



RESEARCH ARTICLE

YOUTH AND CHURCH DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF CYON IN MBAITOLI AREA OF IMO STATE

KEVIN CHIDI UGWULEBO, SIMEON U.N. DURUJI

Department of Religious Studies, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This paper examined the impacts/roles of the catholic Youth towards the growth and development of the Church. It analysed data from both primary and secondary sources. It was discovered that the Catholic Youth have paid their dues as far as Church development is concerned. However, all these contribution of CYON were scarcely recognized and documented. This study revealed that the Catholic Youth Organisation of Nigeria is bedeviled with many problems which include lean financial background, lukewarm attitude of members, poor attendance to meeting et cetera. It is our recommendation that parents should encourage them financially. The organization should also embark on carrols, staging of plays et cetera to boost their financial base. Parents should also allow and encourage their children and wards to identify with the Catholic Youth organization. When all these and other recommendations are implemented, CYON will contribute more to church development.

Keywords: Youth, church, development, impact assessment, C.Y.O.N

Corresponding Author

Kevin Chidi Ugwulebo

Email Addresses: comradekaycee@gmail.com

Telephone Number; +2348035815463

Received: 10/2/2025; **Revised:** 11/3/2026; **Accepted:** 27/3/2026; **Published:** 30/3/2026



1.0. INTRODUCTION

It is an indubitable fact that right from the pre-colonial era, youths have been playing critical roles in societal development. They are involved in the economic, socio-cultural, religious and other spheres of life. We cannot sweep under the carpet the roles played by these notable figures in their youthful days: the Biblical Joseph, Esther, Jesus Christ including Muhammad and others too numerous to mention.

In the church, the youths are a force to reckon with in the activities of both the laity and Clergy, hence the importance of the youths cannot be over-emphasized. It is based on the above scenario that this work is geared towards x-raying the roles/impacts of the Catholic Youth Organisation in Church growth and development.

2.0. CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth

The term “Youth” has been an elusive one, because people hardly agree on one general accepted definition. The Webster’s Universal Dictionary & Thesaurus (2005) defined Youth as the period between childhood and adulthood; young people collectively. The United Nation defined youth as those persons between the ages of and 24. Without prejudice to other definitions by member states (<https://www.un.org>) Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood independence (<https://www.un.org>).

Also, UNESCO see youth as referring to the period of life characterized by development, exploration and growth, typically encompassing individuals from adolescence to early adulthood (<https://www.unesco.org>). Uche (n.d.) describe Youth as a period of transition between childhood and adult life. On its own, the Collins Cobuild English dictionary for Advanced Learners (2001) sees someone’s youth as the period of their life during which they are a child before they are a fully matured adult. It also described Youth as the quality or state of being young.

However, for the purpose of our discussion, we shall define a youth as an unmarried young man/woman who is mid-way between the periods of childhood and middle age of life. A youth is full of life and energy.

Church

The word “church” according to Akpunonu in Ukpung., Okure, Anyanwu, Okeke, Odoemene, 1992:28) is derived from the Greek word “ekklesia” which denotes a gathering, an assembly, a congregation, probably of citizens summoned together by a herald. Ike (2002:19, in Achunike (Ed) see the church as a mystical communion fellowship of believers in Jesus Christ the son of God, who are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Brodd (2003:245) just like Akpunonu aver that the term church originated from the Greek word “ekklesia which means assembly”. He described church as the “Community of all Christian believers”. Onwubiko (1999) contended that the Church is a community of faithful people in Christ mysteriously sustained by the Holy Spirit in the communion of the father and the son.



Iroegbu (199:44) on his own, sees church as the community of believers in the Trinitarian God, gathered together and commissioned by Jesus Christ, God-man to continue the mission-the establishment of God's reign in the world until He returns at the end of life. Wotogbe-Weneka (2004:20) succinctly defined the church as the body of believers in Christ.

Although the magnificent edifices we see here and there can be referred to as churches but in a miniature sense. We can therefore, see the church as people who believe in the Trinitarian God, who are redeemed by Christ through His death on the cross and who are united by the Holy Spirit. As a result, they share in the sonship of Christ and therefore, heirs of the kingdom of God (Ugwulebo and Duruji, 2014 cited in Ugwulebo, 2023:142).

Development

Development is a subject matter embodied many spheres of life which include socio-political, economic, psychological and religious lives. To this end, Ogungbamila avers that development refers to qualitative rise in skill, capacity, freedom, self-discipline responsibility and creativity which is geared towards physical, material and or psychological well-being. Narrowing his point down to the spiritual or religious realm, he contended that development stipulates that the society and the individual move progressively with the Supreme Being (Ifeanacho, 2006:096).

As far as Akinsaya is concerned, development implies sustainable growth, poverty reduction, institutional transformation (Ifeanacho, 2006:105). Development may also mean more efficient and progressive ways of doing things than what existed before. For the sake of this work, we will define development as the sustainable growth, progress and expansion of the church.

