

YOUTHS AND SOCIAL VICICES: A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF DRUG ADDICTION IN *SWEET-SWEET CODEINE*

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Abstract

The campaign against drug addiction has taken different dimensions in various countries of the world. Nigeria seems to be battling with different shades of social vices that are ravaging its most promising talents, the youths. This study looks at the relationship and ripple effects of social vices and thus, evaluates BBC documentary film, *Sweet-Sweet Codeine* (2018). Moored in Social Responsibility Media Theory (SRMT), the study uses descriptive and content analysis modalities of qualitative research to evaluate drug addiction among the youths in Nigeria. The article examines how the ‘Say No to Illicit Drug’ campaign can best be supported and the need for activists, campaigners and government to take responsibility and create robust documentary films, jingles and messages that are geared towards educating the populace about the devastating activities that could lead to drug abuse, trafficking and addiction, so that children and young adults can internalise and grow with the message. The study suggests that the youths’ attention could be diverted from drug abuse and addiction by interrogating the dangers of the social vice in more documentary films that would discourage their involvement in such unacceptable act. The energy of the young people could be channelled positively to champion this drive, advocating against drug addiction, drug abuse and, drug trafficking that affect not only their health, productive energy but the environment generally. The researcher, therefore, recommends that the government should utilise the opportunity offered by documentary films to push the campaign against social vices, including drug addiction.

Keywords: Documentary films, Drug addiction, Social vices, *Sweet-Sweet Codeine*, Youths.

Introduction

Social vices such as drug abuse, robbery, ‘419’ or ‘Yahoo-Yahoo,’ get-it-at-all-cost syndrome, money ritual, etc., are ravaging the sanctity of the Nigerian ecosystem when it comes to upholding high moral standards among the youths. Aniukwu and Onwumelu posit that: ...the composition of this social ideology of ritual killings for quick-money enterprise, as constantly projected to the Nigerian film audiences which could be argued are encouraging maladjusted behaviours among the youthful populations. Some of the films have shown how one can quickly become a billionaire through ritual and other dubious means without having to follow the right path, or engage in hard work, perseverance, integrity, competence, and credible endeavours (157-158).

Is there any effect that the mentioned vices may have on the progress of the country? To curtail the devastating effects of drug addiction orchestrated by the activities of some members of society, a new breed of individuals needs adequate

training, campaign and advocacy and commitment to see to its logical conclusion. The new breed is the Nigerian youth. The future belongs to the youths as such, it is imperative for the youths to be actively involved in campaigns fashioned towards addressing drug addiction. In the Nigerian ecosystem, where are the youths? Are the youths gainfully employed or engaged by the government or the drug addiction campaigners? We will be looking for the answers in the documentary film that formed the basis of discussion and analysis in this study: *Sweet-Sweet Codeine*.

Social vices are "deviant behavioural acts such as illicit sex, drug addiction, evil or immoral behaviour such as murder, examination malpractice, thuggery and such other criminal tendencies" (Apase and Yawe 3). This basically translates to acts that could be toxic to the society or the individual carrying them out. These acts are not peculiar to any particular race or geographical region. There are social menaces worldwide. Gangs in the United Kingdom are notorious for knife crimes as gun laws in the United Kingdom are stricter compared to their American counterparts. The House of Commons Library reports on the 30 September 2021 that:

The main offences involving a knife or sharp instrument recorded in the year ending March 2021 were assault with injury and intent to cause serious harm (49.4%) and robbery (36%). Chart 2.1 shows that there were more offences committed in all categories except for robbery in 2020/21 compared to 2010/11. This data excludes Greater Manchester Police Force (GMP). Since 2010/11, the total number of selected offences involving a knife or sharp instrument has increased by 27% and the number of threats to kill using knives or sharp objects has tripled (increasing by 252%). (8)

In Nigeria, which is the focus of this study, similar situations are seen as crimes such as internet fraud, thuggery, drug abuse and armed robbery are the order of the day. Cultism and cult wars take the place of gang conflicts and they are more prevalent in student populated vicinities. Films such as *Far from Home* (2022), *A Tribe Called Judah* (2024), *Nimbe* (2019), among others, demonstrate how drug abuse and addiction can frustrate the ambition and aspiration of youths and aid them in engaging in different shades of social vices. A clog in the wheel of progress against drug abuse and addictions seems to be a synergy between drug traffickers and some highly placed public servants in the Nigerian society. Through this system, illegal drugs are sold to addicts, particularly the youths.

