

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS CAMP (NYSC) ON UMUNYA COMMUNITY, 1998 – 2004

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Abstract

The root of the factors leading to the establishment of the NYSC scheme stretched to the pre-colonial, colonial and immediate post-independence history and experience of the Nigerian state marked by the manifestations of ethnic loyalties, mutual group suspicions and distrust. These arose from Nigeria's diverse nature, and the need for catalyzing national unity and integration. These were further reinforced by the urgent need for the youth mobilization as part of the capacity building strategies for national development, nation-building and combating, the forces of poverty, mass illiteracy, and shortage of high skilled manpower, coupled with the urgent desire to tackle the phenomenon of uneven distribution of available skilled manpower in the country¹. This paper attempts to portray the socio-economic gains of the NYSC camp in Umunya community. The methodology of this paper is based on analysis of available data, using primary and secondary sources. The paper attempts to trace the history of the NYSC, the activities of NYSC at Umunya camp and the contributions of the camp to Umunya Community. No doubt, the presence of the camp has had both positive and negative effects on the community. The paper, therefore, concludes that the presence of the camp has however, brought substantial development in Umunya Community.

Key words: NYSC, Umunya, Socio-economic, Orientation camp, Community

Introduction

History is believed to hold the key to the understanding of institutions and organisations of nations (Mills, 1956). In line with the views of Mills (1956), Nigeria's history provide the understanding of the institutions of the NYSC, established in Nigeria's post-war-era, in response to the country's pressing national needs and developmental challenges. The NYSC is a product of an unpleasant past and an expressed desire to avoid a repeat of that ugly past. Unfolding events in Nigeria after Independence, which eventually climaxed in the Nigeria-Biafra war that brought about dissatisfaction to all, especially among the youth, hence the setting up of the scheme in 1973, three years after the Nigeria-Biafra war which ended in 1970.

At the beginning of 1967, several Nigerian youth groups had asked for a national youth scheme that would begin with providing relief to people wounded in the war, which will later metamorphose into an agency for national mass mobilization for the youth (nysc5.htm). In 1969, with the end of the war clearly in view, the committee of Vice Chancellors of Nigerian universities called for a one year national service scheme for Nigerian undergraduates. They suggested that the proposed service would be for students who had completed the first year of a three-year course, and was to be designed to inculcate the spirit of service and patriotism and to promote national unity.

At the end of the Nigeria-Biafra war, General Yakubu Gowon, the then head of the victorious Federal Government, announced a “no victor no vanquished” policy. In order to give credence to this pronouncement, the Gowon Administration embarked on a national programme of reconciliation, rehabilitation, reconstruction, popularly known as the “3R's programme” (Danfulani and Aja, 2008). With the bitter lessons of Nigeria's first republic and the pains of the just concluded war still resounding in the hearts of Nigerians, the government of the day realized that the proposed national youth service programme would be needed to quickly address the root of the problem of national unity (nysc1.htm). The eventual establishment of the NYSC Scheme in 1973 was because of maximum cooperation, commitment and dedication both on the part of the military and the civilians, in keeping Nigeria one (Obasanjo, 1990).

In furtherance of the intent to uphold national integration in Nigeria, efforts were made to use the educational system as a tool for the pursuit of national unity and foster the spirit of patriotism. In this regard, about forty unitary (federal) secondary schools were established in Nigeria in 1973, where students from diverse ethnic and cultural inclination could come together under one common agenda. The idea was that young adolescents would come together, interact and develop a solid base for themselves in the formulation of national and cultural values (Adesina, 1986).

The Nigerian government at the time believed that the youth is the future of any nation and so worked assiduously to support the policy of establishing the scheme where the leaders of today through drill, thick and thin of national service, would be committed to the corporate existence of Nigeria as a powerful, peaceful, united and strong member of the comity of democratic nations (Adesina, 1986). The NYSC therefore, became a product of national historical process and development both at the national and international levels. It was established partly as one of the many measures put in place to reiterate its commitment and dedication to the Nigerian slogan unity in diversity and, to ensure the continuous existence of Nigeria as a corporate entity (Ahmed, 2008).

