**YOUTHS SHORTCUT SYNDROME AND MATERIALISM: IMPLICATIONS AND OPTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Sustainable economic development as kinetic development phenomenon involves enormous commitment of all available resources, hence the implacable investment of efforts and strategies by all nations to attain it. Success in economic development requires the uncompromised viability of everyone, particularly the youths. For Nigerian youths, demonstrating adequate motive and determination towards this all-important value to national economic development has been undermined by some issues that include rising shortcut syndrome and inordinate materialism. This paper explores the critical relevance and implications of youths optimum capacity to propel Nigeria's economic growth; with attention to how the attitude of seeking for illegal shortcuts to solutions and goals coupled with plethoric chase of material things impact on their optimal participation and contributions to national economic development process in an era of tough internal and global challenges. Moreover, the paper proffers options for youths transformation, and concludes that only when youths abstain from immoderate behaviour and pursuits through positive attitudinal changes, organizational and governmental reforms, can youths life and sustainable economic development be on the path toward significant success in Nigeria.*

**KEYWORDS**: Youths, Shortcut, Syndrome, Inordinate, Materialism, Sustainable, Economic, Development.

**INTRODUCTION**:.

The avocation of development, and particularly economic development, in any nation cannot be effective and feasible with the lack of adequate commitment, unrelenting efforts and participation of the youths. They constitute a population with enormous energy and tremendous capacity that can leapfrog any ailing economy to be on the path to transformation and significant growth. Ande (2008) opines that economic development is the process whereby the level of national production or per capita income increases over a period of time. The main purpose of economic development is to raise the standard of living and the general well-being of the people in an economy. From a more articulate perspective, the term economic development is concerned with promotion of advanced economic activity through education, improved tools and techniques, financing, better transportation facilities, and creation of new businesses (Microsoft Encarta, 2009) cited in ( Falusi, 2014 ).

Globally, a developing nation's level of economic development signifies its efforts and strategies towards transformation into the categorization as a "developed nation". Nigeria is significantly far from belonging to this category. The nation is still conveniently ranked as a developing society and one of the poorest nations of the world. Obviously, a major factor for this status is the nation's level of human resources utilization and development, which is still in an abysmal state ( Egwuonu, 2015 ). Getting Nigeria out of this bad economic situation is an issue that has lingered and challenged successive governments in the country. The enterprise involved demands the efforts of every segment of the national population, especially if significant progress must be recorded. Youths, as a critical population group, constitute probably the most important human resources entity that operate most of the economic structures of a nation. Nigeria has more than 30 million people under 30, the rough equivalent of the population of Egypt, Tunisia and Libya put together. Young people constitute over 60 percent of the total population of Nigeria and these young people face many challenges that affect their development and social integration. Many youths are involved in acts of terrorism, banditry, kidnapping and other crimes (Millennium Development Goals, 2011).

The youths in Nigeria are probably the most important stakeholders in Nigeria's pursuit of economic development, and have a significant roles to play in the efforts toward the country's economic upliftment, giving their manifest attributes. Countries of the world that are today regarded as developed nations took maximum advantage of their youth population and capacities to transform their economies (Nzewi, 2019). Historically, youths of pre and post-colonial era, and up to the 1980's were energetic, resourceful and full of determination for self-survival, and to contribute their abilities and talents in a patriotic manner to national development (Okafor, 2013). However, in the last two or more decades, the full participation and efforts of the increasing youth population in economic growth of the nation seems to be challenged by a myriad of anti-social issues, particularly the issues of youths penchant for illegal shortcuts to life challenges and their inordinate chase of material things. These two correlated issues have become clogs in the wheel of youth development and youth participation/contribution to national economic development.