Ekpenyong divulges that: ... drugs traffickers have hijacked the entire policy and political processes of governments and states in West Africa including Nigeria, and also institutionalised criminality in the conduct of public affairs which plays itself out in terms of the way in which the cartels, as a powerful, well-financed and highly organized special interest group, takeover policy-making through their proxies, and sponsor political advocates and protectors whose day-to-day dealings effectively put criminal interests ahead and above all other interests (6). One could argue that one of the factors that allows social vices such as armed robbery, drug trafficking and cyber fraud to flourish in Nigeria is the value system of the Nigerian society. The Nigerian society has built a value system where an individual is valued by the wealth and influence, they can command. So much value is placed on wealth regardless of its source(s) and such attributes are re-echoed in most Nollywood films. This appears to

have made many young Nigerians put morality and integrity aside to become wealthy notwithstanding its means.

As Adejoh puts it: cyber-crime, particularly among young people in Lagos, has continued to gain popularity as many young people are becoming attracted to the act. In fact, many youths in Lagos have embraced cyber-crime as a way of life and a means of improving their economic condition, especially as unemployment rate continues to soar (10). Some drug users are oblivious of the risk they put their health in as they consume these toxic pills, syrups and grass with little or no reservations. In most cases, it seems as if they are unaware of how mentally or physically unstable, they might become as they take these drugs so they go ahead and consume them. This is why documentary films that interrogate and mirror these social vices, especially drug abuse, are relevant to society. Thus, this study evaluates BBC's documentary film, *Sweet-Sweet Codeine*, that highlights the menace of social vices like drug abuse and addiction.

Theoretical Fortification

The Social Responsibility Media Theory (SRMT) is the framework for this study because it is an ethical theory that encourages the need for individuals and organisations in the media world to fulfil their civic duties to benefit the entire society. The SRMT allows free press without any censorship but at the same time the content of the press should be in the interest of the people. This media theory was collaboratively propounded by Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm in their book *Four Theories of the Press* published in 1956. It stands on the notion that media organisations have a moral obligation to act in the best interests of society. And this is based on the idea that media organisations have a significant impact on the public's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, and, therefore, have a responsibility to use their power and influence in a responsible and ethical way. The theory also discusses the controlled freedom of the press and the necessity for this freedom to be checkmated lest journalists relegate the obligation bestowed them to be watchdogs of society.

This is against the ideologies of two other normative theories of the media; the Authoritarian Theory which proposes for the media to be under the control and censorship of the government and the Libertarian Theory that proposes for the total freedom of the media regardless of whatever they report, true or false. The Social Responsibility Media Theory (SRMT) serves as a middle ground for both theories. Uzuegbunam claims that: this theory, regarded as a western theory incorporates part of the libertarian principle and introduces some new elements as well. The underlying principle of the social responsibility theory of the press is that the press should be free to perform the functions which the libertarian theory granted it freedom to perform, but that this freedom should be exercised with responsibility. If the media fail to meet their responsibilities to society, the social responsibility theory holds that the government should encourage the media to comply by way of controlling them (3).

SRMT is necessary for the study because it gives stakeholders in the media industry and filmmakers, campaigners against drug addiction, the responsibility of being watchdogs of the environment to help the Nigerian society understand the

behaviours, attitudes and acceptable practices that could help stop social vices and propagate the message of avoiding drug abuse and drug addiction. The theory stresses that it is the responsibility of the media to investigate and report issues with accuracy which is the foundation of making documentary films. Also, the theory charges the media to provide information that enhances the welfare of society like documentary films that discuss social vices among the youths and also drug addiction that is prevalent in virtually all parts of the world today.