CYON

CYON is an acronym for the Catholic Youth Organisation of Nigeria. It is the organisation that brings Catholic Youths together under one umbrella. CYON as an organization was founded in the year 1985. (divinemercylekki.com). It was founded by Late Most Reverend Gabriel Ganaka and was officially ratified in 1987 by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria. (<https://stgeraldgbagada.org>, <https://stjohnmaryvianneytrademore.org.ng>). The organization was founded to create a youth organization for young Catholics in Nigeria. CYON emerged in the context of a concern of the Catholic Bishops conference of Nigeria that the Young Catholics and Local Catholic Youth Organisations in Nigeria should celebrate the international youth year (IYY) declared by the United Nations in 1985. (<http://ckcumuezigwe.com>).

It took place at Ogoja, Cross River State between August 28th and September 1st 1985 (Dodo in Ojo and Dodo (Eds) 1986:106). As a result of the establishment of CYON at the national and Diocesan levels in 1985, Mbaitoli was not left behind hence the presence of CYON is felt in the twenty nine (29) parishes and four (4) special jurisdictions in Mbaitoli. Membership of the organization is open to all Catholics and Catechumens between the ages of fifteen (15) and thirty five (35) years of age (<https://stgeraldgbagada.org>). The mission statement of CYON is "For God and for Youth – Through Christ".



3.0. METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative in nature. It employs a historical analysis of CYON and critically elucidates its impacts in church and national development

4.0. IMPACTS ANALYSES AND DISCOURSES

4.1. The Synoptic Impacts of CYON in Church Development

The Youths have dynamic roles which they play in the church and this cannot be denied. They engage in evangelism which is the primary aim of the church. They spread the gospel message among their peer groups and people round them. By this, they share in the salvific mission of the church. Some of them are involved in teaching catechism in the church, thereby helping the people to imbibe the teachings and doctrine of the church.

CYON promotes social justice and fight for the course of the youth. It is the voice of the youth both in the church and society. Some members of the organization represent their parishes in Deanery (zonal) and Archdiocesan activities.

CYON members in the parishes in Mbatoli serve in Church committees such as harvested and bazaar, ordination, building committees et cetera, thereby contributing their quota to church growth and development. Some of them function as lay readers and are even part of the church choir where they sing to the glory of God.

On the other hand, if any of their members join the church triumphant, they always rally round the bereaved family to make sure that he/she is given a befitting burial. Even when any of their members is bereaved or is sick, they are not abandoned but rather the members visit and share in their sorrows and pains.

In spite of the lean financial background of the Catholic Youth Organization, it still make its financial contributions towards the growth and development of the church, During special celebrations of the church such as lent, Passion Sunday, Easter, Christmas, anniversaries among others, the Catholic Youths play active and prominent roles, They are actively involved in the planning and execution of the programmes. They provide the labour force needed in the execution of the programmes and projects.

In the area of sanitation and cleanliness of the 'church and its environment, the Catholic Youths have paid their dues. They help in keeping the church compound and priests' residence clean and tidy. Every Saturday, the Youths engage in the cutting of grasses around the church premises. They landscape the premises and evacuate refuse dumped in and around the church premises. Besides, the youths also mend bad roads and fill up bad spots in and around the church premises., Also, the youths are involved in erosion control around the church premises, this is to ensure that erosion does not destroy the landscape, thereby making the church compound a better place to worship and serve God.

Since nobody toys with the issue of security, the Catholic Youths constitute themselves as security outfit during church activities and celebrations, In the area of education and enlightenment, the Catholic Youths are not left out. They organize debates, symposia, workshops, seminars, youth



retreats and counselling where youths and other interested people are taught things that have to do with their spiritual, intellectual, educational, political and economic development. Some CYON members teach in church schools, thereby helping to positively rear the leaders of tomorrow.

"All work no play makes Jack a dull boy". In line with this assertion, the Catholic Youths organize drama where people are entertained and made happy, thereby making them to relax and ease off tension, hence reducing high blood pressure.

4.2. Problems Militating against the Activities of CYON

The Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria just like any other human entity is not shielded from problems. Some of the problems bedeviling the organization include; inadequate finance/fund, poor attendance to meetings by the members, refusal of some parents to allow their children and wards to associate or join the organization among other problems confronting the organization.

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Summary and Conclusion

From our journey so far, it is a basic truth that cannot be argued that CYON is veritable agent as far as the church is concerned. They are stakeholders in the church and have not shied away from their role. However, the youths should be encouraged to do more. Hence, the Igbo saying: "E kelee Onye akidi, ya agwota ozo". So if the necessary encouragement is given to the youths, they will add more value to the church project, thereby making the church a good and conducive place to worship God.

In this paper, we have endeavored to define the basic concepts in this work and they are Youth, Church, development and CYON. This is for easy and better comprehension of the issue at stake. We took a brief walk into the history of CYON. The impacts/roles of CYON were well taken care of since it is the crux of the matter. We found out that the Catholic youth is a force to reckon with in the church project.

5.2. Recommendations

It is our recommendation that CYON should engage in some economic ventures to boost their economic base. They should establish cottage industries, embark on carols, football competitions, staging of plays, farming, et cetera.

Parents should allow and encourage their children and wards to join and identify with CYON. Also, parents should encourage CYON financially. We also request that parents should request their children who are CYON members to show serious commitment to the cause and activities of the organization as, according to Agwu (St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Alaenyi Ogwa Diamond Jubilee commemorative publication, 2002) it forms part of the worship of God.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no conflict of interest exist in this manuscript.



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