches have been bombed in Niger, Plateau and Kogi States. For insecurity to be seen not to be religious, mosques have also suffered similar faiths in Borno and Kano States. One wonders who the perpetrators of these evil acts are. Security reports show that most of those involved in these acts are Youths. The two suicide bombers that attacked the residences of Emirs in Bornu

and Yobe States were reported to be between 12 and 18 years respectively. The problem that is facing the nation is how youth restiveness can be curbed or reduced in Nigeria and most especially in the Niger Delta Region. Youths who are gainfully employed rarely participate in anti-social activities. The future belongs to youth who make productive use of information and knowledge.

Youth restiveness in Nigeria has been a reoccurring theme or issue in recent times. Unfortunately 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 (Anasi, 2010). Youth in the context of this research can be seen as young men and women who are no longer children, but not yet adults. Some scholars have gone ahead to give a definitive age bracket to youths as those within the age range of 15- 30 years. In fact, in some cultures in Nigeria it may not be out of place to see people (especially men) of even 40-45 years of age claiming youth membership. Hence, the concept of youth is a relative one: a person is a youth if he or she believes so.

### **Concept of Social Action**

Social Action among Youths refers to a plethora of activities expressed in the form of hostage taking of foreign nationals, local oil workers and citizens for ransom; oil pipe-line blow ups; illegal bunkering; strikes, peaceful or violent demonstration; bombing of public places, etc, (Epelle, 2010). Weber, (1975) conceived social action as an act which takes into account actions and reactions of individuals who perceive they exist under circumstances that are unfavourable to them. In other words, Social action is a method of social work used for mobilizing masses in order to bring about structural changes in the social system or to prevent adverse changes. Hence, social action is taken as a transformational practice to meet the objective of promoting well-being by

bringing change in the arrangements in social system that lead to inequality and injustice, preventing people from realizing their full potential as self-determining agents. Furthermore, Richmond, (1922) has defined social action as “mass betterment through propaganda and social legislation”. This definition stresses on improving the condition of huge sections of the population as an aim of social action with propaganda and social legislations as main strategies. From the above, it can be deduced that social actions is not just negative but also has positive impact on the society too.

For Marx, “alienation” just as social action is a necessary and humanized process that includes positive implications. It has positive and negative implications regarding Man’s self-realization in nature. Karl Marx, renowned philosopher and critical thinker of political economy left behind a vast legacy and a rich literature to elaborate upon the historical development of human being in nature and society. From the beginning of the capitalist period, humans have been portrayed as a labour power at work. In essence, work became a vital issue and appeared as a product of man in different formats, for example, in primitive age, work could be defined as hunting or building a house, nowadays work is regarded more as a labour power, such as in designing and producing smart phones, performing surrealist art, training on a

subject. It has thus become sophisticated. But on the other hand, the relationship of human being to nature has changed dramatically and transformed since Marx's time.

To Mitchel (1999) "Action is social when the actor behaves in such a manner that his action is intended to influence the action of one or more other persons." Baldwin (1966) defines social action as "an organized effort to change social and economic institutions as distinguished from social work or social service, the fields which do not characteristically cover essential changes in established institutions. Mishra (1992) identified the following as goals of social action:

- Prevention of needs
- Solution of mass problems
- Improvement in mass conditions
- Influencing institutions, policies and practices
- Introduction of new mechanisms or programmes
- Redistribution of power and resources
- Decision-making
- Effect on thought and action structure
- Improvement in health, education and welfare

### **Socio-economic conditions that enhance Social Action in Nigeria**

A number of studies have identified factors responsible for youths engaging in Social Actions. 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, amongst others, as the reasons for incessant youth restiveness or social action. This implies that a catalogue of closely-related factors is responsible for social action.