Role of Documentary Films in Society

Documentary film could be seen as one of the most undervalued forms of films as it does not project the same entertaining intrigues as fictional-reality and fantasy films. Documentary films are majorly made to educate and inform unlike the other forms of films whose major inclination is to entertain. Documentary films are sometimes called 'actuality films' because they report with facts and images of actual events. Pictures from documentary films cover people and events that belong to the real world rather than present characters and actions conceived to tell a story that refers back to the imaginary world implicitly and symbolically. "Documentary films speak about actual situations or events and honour known facts; they do not introduce new, unverifiable ones. They speak directly about the real world rather than allegorically" (Nichols 7). Most documentary films are about real people who do not play or perform roles like actors playing characters, but rather present themselves or their ideas before the camera as the case may be (Omoera 147-148). They draw on previous experience and habits to be themselves in the face of a camera. Nichols further states that the presentation of self in everyday life involves how a person goes about expressing his or her personality, character, and individual trait rather than suppressing them to adopt a role. It is how people undergo change as people, rather than how they represent change in fictional characters. There is no specific training for self-presentation other than the experience of becoming a member of society (9).

In Nigeria, documentary film of the Nigerian Civil War is used to dissuade agitators who fan the embers of war to drop their agenda. On the internet today, there are some documentary films that show the suffering and predicament of the Jews imprisoned in Auschwitz, Poland during the World War II (WWII) and Kwashiorkor ridden children of the 1967-1970 Nigerian Civil War. For Karlin and Johnson: documentary film has been used as a tool for promoting social change throughout its history. John Grierson, who coined the term "documentary" in 1926, believed it could be used to influence the ideas and actions of people in ways once reserved for church and school (2). Documentary film has undergone many significant changes since its inception, from the heavily staged romanticism movement of the 1920s to the propagandist tradition of governments using film to persuade individuals to support national agendas to the introduction of *cinéma vérité* in the 1960s and historical documentary in the 1980s. However, the recent upsurge in popularity of documentary media, combined with technological advancement of the internet or computer age have opened up a whole new set of opportunities for film to serve as both art and agent for social change.

Film in Nigeria one could argue started with some documentary films, as the British colonial government during the WWII imported films that promoted the ongoing war into the country. Documentary films were used to educate the Nigerian populace about the war and also used as a propaganda tool to coerce the people into fighting for the British government. Such documentary films projected the British successes and achievements of the war, an action that does not represent the whole picture of the war. "The government was interested in producing and using documentary films to brainwash the colonised people and to propagate British ideals while at the same time enlightening the public on health, education and other matters" (Oladipo 2). One could argue that apart from the earlier documentary films produced in Nigeria, the genre seems to be losing its relevance gradually, as fictional reality and fantasy films have taken precedents before the majority of the Nigerian film audience. This also brings to mind the knowledge that the importance of documentary films, a significant tool in combating social vices and enhancing positive attitudes towards the environment in Nigeria, appear to have derailed recently.

The Nigerian Youth, Prospects and Challenges

National Youth Development Policy defines the youths as comprising all young persons of ages 18 to 35 years. As at 2011, the federal government of Nigeria estimated that the youths' population constituted about 40 per cent of the more than 140 million people of Nigeria. Nigeria is known to have some of the brightest young people in the world. They are also known to be among the toughest as they tend to survive in whatever situation they find themselves. Nigeria has through documentary and Nollywood film productions, has made efforts to surmount the challenges facing its youths. Emelike claims that:

It is good to show all the glitz and glamour but if the essence of your story is lost, then you have not done a job. We need to find that untold story that reflects our history and the magic of African culture more, not cloning stories informed only by pecuniary gains. Our stories should not only entertain but also inform and inspire. Filmmaking is a powerful tool, which most of us are yet to fully grasp. Nollywood can and should be the most powerful voice of the black race. Multi-Choice Talent Factory Academy, a digital hub conceived as the premier destination for connecting Africa's creative industries, is already latching onto the portal to discover, groom and connect creative minds across Africa for more productive engagement and business. (qtd. in Femi Odugbemi par.1)

Many productive industries in Nigeria are controlled by youths. For example, the Nigerian music industry which is considered to be one of the greatest exports of the country's culture is being 'pushed' and run by young Nigerians. Same could be fairly said about the movie industry. The tech sector is another fast-growing industry in Nigeria and it is chaperoned by the young people as most successful Nigerian start-ups in technology such as Fintech, Agro-Tech, among others, were set up youths. Examples are *Flutterwave*, whose chief executive officer (CEO) founded at the age of 25 and *Patricia* whose CEO and founder, Hanu Fejire Agbojide, started the company at the age of 22. Another export by the country involving mainly the youths is sports.