The attitude and practice of always seeking for illicit shortcuts that are often immoral and sometimes unwarranted, as well as, the embracing of intolerable level of materialism as exemplified by youths 'get-rich-quick' posture are commonplace in Nigerian society. These issues appear to be constituting major setback to youths increased participation and contribution to Nigeria's efforts towards national economic growth. Against this backdrop, this paper x-rays the concepts of shortcut syndrome and inordinate materialism as elements of under-development that negate youths development and sustainable economic advancement in Nigeria; and logically attempts these questions:

1. What are shortcut syndrome and inordinate materialism, and how do they manifest in the Nigerian society?
2. Is there existing relationship between shortcut syndrome and inordinate materialism with regards to youths in Nigeria context?
3. To what extent does shortcut syndrome and inordinate materialism impede youth development and sustainable economic development in Nigeria?
4. What are the realizable options for promoting youth transformation and sustainable economic development in Nigeria?

**MANIFESTATIONS OF SHORTCUT SYNDROME IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY**

Shortcut as a word connotes a route more direct than the ordinary taken; a method or means of doing something more directly and quickly than, and often, not so thoroughly as by ordinary procedure (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2023). Shortcut in itself is made of two different words put together to make a meaning. Shortcut implies means or ways or methods of approaching or carrying out an act, process or system. It is sometimes used derogatively across many circles in some societies to signify attitudes of avoiding the right, legitimate and proper procedures or techniques for doing things in both private and public spaces. Ordinarily, applying or following shortcuts in life when they are not against the law or immoral does not matter; but they appear to be increasingly perceived with negative connotations by many Nigerians because of their unpleasant effects on many youths. Shortcut syndrome is used to refer to the problem of employing wrong or illegal means or patterns of doing things in society. It entails using or applying means, methods, or approaches that are apparently somewhat easier, simpler, faster and swifter, yet immoral, unethical and illegal, in solving or tackling problems or bypassing challenges, particularly micro (everyday) challenges. Also, Merriam-Websters Online Dictionary (2023) has its Thesaurus synonyms of shortcut as, to beat, bypass, circumvent, dodge, get around, sidestep and skirt. Shortcuts are detrimental to social wellness and economic development because of their adverse effects. Bad shortcuts include certain attitudes, behaviours and dispositions that are not only anti-social but also unpatriotic and often undeserving. These are issues that extend from micro acts such as jumping queues, disobeying or disregarding traffic signs, doing shabby jobs to avoid time that should have been committed to do work thoroughly and efficiently, paying less attention to details in order to avoid time required for proper examination or scrutiny of documents, avoiding relevant meetings and taking selfish individual-based decisions in a bid to beat time, manipulating dates to hasten certain actions that should have been done better, up to macro level issues such as avoiding necessary bureaucratic procedures plus all forms of widespread corrupt and inhuman acts done in a manner that involves bypassing or dodging the law. These worrisome antecedents aim at unlawfully achieving quick results and profits in society.

Even tax evasion that is one of the major reasons for Nigeria's poor revenue generation is in actual effect an act of cheating and by passing (shortcut) of the law and expectations of society for selfish and organizational gains. The growing cankerworms of "Yahoo boys" activities and Advance Fee Fraud - also known commonly in Nigeria as 419 are social malaises; and there is the growing issue of "Yahoo plus" ravaging the country. This is indicative of the fact of the ugly trend of affairs, particularly among youths. 419 is simply fraudulent acquisition of wealth without any legitimate hard work, and it is common among unemployed youths. It includes cyber frauds, extortion, and other forms of defrauding individuals and organizations, locally and internationally of their money and assets. These are wicked shortcuts to affluence and fame patronized by many youths in Nigeria. Obika (2022) reported in (The Leader, 2022) observes that "most ritual killings and harvesting of human organs that occur in recent times are done by youths who are desperate for quick money through fetish means". These mindless acts are some of the consequences of shortcut syndrome and the alarming quest for material things among young persons in the Nigerian society.

