



THE EFFECT OF YOUTH VANDALISM ON RECREATIONAL BUILDINGS IN PORT HARCOURT

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INTRODUCTION

Youth vandalism can result in several negative outcomes in both the social, political, and economic development of a society. It is also a substantial problem in the construction industry and will continue to be a threat if not handled properly (Farinyole et al, 2013). Vandalism sparks reactions of aggrieved victims of the vandalized area and leads to unemployment, loss of life, property, hardship, starvation, and poverty. The havoc it creates cannot be overemphasized. But to ascertain the effect which this study seeks to achieve, it would be expedient to know the factors that trigger youth vandalism on buildings and infrastructure, using Port Harcourt city as a case study. Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers state is the fifth-largest city located in the southern part of Nigeria. It lies along the Bonny River, and has a population of 1,383, 592 people, according to the national population census in 2006. In 1913, Lord Frederick Lugard, the then governor of Nigeria, named the city after Lewis Vernon Harcourt (Udo, 1970). This city has one of the country's major economic revenue – crude oil, hence the name "treasure base of the nation. It is part of the Niger Delta region and houses the major refinery, the "Port Harcourt Refinery" (Onwuejeogwu, 1981).

Vandalism is the deliberate destruction of both public and private property. In the words of Sanusi, Onovo, and Isa "within the civic domain, vandalism denotes wilful destruction of public or government property in keeping with criminal or political intent." It has also been associated with consequences that hold negative implications on both the environment and the economy of the state. In building construction industries, vandalism has posed a serious threat as equipment,

materials, and tools are stolen, resulting in the loss of millions of dollars by contractors each year. Some even lose their jobs in the process.

Vandalism can come in different forms; Graffiti on public buildings, which is a common gang culture in urban cities, theft and riot which results in the destruction of properties, businesses with or without the intent to steal.

Over the years, Port Harcourt has recorded a series of theft and vandalism on building infrastructures in different urban areas in the city. Either building in construction or nicely built infrastructure. Due to violence induced by cultism and militancy. To a large extent, these issues have resulting influences hinged on insecurity in the state, stretching from oil pipeline vandalization, rivalry between opposing cult groups, and on a smaller scale student riots in universities.

Factors that trigger vandalism on buildings by students according to (Aluede and Aluede, 1999) include welfare problems that arise in the form of lack of electricity and pipe-borne water, inadequate learning facilities, and lack of proper motivation. Others include educational policies and perceived victimization of students. Some other factors that trigger vandalism are incitement of youths by local politicians, widespread youth unemployment, illiteracy, underdevelopment, poverty, and the need to survive.

The effect of youth vandalism could result in job loss, damaged buildings and properties private or public owned, insecurity, disruption of services, dilapidated buildings and extreme poverty. It can also have a direct negative impact on the success of projects, diminishing the profitability of these projects under construction.

It is on the premise of the above exposition that this study seeks to further explore the effects of youth vandalism on recreational buildings in Port Harcourt.

METHODOLOGY

The method adopted for data collection in this study is secondary, with the use of an electronic database to source for research papers, research articles, videos, or audios on the study. These research papers are centered around the vandalism of recreational buildings in Port Harcourt, causes of vandalism on buildings, and its effect on society. Sources include journals, articles, papers, online videos, and audio interviews.

The study is not without limitation. The materials sourced for this research are limited to available scholarly articles or journals online. Also, the time with which this research is to be carried out is limited. All these factored in one are the limitations in this study. Nevertheless, the study seeks to achieve what vandalism means, reasons for vandalism, and the effect of youth vandalism on buildings in Port Harcourt. And also, to suggest possible solutions to this problem.

The Effects of Youth Vandalism on Buildings in Port Harcourt

The poor state of facilities in urban areas like Port Harcourt is of utmost concern to the government and the private sector. A 1973 survey showed that migrants accounted for 72% of the town's population (Izeogu, 1989). This figure has continued to rise, thus deepening the need for public facilities. Despite the government's effort at bringing governance to the people by building these infrastructures, it hasn't yielded many results. In this section, I'll look at some public facilities in Port Harcourt, the reasons and effects of vandalism.

Public facilities in Port Harcourt

There are numerous public facilities in Port Harcourt. This paper will limit the scope to recreational facilities in Port Harcourt. Some of them are:

● **Yakubu Gowon Stadium**

The Yakubu Gowon stadium (formerly known as Liberation stadium) is a multi-purpose stadium used for football matches, crusades, and

rallies. It has a seating capacity of 16,000 people. This facility hosts regional football matches and also serves as a training ground for fitness-savvy people. This facility is not the best in the country owing to several factors like the standard. Even when the government does its bit to upgrade the facility, there are still community boys who walk in and out unmonitored.

