

## **Influence of the Activities of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme on the Knowledge of Social Issues in Host Communities in Rivers and Akwa Ibom States**

**Dr. M. A. Oyebamiji and Inemesit Essiet Umofia**

Department of Adult and Non-formal Education,

Community Development

University of Port Harcourt,

Rivers State

inem2k4@yahoo.co.uk

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper examined the influence of the activities of the National Youth Service Corps scheme on the knowledge of social issues in host communities in Rivers and Akwa Ibom States. The objective was to establish the extent to which the activities of corps members have improved the knowledge of community members on social issues. The study used the ex-post facto research design and formulated a hypothesis. The sample size used for the study was 796 respondents. The research instrument was a closed structured questionnaire with 20 items. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) ( $r$ ) was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that the activities of corps members do not significantly influence the improvement of the knowledge of community members on social issues. The recommendations were discussed.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the bedrocks of the development of every nation is education. Illiteracy is a major developmental challenge, which means that only a literate nation can make greater strides towards development. The federal government of Nigeria has taken great steps to improve the level of literacy in the nation through the educational programmes, institutions, and the mass media. The National Youth Service Corps scheme is one of the ways that the federal government has brought education to the communities of the 36 states of the federation. This is why most of the corps members of NYSC are sent to the secondary schools in these communities for their primary assignment. The educational institutions are one of the major establishments in the country that have utilized the services of corps members over the years. This is supported by the fact that a lot of community development activities have been carried out in schools. The corps members of NYSC play a vital role in the education of the host community members. As stated in Daily Trust (2011:1) "The impact of these young Nigerians is well documented, and is particularly felt in educational and health institutions across the country where professionals are inadequate."

As stated by Oyebamiji and Adekola (2008), illiteracy is one of the lead causes of poverty in the nation. The Newswriter (2016) described poverty as being exhibited through the low level of income and resources for sustaining livelihood; lack of nutrition; illiteracy; and low access to other basic services; increasing ill-health resulting in deaths; homelessness; unsafe surroundings, and social discrimination.

These are some of the social issues that affect the society and are hindrances to the wellbeing of the nation's citizens. These issues are being worsened by the members of the society that ignore their profound influence on daily living.

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme was established in 1973 under the administration of General Yakubu Gowon. Abbas (2012) explained that the NYSC scheme was created to rebuild Nigeria after the civil war. The scheme was established by decree No. 24 on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 1973.

The NYSC scheme was put in place in an effort to bring attention to the social issues of the country and provide solutions for them. As noted in the NYSC Handbook (1999) the fundamental aim of the scheme is to inspire the youths of Nigeria to selflessly serve the communities of the nation and express the spirit of unity and brotherhood, regardless of culture and social position.

This paper will examine the influence of the activities of the NYSC scheme on the knowledge of social issues in host communities in Rivers and Akwa Ibom States. To achieve this, the paper will determine the extent to which these activities have improved the knowledge of the community members on social issues.

### **The Community Development Service (CDS) Programme**

The Community Development Service (CDS) programme is one of the cardinal programmes of the NYSC scheme. It is through the CDS programme that the corps members of NYSC undertake developmental activities during their one year of national service to improve their host communities in one way or the other. It is one of the requirements of the Nigerian youths to participate in Community Development Service as part of their contribution to developing the country.

Onyeozu (2007: 20) defined the concept of community development as an educational method based on the definition adopted by the United Nations. Community Development is defined as “an educational method by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities, to integrate these communities into the life of the nation, to enable them to contribute fully to national progress.”

One of the objectives of Community Development as given by Anyanwu (cited in Oyebamiji and Adekola 2008: 26) is “to inculcate among the members of a community a sense of citizenship and spirit of civic consciousness.”

This sense of citizenship and civic consciousness occurs when the people are aware of the social issues affecting them and how to bring about the necessary improvement.

### **Social Issues**

The term social issues refer to the various topics and problems that are connected with the society and the people in it. Genuine development cannot occur if these issues are ignored. Social issues also encompass the educative aspects of the community development activities of corps members. Social issues include child healthcare and disease prevention, malnutrition, poverty alleviation, women and youth empowerment, mass literacy/adult literacy, patriotism, charity work for social welfare, as well as social vices – cultism, truancy, bribery and corruption, kidnapping, murder, armed robbery etc. There are various means through which the knowledge of community members on social issues can be improved. These include the construction of billboards and signposts for public enlightenment, the mass media (radio, television, and newspapers), the internet, as well as organized workshops,

seminars, and events. The corps members of NYSC have used such means over the years to educate the public on social issues.