In 2022, a Nigerian athlete aged 25, Tobi Amusan, became a world record holder and multiple gold medallist in both the World Athletic Championships and Commonwealth Games. Another Nigerian who put the country on the world map in her youth is Chimamanda Adichie who published her world-renowned novel, *Purple Hibiscus* at the young age of 26. Though some of these individuals may be privileged, a lot of them got to where they are or achieved great feats against all odds. Uzoma posits that:

Many undergraduates cannot find 'appropriate' outfits to intern/for industrial attachments and graduates are either underemployed or unemployed leading them to crime, prostitution, hooliganism, susceptibility to being used as terror agents. However, underlying is the problem of ill preparedness for the labour market occasioned by faulty curriculum that does not teach entrepreneurship development and the general system which appreciates university graduates more than technical and vocational institution's graduates. (6)

But then, not every Nigerian youth is privileged or have been lucky to 'swim' against the tides successfully. Some of them are unlucky and lack the skill or facility to do that, so, they turn to whatever that is available which in most cases may involve armed robbery, kidnapping, prostitution, internet fraud, thuggery, money ritual and those who might not get involved in the aforementioned depravities turn to coping mechanism which could involve abuse of hard drugs like crystal methamphetamine, cocaine, tramadol, codeine and others.

Synopsis of the BBC Documentary Film, *Sweet-Sweet Codeine*

Sweet-Sweet Codeine opens with the reporter, Ruona Meyer giving an insight into the problem of codeine addiction. She joins the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) to go after codeine dealers in northern Nigeria. The raid is carried out in a hotel where the officers pull down doors looking for dealers and users of codeine. Later on, Ruona is in the streets making enquiries of how codeine could be got easily. She gets answers to her questions. Adejuwon Soyinka is introduced as Ruona's co-reporter and he sets up a meeting with some codeine dealers in Lagos. He attends the meeting as an undercover agent with the name Mr Johnson, a businessman who wants to buy codeine and resell. He is able to strike a deal with a worker of one of the leading pharmaceutical companies in Nigeria who agrees to supply codeine to him. He gets the supplies he ordered for days while secretly filming the culprits but poured them all into a toilet sink. Ruona, still in Kano, is taken on a tour through the store rooms of the NDLEA in the city where seized drugs are kept. The duo arranges and attend a meeting with a top employee of the Peace Standard Pharmaceutical Company who teaches them how to subvert the system as codeine dealers. Ruona visits a rehabilitation centre in Kano where patients of drug abuse and addiction are being rehabilitated. She sees some of the patients experiencing withdrawal syndrome while being chained to the floor.

An Analysis of Drug Addiction among Nigerian Youths in *Sweet-Sweet Codeine*

Sweet-Sweet Codeine delves into the widespread use of codeine and other opioid-based drugs in Nigeria. Codeine, which is the main focus of the documentary film, is a medication that belongs to a class of drugs known as opioids. It is commonly used for

pain relief and as a cough suppressant. Codeine works by binding to certain receptors in the brain and spinal cord, which reduces the transmission of pain signals and can also cause feelings of relaxation and euphoria. The film portrays a grim picture of how the drug has become a part of the everyday life of some Nigerians, particularly young people. The film is an eye-opener to the devastating consequences of addiction and the social vices associated with it. This evaluation examines some of the social vices highlighted in the film and their impact on individuals and society.



