

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

- a book of readings

Edited by



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NIGERIA'S FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION OF YOUTHS ON HIV/AIDS

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Abstract

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has not only challenged the official structures of government but has placed a significant emotional and psychological burden on non-governmental organizations, churches and even families' members. Many Nigerians have died as a result of HIV/AIDS (both adults and youths), although elaborate campaign against HIV/AIDS is carried out throughout the country. There seems to be insufficient awareness on the part of youths as the education on HIV/AIDS is commonly done with adults. This paper has clearly highlighted the information on HIV/AIDS needed by youths and how to prevent HIV infections.

Development And Nigerian Youths

Who are the Youths?

Youths are often referred to children below 21 years. In Nigeria it is difficult to estimate the accurate number of youths as statistics of some youths cannot be obtained

because they fall in the categories of uneducated individuals. Although it is possible to estimate the number of youths in primary, secondary and universities, it is not complete and accurate statistics of youths in Nigeria without including the unfortunate uneducated ones. However, it is true to say that we have millions of youths in Nigeria.

What is Development?

Development can be viewed in different perspectives. It could be viewed with people having high hopes of a changing situation from a poorer condition to a better condition. As seen by Singer (Sharma: 1992:35) the story of development, the lessons of development experience, the evolution of our thinking about development, all these things (which are not exactly the same) can be written from many different angles. The angle which is adopted for this paper is the one that Singer describes as "one in which our approach to development problems and the lessons which we learn is simply the result of changing fashions and ideologies (Sharma: 1992:36).

Development is championed through education, which is often assumed to have significant influence about their welfare. It entails the enlightenment of people in their way of pursuit in life. Development can be associated with a positive change in the condition of either individuals, groups, communities or even a country as a whole. It concerns effective communication of information, between individuals, groups, communities or even nations as a whole. Infact, the centre of development is the minds of people who are willing to accept the much talked about positive change, in fashion, pattern and ideologies. Adebayo Adedeji is of the view that:

A choice has to be made to break with the past and enter a different

development path which will be truly self-reliant and will transform our societies and serve our own interest (Onimoder Syngé: 1995)

Development can be viewed in three perspectives – political, social and economic. Political development is much associated with adults than youths in Nigeria. Social development is linked with indicators such as life expectancy, infant mortality, maternal morbidity, maternal and child health-care services, ratio of population per physician, clean water supply and sanitation, adequate housing, control of endemic diseases, education and environmental security and others which affect the youth.

Youth Development

Youth development entails education of youths (which can be formal or as training in different skills), change in fashions or ideologies of youths, change from poorer conditions to better conditions of living by youths and provision of effective information to youths on matters and issues concerning and affecting them. On the issue of formal education of youths, it entails pursuance of courses by youths in the primary, secondary and universities for the fulfillment of their change in fashions and ideologies in life. As regards training in skills, youths undergo the training to be able to assist themselves, contribute to the development of their local environments and their subsequent contribution to state and national development.

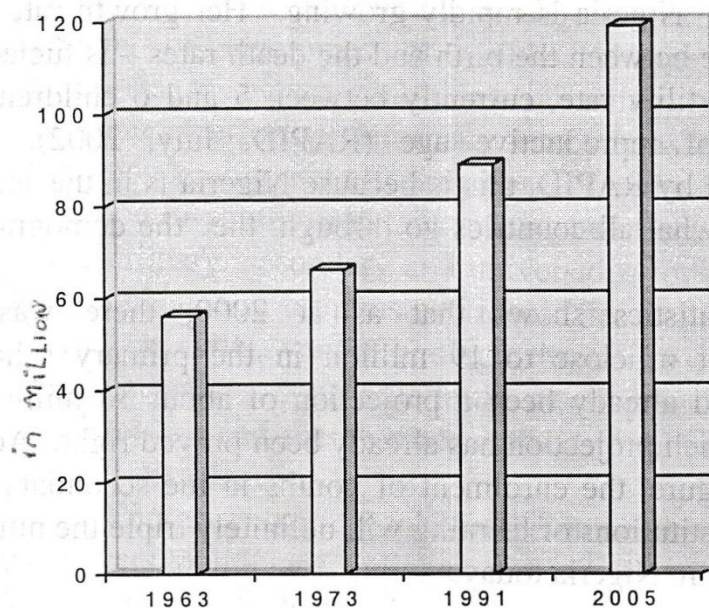
Youths who are trained in the universities come out to be lawyers, politicians, enlightened business men and women, doctors, nurses, technologists, architects and other professions not stated in this work. For effective youth development, those concerned (both teachers, lecturers and students) must