**MALIGN CORRELATION BETWEEN INORDINATE MATERIALISM AND SHORTCUT SYNDROME IN NIGERIA CONTEXT**

It can be argued that bad shortcuts have been there for long but seems to have gained prominence and popularity among youths in the last two to three decades in Nigeria. The older generations of pre-colonial Nigeria did not exhibit the shortcut syndrome among youths as it is today (Okoroafor, 2018). The past generations were known to be more devoted to embrace good citizenship, discipline, modesty and decent lifestyles, and most importantly patriotism and nationalism as core values of life, and therefore were significantly far from seeking undue shortcuts to cheat, defraud or exploit relationships, situations, opportunities or the nation as a whole. They appeared to have been more law-abiding, tolerant, patient, persevering and dedicated to duty and responsibility. Unfortunately, this cannot be said of the majority of present day youths who are more overtly concerned with obnoxious notions of life that are not healthy for their development and that of the nation (Okoroafor and Njoku, 2012). The youths of many societies, and particularly Nigeria, seem to have been caught in the web of overweening pursuit of good things (material objects) of life without putting in the required efforts and time to acquire these things. They desire the good things of life overmuch and so quickly that they seek and explore very fast or short ways or means (shortcuts) to have their choices in life without any respect for the rule of law, due process, orderliness and decency. This is the crux of this paper: the effects and implications of youths shortcut syndrome and inordinate materialism on the youths and sustainable economic development.

Extreme materialism can be said to be a factor stimulating the shortcut syndrome among many youths in Nigeria. Shortcut syndrome and inordinate materialism are two phenomena that have a malign correlation and influence on youths behaviour and perception of life. They are evidently challenging contemporary youths in different perspectives in Nigeria because of their overdue desire and pursuit for material satisfaction and definitions by engaging in various nefarious, quick and sharp practices that takes the shortest time possible to achieve. In short, the spirit of inordinate materialism, that is, the feeling, craving and desperate pursuit of material objects by any means whether illegal or immoral to achieve their goals, provided that means is swift and yields their expected results, is a growing challenge for youths in the country. Materialism refers to a desire for wealth and material possession with little interest in ethical or spiritual matters (Advanced English Dictionary, 2022). This definition portrays materialism as an act that is less concerned with ethics and spirituality, and therefore susceptible to human emotions and manipulations. The love for material things may not be outrightly dangerous but inordinate practice of materialism can be quite obnoxious, destructive and counter developmental for the individual and society. More elaborately, Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2022) states that "materialism is a doctrine that the only or highest values or objectives lie in material well-being and in the furtherance of material progress, a preoccupation with or stress upon material rather than intellectual or spiritual things; hedonism and the overriding quest for personal gratification". In the world of today that societies are clamoring for equality, fairness and justice, excessive materialism is corruption that undermines equity in social relationships and social organization. It hampers adherence to social norms and values because real materialistic people often violate group decisions and rules in order to sustain personal gratification.

It is obsession with material things that can easily generate and sustain the desire and preference for illegal shortcuts. It drives the pursuit of material things at all possible cost. It is understandable that there is concrete malign correlation between the degree of materialism among Nigerian youths and their patronage of these illicit shortcuts. There is no how youths can develop in a nation without the proper social values and positive virtues of life (The Leader, 2022). Youth development is conceptualized as the process involving the transformation of youths in an all-round manner that enhances their competences, talents, resources and energy towards their productive and sustainable advancement in life. It is the effective empowerment of youths in the different facets of life endeavours for positive growth. Youth development basically stems from youth empowerment. Empowerment is the process of obtaining the basic opportunities, encouraging and developing the skills for self-sufficiency, with a focus on eliminating the future need for assistance for youths. Hence, youth empowerment is the gateway to intergenerational equity, civic engagement and capacity building (Okoli and Enekwechi, 2013). It is clear that for any meaningful youth development to occur, there has to be youth empowerment, especially through capacity building of the youths in Nigeria.