● Port Harcourt Tourist Beach

Tourist infrastructure is a crucial element in the quality of the tourist experience (Badaruddin and Omar, 2005). The Port Harcourt beach is located along Kolabi Creek in Old Port Harcourt township. It is designed to entertain residents and visitors to Port Harcourt. You can play in the cool water, eat at the traditional restaurants around, and listen to the tunes of highlife and hip-hop music. Most tourists come to play beach football or volleyball, watch races, or go horseback riding. Today, the once bubbling attraction is a shadow of itself. It is now home to hoodlums, and many people would instead visit malls and parks than explore the white sand. The state's tourism potentials are yet to be fully tapped, although the white sand is considered to be one of the most beautiful in Africa (Nwando and Egere, 2016).

● Port Harcourt Zoo

The Port Harcourt zoo is a River State-owned zoological park located at the heart of the city. It was established in 1974 by military governor Alfred Diете-Spiff. Some years ago, the facility housed animals like chimpanzees, tigers, reptiles, leopards, and many monkey species. Many recent visitors say they find it hard to believe that the facility is a zoo. This is because you visit with high hopes to see some endangered species only to find the place deserted. Everyone agrees that the government has a lot to do here. Also, you have tourists trying to feed the animals with all sorts of dangerous foods that could hamper their health.

Reasons for Youth Vandalism in Port Harcourt.

Although there is no justification for destroying any government edifice, we would look at some reasons people give for vandalizing public property.

● **Political patronage**

Politics is a full-time business in Port Harcourt. The politicians here can do anything to seize power. One shortcut to controlling power is sabotaging the efforts of the ruling government. Since they cannot visit public buildings to vandalize them, they send their foot soldiers to do the dirty job. These hoodlums wait for the slightest breach of protocol to unleash mayhem on the property, and the rest is history.

● **Misinformation**

The traditional institutions and the National orientation agency are not doing enough to enlighten Port Harcourt residents on handling public utilities. There's always a false belief that these properties belong to the government. This assertion is false. They are built and maintained with taxpayer's money. Whenever it is looted or vandalized, the government spends more money renovating or replacing the stolen items.

● **Willful Sabotage**

Some other youths vandalize public property because they want a share of the national cake. Since oil was discovered in Nigeria, the Niger Delta people always feel marginalized because they think they are not getting enough. Because oil is the mainstay of the economy, they expect that the trillions realized from their region will be used to develop their region. Unfortunately, that is not happening, and the youths are not taking it lightly. Most of them have resorted to bombing pipelines to gain the government's attention. For this group, willful sabotage is the shortest route to reach the national cake.

The Effect of Youth Vandalism In Port Harcourt

The vandalism in parts of Port Harcourt has widespread effects on the town's physical infrastructure, social, cultural, and economic life. The major areas include

● Damaged Infrastructure

Damaged infrastructure is the primary effect of vandalism before anything else. When a public facility is vandalized, the structure takes another look different from what the government initially planned. This would also hamper the government's urban renewal plan, and more money would be spent on renovation.

● Economic impact

Pipeline vandalism is common in this part, and since oil revenue is the mainstay of the town, a disruption of flow has negative impacts on the economy. Productivity is cut short, and the government is starved of funds to develop the city. Vandalism also results in pollution, and this means that the government and the international oil companies would spend billions of dollars to clean up the environment. (Alawode and Ogunleye, 2011) posit that oil pipeline sabotage is also a threat to national security, especially for a country that depends on oil exports for survival.

● Disruption of services

The workers would be unequipped to provide the services assigned to them, and gradually, the institution becomes moribund. In situations like this, it is the masses that suffer. There have been reported cases of hoodlums breaking into transformers in Port Harcourt to cart away power cables. This means that the people of that area would suffer blackouts until the equipment is replaced. The businesses around the area would suffer because they'll spend more money generating electricity for themselves.

STEPS TO TACKLING THE PROBLEM

● Bridging the gap between the rich and poor

(Uchegbu, 2002) suggests that the government can protect public facilities by bridging the gap between the rich and poor. It is only an idle mind that sees vandalism as a get-rich-quick scheme. Secondly, the government needs to make these utilities accessible to everyone. When the poor are excluded, they are raged and want to break in by force. Also, if you see anyone tampering with any public facility, alert the police so that the culprit is apprehended immediately.

● Ensure that vandals are punished

Vandalism occurs when people think they can get away with it. If the government leaves the impression that you can go free after vandalism, it becomes an open invitation to them. Buildings with no surveillance are exposed to all manner of visitors especially those who don't mean well. There is also a crime prevention through environmental design you can implement to deter criminals.

● Using solid materials to resist attack

The recent flyovers constructed by the Nyesom Wike's led administration have barricades under them to prevent hoodlums from perpetrating illegal acts. Should there be a future crisis, no one would run under the flyover to destroy it easily. Even when they try, the police may catch up with them because the metals are not easily moved. Our society is unpredictable, and if that is the case, recreational facilities should be equipped with materials that can withstand the test of time. Consider electric fencing, bulletproof doors, installing CCTV cameras, reinforced glass, hip roofs, solid pipes, etc.

CONCLUSION

Port Harcourt is at the heart of the South-South, but all forms of vandalism bedevil it. Of what use is a public school if it doesn't raise great leaders of tomorrow? Why do we have public hospitals if they don't preserve lives? The job to protect these utilities is not for the government alone but for residents too.

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