Conceptual Clarification

For in-depth understanding of this paper, the concept “youth”, will be clarified. Youth – the term youth is the time of life when one is young. The word, youth, can also mean the time between childhood and adulthood (maturity), but it can also refer to one's peak, in terms of health or the period of life known as being a young adult (Macmillan, 2013). Youth is also defined as "the appearance, freshness, vigor, spirit, etc., characteristic of one, who is young" (Dictionary.com, 2012). Its definition of a specific

age range varies, as youth is not defined chronologically as a stage that can be tied to specific age ranges; nor can its end point be linked to specific activities, such as taking unpaid work, or having sexual relations (Furlong, 2013). Youth is an experience that may shape an individual's level of dependency, which can be marked in various ways according to different cultural perspectives. Personal experience is marked by an individual's cultural norms or traditions, while a youth's level of dependency means the extent to which they still rely on their family emotionally and economically.

Around the world, the English terms-- *youth*, adolescent, teenager, *kid*, *youngster* and *young person*, are interchanged, often meaning the same thing (Konokpa, 1973), but they are occasionally differentiated. *Youth* can be referred to as the time of life, when one is young. The meaning may in some instances also include childhood (Webster's, 2024). *Youth* also identifies a particular mindset of attitude, as in "He is very *youthful*". For certain uses, such as employment statistics, the term also sometimes refers to individuals from the ages of up to 21 (Altschuler *et al*, 2009). However, the term *adolescence* refers to a specific age range during a specific developmental period in a person's life, unlike youth, which is a socially constructed category (Furlong, 2013).

In much of sub-Saharan Africa, however, the term "youth" is associated with young men from 12 to 30 or 35 years of age. Youth in Nigeria is an indication used for every citizen of the federal republic of Nigeria within the ages of 18 and 35 years. (NNYP, 2009). Many African girls experience youth as a brief interlude between the onset of puberty and marriage and motherhood. But in urban settings, poor women are often considered youth much longer, even if they bear children outside of marriage. Varying culturally, the gender constructions of youth in Latin America and Southeast Asia differ from those of sub-Saharan Africa. In Vietnam, widespread notions of youth are socio-political constructions for both sexes between the ages of 15 and 35 (Dalsgard and Tranberg, 2008). For the purpose of this paper however, the Nigeria 2009 national youth policy (NNYP) classification of the youth will suffice.

Background to the Establishment of NYSC Camp at Umunya

The establishment of the NYSC camp at Umunya, followed the creation of a new Anambra state in 1991, with a new state capital in Awka. Anambra state is one of the five states that make up the south-east geo-political zone, and also one of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria. The name Anambra is the anglicised version of the "omombala", the indigenous name of the Anambra River. With the creation of the new Anambra state, it became independent of the administrative structures of the old Anambra state. To this end, it became imperative for the new state to set up new administrative structures of its own to meet the demands of the new state.

The NYSC, being a government establishment, also began operation in 1991. The responsibility of coordinating a new NYSC secretariat was vest on Mrs. Elizabeth Adimora, an indigenous chief inspector-general of NYSC. The NYSC secretariat was first situated at Umueze square, Amawbia, within the Awka capital territory. Faced with the challenge of providing accommodation and other required facility, the then governor of the state Navy Captain Joseph Abulu, commissioned the federal

government college technical, Umuze, as the temporary site for the NYSC orientation camp; and in September 1992, the first NYSC orientation was held at Umuze (Ilodigwe, 2014).

With the passage of time, it became obvious that the Umuze camp could no longer accommodate the increasing numbers of corps members posted to the state. More so, the location of Umuze camp was said not to fall within the stipulated range of camp site by the NYSC national directorate (Achukwu, 2014). The NYSC national directorate in its policy guideline stipulated that no NYSC camp should be situated anywhere farther than 30 kilometers away from the state capital. This necessitated the relocation of the camp from Umuze to a more conducive place. Hence, in 1997, Col. Mike E. Attah, the then administrator of Anambra state, announced the movement of Anambra state NYSC orientation camp to Umuja (Ayanda, 2014), as Umuja had met the criteria stipulated by the NYSC directorate for the establishment of NYSC camps across the federation.

Structures of the Umuja Camp

The NYSC directorate headquarters organises the orientation programmes; and determines the general structure of camp administration. For effective administration and management, the Umuja camp is thus structured:

State Coordinator -- the state coordinator is often a senior staff of the NYSC scheme, who is in charge of the programme at the state level. The state coordinator receives directives from the national directorate headquarters and is responsible for the overall administration of the camp (Anamkopa, 2012).

Camp director – the camp director is also a senior staff of the NYSC scheme, but lower in rank than the state coordinator. He/she receives directives from the state coordinator; and is in charge of the overall well-being of corps members and camp officials (Anamkopa, 2012).

Camp commandant – the camp commandant is usually an high-ranking military personnel who serves with the Anambra state military cantonment. He often works with other junior personnel to provide para-military trainings and drills; and general discipline of corps members during the orientation camp period (Anamkopa, 2012).