The correlation between shortcut syndrome and too much materialism extends to youth development in the country. So many issues contribute to the growth of these vices starting from the decay or loss of social and moral values, negative societal influence, unethical practices, lack of discipline, laziness, greed, ethnocentrism, mediocrity up to unpatriotism, downgrading of meritocracy, poverty and deprivation, and the proliferation of religious organizations preaching inordinate quest for prosperity. These issues combine to fan the embers of the shortcut syndrome in Nigeria. Given this scenario, the mutual existence and interface between shortcut syndrome and towering levels of materialism is clear and full blown. Many youths are propelled to indulge in negative shortcuts in order to be able to reach their excessive material desires and feel “belonged”. This is the situation that drives the psyche and actions of many young individuals. Both shortcut syndrome and extreme materialism constitute significant obstacles to the future of youth empowerment, participation, contribution and development in Nigerian society. They undermine the right opportunities, kill skills acquisition, and achieve little or no youth capacity building, leaving the youths vulnerable to indulge in all manner of social vices including terrorism, kidnapping, armed robbery, arson, rape, banditry and other serious immoral and negative ventures such as 419, games betting, examination malpractice, extortion, etc. Youth development in Nigeria is no doubt jeopardized by these issues with untold implications on national economic stability and progress.

**SHORTCUT SYNDROME AND INORDINATE MATERIALISM AS IMPEDIMENTS TO YOUTH / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The act of “cutting corners” or following short-cuts that are mostly unlawful for the sake of fast or quick results remains a significant obstacle to healthy and meaningful youth/national development in Nigeria (Agoha, 2004). Technically, short-cuts are not necessarily bad when and where they are applied or used legally without any fear or favour, but otherwise, they constitute harmful, unsustainable and unethical practices that discourage the youths' genuine and optimal resourcefulness. Some authors have argued that one of the major factors that is giving rise to the issue of short-cut syndrome is the soaring unemployment rate in the country. And this negative phenomenon is affecting mainly the youths who out of impatience, lack of capital, opportunities and entrepreneurship skills explore all sorts of illegal shortcuts as means of survival and gaining quick success. According to Obialor and Obialor (2016) unemployment situation consists of all those that are willing to work but unable to find jobs. The total labour force of Nigeria is made up of those between the age of 15 years and 59 years. Unemployment arises when the demand for labour of the factors of production falls short of supply. It is clear from the above statement that unemployment mainly affects the youths, and exposes Nigerian youths to self-survival which makes them more vulnerable to anti-social behaviours and unethical practices. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the eight in the world with a population of over 200 million people and with nominal GDP of over $300 million, yet graduate unemployment has been one of the major problems facing Nigeria. A high level of unemployment and underemployment is one of the critical socio-economic problems in Nigeria (Obialor and Obialor, 2016). With growing unemployment, poverty, political instability and lack of good governance, illegal and nefarious short-cuts becomes the order of the day among many youths who are increasingly lazy and desperate to make money to acquire exotic things of life such as cars, jewelries, buildings and other assorted properties as fast as possible.

Exploring short-cuts that are unlawful and unwarranted negates proper and normal human development. It is not only against the law but infringes on social values and norms, and therefore antithetical to healthy youth and national development. The duo of bad short-cuts and materialism combine to jeopardize the healthy future of Nigeria youths and constitute significant obstacles to their efforts to participate legitimately and contribute optimally to national economic growth and advancement. While following such shortcuts may lead to easy and quick riches, it breeds the spirit of extreme materialism; and conversely, increased inordinate materialistic lifestyles tend to encourage the continued exploitation of illegal short-cuts in order to sustain ostentatious lifestyles. This is the core argument behind the issues of illegal shortcuts and overdue materialism that put youths into a difficult situation and makes them endangered species of the present generation. In as much as the acquisition of material things of life may be good for better living and the pursuit of comfort and happiness, it must not be derived through shortcuts that are illegal and unenduring. Bad shortcuts are usually unsustainable and deceptive, and therefore improper. They encourage wasteful spending and lack of prudence since it is often said easy it comes, easy it goes (Okoroafor & Akujuobi, 2021). These shortcuts kill the spirit of hard work, competition, determination, focus and industry, and therefore instrumental to breeding a lazy, docile and unenterprising bunch of youths who would fully embrace extreme materialism and further indulge in more society-threatening criminalities.