## METHODOLOGY

The ex-post facto research design was adopted for this paper. Seven hundred and ninety-six respondents were drawn from Rivers and Akwa Ibom States to establish the extent to which the activities of corps members have improved the knowledge of the community members on social issues. One local government area was purposively selected from each state - Obio Akpor and Mkpat Enin.

The research instrument was a closed structured 20-item questionnaire based on the various activities of corps members and how they affect the knowledge of the community members on social issues. The formulated null hypothesis was tested with the use of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) ( $r$ ) at 0.05 level of significance. Where the computed value ( $r$ ) is greater than the critical or table value ( $r_{crit}$ ), the null hypothesis is rejected, but where the computed value ( $r$ ) is less than the critical value ( $r_{crit}$ ), the null hypothesis is accepted.

### Research Hypothesis

1. There is no significant relationship between the community development activities of corps members and the improvement of the knowledge of community members on social issues.

The results of the null hypothesis is presented in Table 1:

**Table 1: Analysis of relationship between the community development activities of corps members and the improvement of the knowledge of community members on social issues.**

Variables	Degree of freedom	Calculated value ( $r$ )	Critical value ( $r_{crit}$ )	Level of Significance	Decision	
Community Development Activities of Corps members ( $x$ )	$\sum x$ 23165	794	0.078	0.164	0.05	Accept $H_{03}$
Improvement of Knowledge on Social Issues ( $y$ )	$\sum y$ 21834					

The results from Table 1 show that the calculated value ( $r$ ) is less than the critical value ( $r_{crit}$ ), the null hypothesis is therefore accepted. Hence it is accepted that there is no significant relationship between the community development activities of corps members and the improvement of the knowledge of community members on social issues.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the finding obtained from table 1, the activities of corps members are not significantly related to the improvement of the knowledge of community members on social issues. These activities include Public Enlightenment/Training, Social Activities and Establishment of Centres for Schools, Medical Outreach, and Humanitarian Activities among others. The result indicates that these activities do not directly influence the improvement of the knowledge of community members on social issues. This could be due to the fact that there are other available means through which the community members can improve their knowledge of social issues e.g. the mass media (radio, television, and newspapers), the internet, workshops, and events organised by private organisations or other governmental organisations. Over the years, these other organisations have constructed billboards and signposts to enlighten the public. These other means of information and enlightenment operate independently and have been accessible to the public in one form or the other. The activities of the corps members aimed at improving knowledge on social issues are put in place to assist these independent agencies of the society to educate the public. The NYSC organisation, like every other organisation constantly uses the abovementioned forms of media to disseminate information to the public. According to Olutola (1981) the determination of what project should be undertaken for which local community has been a virtual prerogative of corps members and the N.Y.S.C. field staff in each state.

Apparently, the corps members are the initiators of development in their host communities. As long as the community members look at a typical NYSC project and refer to it as a 'corper's project', true ownership has not been taken. It is also possible that the community members could show interest in the educative activities of corps members without any real intention of using what they have learnt on a long term basis. The results also indicate that whether the corps members carry out their activities or not, the community members will always find other independent means to educate themselves on social issues or other issues of interest.

The sporting events organized in schools by the corps members, have been used to improve knowledge on social issues by targeting the behaviour, enthusiasm, and enlightenment of the youths. When the construction/renovation works of corps members are not adequately maintained by the community members, this improvement can be affected, because of the low level of utilization. These works include game courts (volleyball, basketball, and badminton), classroom blocks, signposts, billboards, computer literacy centres, laboratories, etc.

This study implies that the activities of corps members are not significant enough to result in a greater change in the improvement of knowledge of social issues. Although the educative needs and the empowerment needs of the community members are catered by the corps members, the fact still remains that when the people are the recipients of development instead of the initiators, the influence will be low even when efforts are made to sustain it.

It is recommended that the corps members of NYSC should focus more on awakening the people to take the first steps in their own development. The social issue of healthcare and increased life expectancy can be catered for through increased and improved medical outreach activities by corps members. Moreover, the youths in the communities should take a more active role in developing themselves in terms of education and utilize the expertise and experience gained from their various institutions.

Finally, it is apparent that the daily education of the public on the social issues that affect them promotes life expectancy, unity, and peace.

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