be physically and psychologically fit for the lessons they (lecturers) teach and they (students) receive. It is, therefore, acknowledged that, for a youth to be an efficient and effective contributor to local, state and national development, they (youths) must not be infected by diseases that impair their health or be faced by other circumstances that hinder their progress.

Nigerian Policy for Managing Population Growth and HIV/AIDS – Two Instruments of Population Reduction

Nigeria is one of the most populated countries in the world, with an estimated population of 115 million people. It is estimated that one in four sub-Saharan Africans is a Nigerian. Nigeria is rapidly growing. Her growth rate (the difference between the birth and the death rates – is fueled by a high fertility rate, currently between 5 and 6 children per woman of reproductive age (RAPID, July, 2002). As explained by RAPID, this is because Nigeria is in the second stage of what all countries go through; the “the demographic transition”.

Statistics shows that as at 2000, there was an enrolment of close to 19 million in the primary schools. There had already been a projection of about 36 million in 2005, which projection has already been proved right. Added to this figure, the enrolment of youths in the secondary and higher institutions of learning will definitely triple the number of youths in Nigeria today.



Source: RAPID, July, 2002

Nigeria's population size is influenced by both adults and youths behaviours. High rates of fertility are directly related to high rates of mortality and morbidity among infants and mothers (RAPID, July, 2002).

The high growth rate in Nigeria does not only have impact on the health of adults and youths but it does also have impact on the country's development. As a result of the high growth rate, Nigeria has initiated a policy for managing the population of the country. A period of five years has been predicted, will reduce the growth rate appreciably. Although much benefit is anticipated in this policy, the effect of the killer disease further reduces the number of Nigerians vis-à-vis youths.

Youths and Education on HIV/AIDS

Development is championed through education, which is often assumed to have significant influence on how people make decisions about their welfare, of which sexual behaviour is a part. Communicating the right messages to youths about HIV/AIDS needs our utmost attention. Unchallenged cultures of silence can only lead to exacerbation and stigmatization (Action AIDS, 2003). In Nigeria, more than two in five Nigerians are below 15 years old. Education of youths in HIV/AIDS and other reproductive health matters is helpful to adolescences and adults to protect themselves from sexual-related illnesses such as HIV/AIDS (Goder and AIDS Almanac: 15).

Education of youths in HIV/AIDS have been viewed with less seriousness by the Government of Nigeria. For example, in Akwa Ibom State, much of the mobilization and sensitization is being carried out by non-governmental organizations and community based organizations. One will

expect that jobs that are paid for to be carried out within a specified period will, obviously, not be done much satisfactorily.

What is HIV/AIDS?

HIV is the virus that destroys the body's immune system. When a person is infected with the virus, the virus after sometime, affects the body fluids such as the blood, and affects the chemicals that protect the body system. These chemicals are called the "soldiers of the body", which fight against the virus. The dominance of this virus in the body system has a way of slowly destroying the body defence system. When the regulating effect of the slow destruction of the body system i.e. the 'body soldier' are no longer able to resist the disease, the infected person or persons are said to have AIDS or are otherwise called AIDS positive.

Nigeria will have to channel her resources (which is normally termed limited) to satisfy the health, environmental, social and educational needs of the people. As we are already aware, the overall goal of the National Policy on Population for Sustainable Development is the improvement of the quality of life and the standards of living of people of Nigeria.

HIV/AIDS – A Prevalent Killer Disease

HIV as we already know is the virus that develops to AIDS. HIV/AIDS has been an issue that concerns both academics and non-academics. Recent statistics shows that close to 3.5 million Nigerians are infected with HIV/AIDS and thousands all over the world have already died of AIDS.