Police unit – the police unit is manned by policemen from Anambra state police command. They are responsible for the provision of adequate security and ensure the maintenance of law and order within the camp (Anamkopa, 2013).

Camp officials – camp officials are members of staff of the NYSC scheme. They are responsible for registering corps members, payment of corps members' allowances, feeding of the corps members, provision of accommodation, mattresses, uniforms for the corps members, lighting of the camp, technical requirements of the camp. The camp officials provide these services through the committee system. Hence, there is kitchen committee, clinic committee, social/reception committee, course evaluation committee, registration committee, lectures committee (Anamkopa, 2013), to mention but a few.

Activities of the NYSC at Umunya Camp

The Umunya Orientation camp would usually run for a period of three weeks, starting with the arrival of the NYSC official and corps members. It features parades, drills, skill acquisitions, tactics, martial arts and physical training. Lectures are also given by resource persons within and outside the camp.

Registration of corps members – at the point of arrival, the respective corps member is expected to undergo the registration exercise, to ensure that he/she is eligible to be at the camp. The registration exercise entails that the corps member presents his/her credentials and call-up letter for sighting. At the end of successful registration process, the corps member is issued with an identity card, complete set of uniforms and a bed space (AnamKopa, 2014).

Platoon formation – the end of registration exercise is followed by platoon formation. The platoon formation is carried out based on the guidelines of the NYSC Directorate Headquarters Abuja. Each platoon is comprised of a platoon commander who would usually be some military personnel; a platoon officer who would usually be an NYSC official; a platoon leader who would be a corps member and; other corps members (AnamKopa, 2014). Corps members are assigned to different tasks on platoon basis. The platoon commander and other leaders are responsible for forestalling law and order at the platoon level.

Swearing-in – swearing-in of the corps members is carried out two days after the opening of the camp. It signifies the formal commencement of the orientation exercise. This ceremony is held to officially usher in the corps members in to the orientation programme. The ceremony would often be graced by the state governor, the Chief Judge of the State, traditional rulers, community leaders, and notable personalities of the state and members of NYSC governing board (Bosah, 2014). The swearing-in ceremony is marked by the following activities: formation of corps members in readiness for parade; arrival of dignitaries; arrival of the Governor, followed by the singing of the national and the NYSC anthems respectively; inspection of guards of honour; parade by corps members; address by the NYSC state director, chairman NYSC governing board and the state governor; signing of oaths and pledge of good conduct by corps members and; the inspection of the camp facilities by the state governor (AnamKopa, 2014). At the end of the swearing-in exercise, the corps members settle in to the routine life of the camp which comprises morning drills, parade, lectures, skill acquisition, sports competition, cooking competition, and so on.

Social activities – there is a saying that “all work and no play make jack a dull boy”. In line with this, the governing board of the NYSC made provision social activities in the camp, where corps members engage in social interactions amongst themselves. These activities include sports, drama, dance, cooking, gala night, bon fire night, amongst others. The sports activities feature sports like football, volleyball, athletics, beauty pageant, ludo, chess and scramble. The dance and drama feature various cultural dances and dramas that portray the richness of Nigerian culture. As for cooking, a day is allotted for each platoon to cook and feed the entire camp; this means that breakfast, lunch and dinner would be prepared by the designated platoon.

Terminal parade – this holds at the last day of the orientation camp, and signals the formal winding up of the orientation programme. Highlights of the event include passing out parade, award of gifts to outstanding corps members, award of gifts to outstanding platoon, issuance of letter of posting to place of primary assignment (Danfulani and Akpuru-Aja, 2008). The collection of letter of posting by corps members is a signal of their official permission to leave the camp. The camp officials are also at liberty to leave the after the dispersal of the corps members.

Contributions of the NYSC camp to Umunya Community

There is no gainsaying that the presence of the NYSC camp in Umunya has contributed to immensely to the socio-economic growth and development of the community. The contributions include the following:

Wider publicity of the town – until the establishment of the NYSC camp at Umunya, the community had been a small and insignificant community, existing like any other small community in the region. However, the presence of the camp in the community has made the community to be gazzetted on the NYSC chart, the fact that about twenty thousand corps members are camped at Umunya on a yearly basis has also enhanced the popularity of the community (Nnagbo, 2014).