**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 framework 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 administrations in Nigeria. For instance, Onyekpe (2007) observes that successive administrations in Nigeria have not allocated much to the needs of the youth. The meager allocations are often diverted by government officials to their private accounts and projects. Thus, youths 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 youths in all developing countries. Experts believe that the number of jobless youths is twice as high as official estimate. Ozohu-Suleiman (2006) notes Nigerian youths are trapped by unemployment. Zakaria (2006) believes that "the rising tide of unemployment and the fear of a bleak future among the youths 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 youths in urban centres in Nigeria who struggle to eke out a living by hawking gala, 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 etc 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 youths 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.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusively, the Nigerian State lacks a productive base on which the productive forces and social relations of production can be anchored that would transform the society and people. Large numbers of the population in Nigeria are peasants who live in the rural areas; and thus, this has weakened class conscious and social awareness which is an imperative tool of social change within the Marxian paradigm. In Nigeria, we do not create wealth, we share the wealth been accrued to the State from oil revenue among the political elites who are constantly fighting among themselves to get a share but not for production, for appropriation and consumption which has made the State a rentier one based on clientship patronage. Due to the unsustainability of the Nigerian system, it has led to the production of militant youth agitations across the nation that is serving as latent functions in shaping social life. The individual as an agent of change in the society, if incapacitated by any means he cannot perform its function of producing and transforming society. The State needs an institutional frame work of policies to tackle this dysfunctional economic system it operates if it does not want to be among the list of failed Nations of the world.

Following years of alienation, neglect and marginalization by the federal government, corruption at all levels of the Nigerian State (federal, state and local government), life has become



increasingly hard and difficult for the common man despite the huge revenue accruing from oil wealth. This therefore provides a grim reality and a fertile ground for conflicts, restiveness and social actions to erupt. Protest and agitations by communities, demanding adequate share of the oil wealth and environmental protection, occasioned by acts of militancy, kidnappings, acts of terror and militarization have become a norm rather than a rule. The use of the State, a public institution, for the pursuit of personal, sectional, and ethnic interests, has undermined the capacity of the state to deal with different forms of social actions within its territory. To deal with this issue, the custodians of state power at all levels (federal, state and local government) will need to commit symbolic suicide (Wilmot 1982:148) by subordinating their personal, sectional and ethnic interests to the common interests or public good.

Meanwhile, the privatization of the state has created a situation where the institutions saddled with the responsibility of distributing and re-distributing wealth (bureaucracies of the federal, state and local governments) are so corrupt that only an infinitesimal proportion of budgeted funds trickle down to poor average peasants in the society. Thus, if the developmental problems of the people remain unresolved, it will sustain the objective conditions that have continued to instigate social actions within the polity.

The Study therefore poses the following recommendations:

1. To address the issue of poverty is to address the development crisis in the Nigeria. This can be achieved if marginalization, domination and abuse of human, material and natural resources of the people are done away with and the leaders of tomorrow (youths) given their rightful place in the society.
2. Poverty and unemployment have made many Nigerians to be vulnerable to militant mobilisation. For many of the youths, militancy and hostage taking is a means of livelihood and a demonstrative effect of corruption and conspicuous consumption among government functionaries. To end this means providing viable alternative means of livelihood for those who will come out of it. It equally requires an end to corruption in government.
3. There is urgent need to enhance and enforce human-capital development in the Country. This can only be achieved through education of the youths on productive, creative and self-sustaining ventures. This invariably will help reduce their dependence on the government for virtually everything.
4. The transformation of the Nigerian State requires tackling the problem of legitimacy, development, participation, dialogue, negotiations, transparency and accountability and the enthronement of good government on a sustainable basis. This can be achieved through the conscious efforts of the Nigerian State in



articulating and meeting the needs of the masses.

5. Improving the living conditions of the people of Nigerians requires the economic empowerment of the youths through skills acquisition initiatives.

6. Multi-national companies operating within the Nigerian State should be re-awakened to their corporate social responsibilities to the people and the environment from which they derive their huge revenues. This way, the people wouldn't feel neglected and alienated from the commonwealth.

7. Corrupt leaders who estrange the populace through the use of public funds to further enrich themselves thereby increasing the rate of social agitations in the country must be brought to book, and should be made to face the wrath of the law.

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