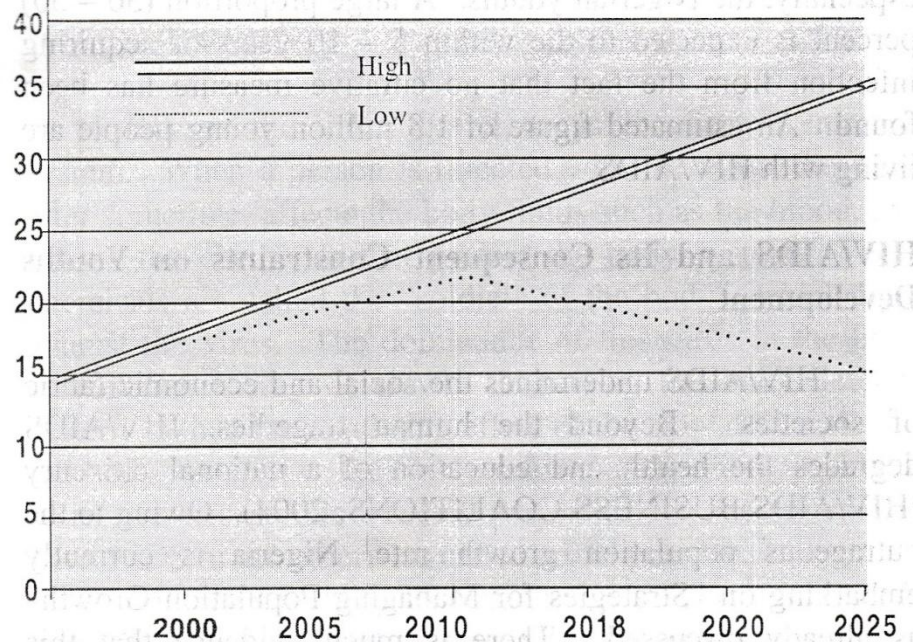
By 2005, it is estimated that about 4 million Nigerians will be HIV/AIDS positive (The 2001 National HIV/Syphilis Sentinel Survey). Many Nigerians are speculating that this

high rate of infection is bound to cause serious and devastating social and economic impact on Nigerians especially, the Nigerian youths. A large proportion (30 – 50) percent is expected to die within 5 – 10 years of acquiring infection from the fact that no curative measure has been found. An estimated figure of 1.8 million young people are living with HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS and Its Consequent Constraints on Youths Development

HIV/AIDS undermines the social and economic fabric of societies. Beyond the human tragedies, HIV/AIDS degrades the health and education of a national citizenry (HIV/AIDS BUSINESS COALITIONS, 2004). Owing to the outrageous population growth rate, Nigeria is currently embarking on "Strategies for Managing Population Growth" as already discussed. There is much evidence that this decision will affect several generations to come. Although this decision is necessitated by bringing out the importance of small, healthy families and their link to the development of a nation, if HIV/AIDS is fast reducing the number of youths in Nigeria, and Nigeria has also taken a decision to manage population growths, then in the next five years, Nigeria's youth population will decrease alarmingly.

Primary School enrolment as Projected by RAPID, July 2002



As projected by (RAPID, July 2002), the lower fertility projection, student enrolment in the primary school in Nigeria will peak in 2010 and then will decline to the level of 2000 by 2025 as the reduced number of births passes into the school age population. With the reduced number of birth as projected and the damage done by HIV/AIDS to Nigerian youths, it is safe to say that youths, the major instrument of development in Nigeria must be properly protected.

It is necessary to look at the number and condition of youths that will be left in the country in the next five years. As already discussed, with the projected reduced birth rates and the significant death rate from HIV/AIDS, the ones whose HIV status are not very bad will be in a position to contribute little or nothing to the development of the local,

state or nation.

It is important to look at the factors that can come into play when youths have been infected with HIV/AIDS.

- The weakened body system is unable to accept the normal physical and mental condition needed for a change of fashions and ideologies of youths. Most of the infected youths will not be accepted for education abroad nor for competitions in terms of games.