Revenue generation –another way the presence of the NYSC camp in Umunya has contributed to the economic development of the community is in income generation. The camp hosts three batches of corps members every year. During each orientation programme which usually last for a period of three weeks, the native people who reside within and outside Umunya would engage in various forms of trade at the camp, ranging from the sale of edible to other forms of consumables (Mobi, 2014). This has contributed in raising the living standard of the people to a reasonable degree.

Equipment of facilities -- as a result of the presence of the NYSC camp in Umunya community, the federal government through the NYSC Directorate has built and equipped the camp clinic with qualified doctors and nurses (Odenigbo, 2014). Although the clinic is only used by corps members, its presence is known to have given the community a face-lift.

Reduction in unemployment rate of Umunya youth – unemployment has been the bane of the Nigerian society, and Umunya community is not left out in the struggle. The unemployed youth are known to roam about aimlessly in the community constituting a lot of nuisance. However, the presence of the NYSC camp in Umunya community has enabled the youth to be gainfully engaged within the period. Some of them were said to be engaged as local aids in the camp kitchen, while others serve as local security (Ugwu, 2014).

Skill acquisition training – Umunya youth also benefit from the presence of the orientation camp at Umunya community through their participation in various skill acquisition programmes and entrepreneurship trainings organised by the NYSC Management for the Corps members during the three-week camp period. These training programmes, which ordinarily might have cost them fortunes to enroll in on individual basis, are got for free at the camp. With the acquisition of these skills, the Umunya youth

are equipped with life-long skills (Ochiagha, 2014). So, being equipped with the knowledge and information from the skill acquisition trainings, they become self-employed and at some point employers of labour. This has made the youth in Umunya to be gainfully employed and become useful citizens of the state and country at large.

Social integration – the presence of the NYSC orientation camp at Umunya has enhanced social integration. Usually the corps members embark on a state visit to the king of Umunya at his palace within the camp period. Other prominent sites in Umunya are also visited within the same period. This has given room for social interaction between Umunya people and the corps members. Also, the teaching of the local dialect to corps members at the camp has also.

Negative impact

Despite the positive contributions of the presence of the NYSC Camp at Umunya, one will not turn a blind eye to the fact that the presence of the NYSC Camp in Umunya community has its negative effects on the community as well. These negative effects are also discussed below:

Disruption of academic activities for Umunya students –it is a well known fact that a secondary school exists at the location where the camp is located. This leads one to wonder the fate of the students who are always displaced and their academic calendar disrupted anytime corps members are on camp. To also think that these disruptions occur three times in every academic year is a thing of concern. It is said that community development is one of the essentials of good governance. As a result, no community can make reasonable effort at development if individuals are not provided with the necessary tools needed to effect the needed change. Quality education for the youth which is a vital instrument of community development is denied the youth of the community through the presence NYSC camp. This has resulted in the depletion of the school population, as the youth seemed to prefer other choices to education that would not be consistent. Also, Parents who know the value of education resorted to sending their children to schools outside Umunya community to ensure an uninterrupted learning process.

Poor hygiene and lack of proper waste management –there is poor hygiene and lack of proper waste management/disposal at the orientation camp. the toilets and bathrooms are in deplorable state and as a result, the corps members instead of making use of the available convenience, improvise for these things by bathing outside and in some instances defecating on farmlands and nearby bushes. The female corps members also litter their used sanitary pads around the environment without proper disposal. Cellophanes used at the camp do not decompose and hence, adversely affect soil fertility. All these cause environmental pollution and degradation in the community.

Destruction of farm lands -- many farmlands are destroyed by corps members during their morning drills and other military training that take place in the bush. Umunya being an agrarian community whose economic mainstay is agriculture, the loss of the farm crops and farmlands without compensation by the NYSC Directorate tells a sad story on the community's economy. This has brought some level of economic hardship

on the community.

High rate of Juvenile delinquency --high rate of juvenile delinquency has been the bane of some youth in the community since the existence of the NYSC camp. Social integration is one of the contributions of the presence of the NYSC camp at Umunya, but when is not properly managed, it will have a negative effect. In the case of Umunya community, some the youth after mingling with the corps members at the orientation camp learn some unruly behavior from them. For instance, some youths were introduced to cultism by the corps members while a lot of teenage girls were sexually exposed, leading to high rate of teenage pregnancies at the end of each camp programme.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it would be said that the presence of the NYSC camp at Umunya has contributed to the socio-economic growth of Umunya community in the area of community development, youth development, economic growth and provision of employment. However, the negative effects of the presence of the camp which include disruption of academic activities of the school, high rate of juvenile delinquency and other social vices, poor waste disposal and management, destruction of farmlands and social vices, if not checked could bring far reaching disaster on the community.

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