Materialism is part and parcel of society because culture is made up of material and non-material elements (Maconis, 2010). The material elements include artifacts, buildings, cars, cloths, jewelries and ornaments, land, and other tangible objects in human environment. In essence, man sustains life partly through the use of material objects and therefore man by nature can be said to be materialistic. However, materialism becomes an issue when it is inordinate or excessive. At this point, it easily drives many vices such as greed, laziness, selfishness, envy, jealousy and impatience. With the less experience and maturity of most youths, their intensity and propensity towards increased materialism and exploitation of all sorts of wrong shortcuts becomes heightened. In a nutshell, the practices of engaging in cutting corners that are illegal and the inordinate pursuit of tangible assets of life hamper the youths appreciable and lawful commitment, participation and contribution to sustainable economic development, apart from the fact that they also impede positive and national youth development.

**INTROSPECTIONS ON YOUTHS PARTICIPATION / CONTRIBUTION TO NIGERIA’S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

There can be no effective national economic development without youth optimal participation, in fact, there can be no appreciable economic growth without youths involvement and contribution. Todaro and Smith (2009) note that participation in development is simply “a say in development policies by people most affected by them”. It is not only a means of furthering developmental goals but also constitutes one of the foremost ends of development itself. The need for the optimal participation and contribution of present day youths in national affairs, particularly in the economic sphere cannot be overstated. The youths consist of young, able-bodied, energetic and talented adolescents, men and women, and therefore an all-genders group that has immense productive capacity to off-load in an economy. That Nigeria’s economy is thriving amidst global competition and occasional recession, and still making some inroads in terms of diversification can be largely attributed to youths enterprise. In Nigeria, as in many other countries, youths constitute the majority exceeding half of the total population. This is why issues affecting youths effective and full participation in economic development process undermines youth and economic transformation of the country. The youths have been significantly influential in national economic growth in Nigeria (Ogunlami, 2012). They have put in decades of pride in strengthening the labour force and the state of the nation’s economy, and are still doing so up to date, but the challenges before Nigeria require concerted efforts of all citizens, particularly the youths. Nigerian youths are the bedrock upon which the economy thrives in terms of human population, and so the state of the youths affects or impacts on the state of the economy. This is the reason youth participation in Nigeria’s economic development must be reinforced and stimulated for future national stability and prosperity (Egwuonu, 2015).

With the population of youths in Nigeria and their critical and immense capacities, they are almost indispensable for national socio-economic and political stability. Efforts to enhance their capacity building, skills acquisition, and other empowerment schemes must be embedded in firm and positive attitudinal alterations that can transform many youths whose participation and productivity are being undermined by the issues of shortcut syndrome and materialism. These vices negate the optimal productivity of youths in Nigeria’s economic growth. Being the greater population makes the youths the greater beneficiaries. According to Todaro and Smith (2009), genuine and full participation by development beneficiaries minimize setbacks and makes for the achievement of greater and better results in the development issues. Since the youths are the majority stakeholders and beneficiaries of development, their unhindered and sound engagement is therefore critical for the attainment of economic development. Although it is believed that most youths run the manpower of most economies, and particularly in Nigeria, their continued determination and resourcefulness can be undermined by indulgence of many youths in some unwholesome attitudes capable of derailing their roles and productive participation in development at all social strata.

In Nigeria’s perspective, the youths roles are critical in the national efforts and strategies to conquer poverty and under development (Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). A key requirement for purposeful economic development of any society is the factor of industrialization, and this factor demands a steady supply of energetic human resources to form the needed labour force. This pull of capable, energetic and industrious personnel majorly come from the youths. The special importance of human resources in development process is hinged on the fact that it takes humans to plot the direction of development and to harness other resources needed for the process (Essien, 2005) cited in (Etuk, Coker and Ogrimah, 2014). Since the youths make up a majority of the labour force in Nigeria, it therefore means that the youths constitute an invaluable bloc of immense relevance to the nation’s economic development.