- **Stigmatization:** It is difficult to accept AIDS positive into any group in Nigeria. The psychological effect does affect the infected, as he/she will be estimating the number of years he/she has to live before a full blown AIDS surfaces. Although various countries of the world, NGOs, CBOs and others have tried to talk about stigmatization, it is a very rare occasion to find people accept people living with HIV/AIDS. This is evident in Nigeria where very few individuals are willing to confess their HIV status.

- **Financial Constraints:** Drugs for HIV is very costly and can be afforded by only the rich people. Only a few parents can afford the anti-retroviral drugs for the children and where the adverse situation happens, the resulting factor is death.

- **Poor academic performance:** Students who are HIV/AIDS positive are very

likely to perform very poorly owing to absenteeism in school activities. The resulting effect is consequent poor results in the primary, secondary and the universities.

Effects of HIV/AIDS on Youth and the National Development

Effects of HIV/AIDS on youths on the Nation cuts across governmental and non-governmental sectors.

The following factors face both governmental and non-governmental sectors in responding to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Some respond from a sense of enlightened self-interest and corporate social responsibility while others respond because of the direct effects that AIDS has or could have on their own business operations (HIV/AIDS BUSINESS COALITIONS, 2004).

- **Increased Costs:** With an increasing number of employees contracting HIV/AIDS, government agencies and private agencies are bound to take care of their employees. In Nigeria, medical expenses of youths working in government agencies are borne by government. The story of private business vary as it is not mandatory that they pay medical bills for HIV/AIDS positive.
- **Weakened business environment:** HIV/AIDS puts national economy at risk. The increasing impact of AIDS on young Nigerian graduates in business deters investment and decreases output for foreign exchange.

- **Threats to consumer base:** Overall demand for goods and services decreases and companies must be less dependent on their consumer base.
- In Nigeria, increased absenteeism of youths infected by HIV/AIDS in governmental bodies and industries is affecting the country in terms of low production.
- Parents, who have infected children, also find it difficult to attend work regularly for the sake of caring for the ill children.
- Nigeria is experiencing high staff (both adults and youths) turnover due to illness and subsequent death. Government and industries lose institutional experience and management is compelled to employ and train new staff.
- Death of students in the higher institutions is on the increase, and this situation lowers the moral of other students as a result of loss of friends, and colleagues.

Suggested Solutions

- Youths in Nigeria should have more enlightenment on the need to avoid unsafe sex which could be a channel for contact of HIV/AIDS. Government is not making enough campaign on this issue as most of the job is left for non-governmental organizations.
- Government should create a separate body

- which should be responsible for:
- dissemination of information
 - identification of youths infected in primary, secondary and the universities.
 - creation of funds for the infected to cater for health and education.
 - permanent counseling of youths who are affected and infected.
 - formation of clubs in schools to fight the involvement of unsafe sex.
 - creation of functional screening centers to screen blood properly before blood transfusion to people especially the youths.
 - creation of emergency blood banks of already screened blood in schools for emergency blood transfusion.
 - creation of jobs for the infected.
 - Funds should be created for the provision of food, clothing and other necessities to prolong and make the infected live comfortably.
 - All infected youths should have free medical treatment, as the cost of anti-retroviral drugs is so alarming.

Counseling with regards to HIV/AIDS issues is nothing more than a confidential dialogue between a person (whether proved positive or negative) and a care provider who has had adequate training aimed at enabling the person to cope with stress and make informed personal decision relating to HIV and AIDS (WHO, 1994).

Counseling is goal centered and directed not mere advice on how to avoid contact of HIV and AIDS. It is

reasonably, satisfactory, and confidential dialogue between the counselor and the person counseled to provide options for a change in behaviour arising from a particular positive decision taken as a result of the counselling. Counselling can result in giving a person the audacity and confidence in taking a particular decision and course of action for his/her behaviour. Counselling also gives confidence to the person to help curb or minimize the infection rate of HIV and AIDS.

It is importance to embark on counselling service for HIV/AIDS positive to encourage them have the confidence that their lives can be prolonged through good care of themselves and that they can live without stigmatization. It is important to counsel the affected persons in order to help them cope with perfect and future problems that could arise as a result of their status.

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