It is noteworthy that the maximization of youth engagement and participation is fundamentally necessary for a sustainable society, therefore a critical component of sustainable development. Their sheer size and energy are key elements for propelling sustainability of economic growth and development. Okoli and Enekwechi (2013) posit that “sustainable society is when a society can manage its economy and population size without exceeding all or part of the planets ability to absorb environmental insults, replenish its resources and sustain human life over a specified period, usually hundreds to thousands of years”. They further explain that during this period it satisfies the needs of its people without depleting earth potentials that may jeopardize the prospects of current and future generations of human and other species. Life sustainability is the utilization of the proceeds without depleting the capital that supplies these proceeds. These views emphasis the need for young peoples’ participation in the sustenance of economic growth. They are not only the major beneficiaries of sustainable societal development but more practically the major drivers of sustainable efforts and strategies towards sustainability in national economic development. The youths constitute the majority in the civil service, public service and in formal and informal enterprises of the private sector. They are the crowd in trade and commerce, transportation, fashion and tailoring/textile businesses, food processing and allied businesses, and they are in the diaspora from where they remit funds / investments back to Nigeria (Ogunlami, 2012). The increasing calls for youth mobilization and participation in politics is mainly borne out of the fact that their ingenuity, dexterity and doggedness far exceed that of the older generation who seems to have failed in providing good leadership over the years in the country (The Leader,2022). This clarion call puts credence to the resourcefulness of the youths and their competences that are outstanding and exigent for Nigeria’s political and economic development at this point in time.

**CONCLUSION**

Sustainable economic development is critical for Nigeria’s transformation into the category of developed society. To achieve this cannot be feasible without the unhindered and full participation and contribution of the majority of the population, and the bulk of the labour force, that is, the youths. They are almost indispensable in the sustainance of the efforts and strategies that can ensure steady and effective actualization of economic development processes in Nigeria. Moreover, as the major beneficiaries of development, it is rational and imperative for youths to be actively engaged in the entire process.

In addition to full exploitation of youths energy and capacity in the drive for sustainable economic development, the myriad of issues that undermine their optimal resourcefulness in participation and contribution, such as the shortcut syndrome and extreme materialism must be thoroughly addressed. The need for youths transformation and conscientious attitudinal change through organizational and governmental reforms are some realizable options towards this direction. With the will and engagement of these institutions and deliberate initiatives, Nigeria’s pursuit of youth development and sustainable economic development will be a matter of actuality in no distant future.

**OPTIONS FOR YOUTHS TRANSFORMATION AND ENHANCED CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

The invaluable and almost indispensable roles of Nigerian youths in national affairs, particularly in economic growth and development cannot be overstated. Considering the immense efforts and contributions of youths leaves one imagining what losses Nigeria incurs from underutilization of youths labour force due to youths involvement in certain anti-social conducts such as undue and illegal shortcuts and the practice of random and extreme materialism. The number of youths that misdirect their energy and resources as a result of these vices undermine national productivity.

Asunder from attitudinal reformation, value reorientation and youth sensitization on the ills of these menace; the Media, National Orientation Agency, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, etc., should employ corporate means of discouraging youths from such indulgences, and to embrace positive attitudinal changes of hard work, integrity and honour. Again for youths, government and religious organizations, the much needed efforts should be directed at:

* Reintroduction of a modified and democratic form of the defunct War Against Indiscipline
* Adherence to the practice of strict and uncompromising adoption of first comes, first served, respect for queues and orderliness.
* Enforcement and effective monitoring of compliance to a due process and other official policies and programmes.
* Religious organizations, especially the new generation ones should total eschew the attitude and practices that directly or indirectly encourage inordinate desire and pursuit of earthly things, particularly money.
* Government and corporate organizations should intensify the practice of rewarding good behavior and declare impartial war against corruption, indiscipline and other social ills.
* Provision of grants, loans and other schemes and structures for effective youth capacity building, green entrepreneurship, technological development, information and computer technology, social media, finance, mentoring and volunteerism, agriculture and food security, education, informal sector, youth in policy and decision-making, are all viable youth transformation agencies for youth empowerment and development.

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