Plate 1: (Drug Addiction: A group of young men and women taking drugs. 06:03 - 06:14 minutes of the film)

One of the most apparent social vices depicted in *Sweet-Sweet Codeine* is drug addiction. It presents visual images of some Nigerian youths taking drugs. They sip codeine from bottles and compliment it with smoking as could be seen in Plate 1. This is a major social vice as it is dangerous to both the health of the individual taking the drugs and the people around him or her. Ruona Meyer sharing the story behind her investigation. 20:57 - 21:53 minutes of the film) narrates thus:

Ruona: My brother, who is called C, has struggled with addiction. He didn't want to appear in this film, but has taught me what addiction can do. His struggle began years ago after our father, Godwin Agbroko, an investigative journalist like me was assassinated. My father was killed for fighting injustice and it tore our family apart. I went the way of work and my brother went the way of drug addiction. Grief pushed him into a bad crowd as it does with many addicts I have met. Once he fell into addiction, he quit school, disappearing for months. I found out he was using Codeine syrups through messages on his Facebook page. Some journalists pursue stories for fun, or for money, I'm pursuing cough syrup in anger, in rage and in love. I do it in memory of my father, I do it for the love of my brother.

Through this narrative, the viewer understands that grief, frustration and depression could lead to drug addiction and might watch out for loved ones who are in similar situations so that they could be guided against falling into it.



Plate 2: (Drug Addiction: A patient of codeine addiction experiencing withdrawal syndrome, while chained to a tree in a rehabilitation centre in Kano. 38:20 - 39:33 minutes of the film)

Ruona: This cough syrup addict was found out of control in the city, arrested and brought into the centre a few days before.

In this scene, the patient is screaming and jumping up and down. The officer in charge, Sani Usmaini attributes his actions to him experiencing withdrawal syndrome. The patient is unable to leave the spot as he usually would because he is chained to a tree. The officer explains to Ruona that there were many like him on the streets of Kano that are still yet to receive medical care and are being a problem for the people around them - their friends, family and community. The officer in charge explains that it is alarming. “Before we could get two or three within a week, but now we receive seven, eight in a week (04:13 - 04:29 minutes of the film)” That explains that the number of addicts keeps increasing by the day.



Plate 3: (Ruona talking to one of the patients at the rehabilitation centre, 40:41 - 49:56 minutes of the film)

Ruona is taken on a tour around the rehabilitation centre in Kano where she meets different patients with most chained to the floor so they can stay put when their withdrawal syndrome starts. From her tour around the rehabilitation centre, the audience could understand the severe consequences of drug addiction. She meets with a 16-year-old boy who has spent two months at the rehab centre, chained to the floor. The teenager advises those who are yet to get involved with codeine to never attempt it and then also for the drug addicts to find a way to stop. Powerful images are obtained from the rehabilitation centre as the audience also see the patients battling with insects coming at them because of the stench of their present environment. Also, there was the use of audio accompanied with the images like the screams of the patients and the buzz of flies.



**Plate 4: (A patient brought into the rehabilitation centre.
41:59 - 42:37 minutes of the film)**

Ruona: Just before I left the rehab centre, a boy was brought in having been found on the street. He was delirious and soon became unconscious. Doctors struggled to find a vein to revive him with a drip. Three days later, this boy was dead. And Sani couldn't rule out cough syrup abuse, although we will never know for sure. What is sure, Sani told us, is that this is what cough syrup can do.

Still in the rehab centre, the audience experiences the most fatal effect of codeine in the system which is death. The patient who was brought was a little boy who had been exposed to codeine by adults in the streets of Kano which has led to this as could be seen in Plate 4.



**Plate 5: (A young man mixing codeine in a bottle
14:33 - 14:59 minutes of the film)**

Dr Mairo Mandara: Codeine addiction could lead to a lot of things. It could lead to almost every organ failure. People can have inflammation of the pancreas, pancreatitis, people could have liver damage. They could have all kinds of damages. That is even in the long run. In the short run, people could literally run mad

Those were the words of the Public Health Office featured in the document to discuss the medical effects of codeine addiction. Another social vice highlighted in the film is drug trafficking. The documentary reveals the alarming rate of drug trafficking and the criminal networks that operate within the industry. It blames the abuse of drugs on how it is easily accessible to the addicts.



**Plate 6: (Drug Trafficking: Ruona making enquiries in the streets.
06:15 - 06:28 minutes of the film)**

Ruona: If person wan get am how I go take get am? How easy to get am? (Loose translation: if someone wants to get it, how easy could it be?)

Addict: It's very easy. The more you like it, the more you get it. Even now if you like, it's easy for me to get it for you.

This buttresses the point that the easiness in which codeine is gotten is one of the major factors the addiction is spreading. From interactions with addicts on the streets, the filmmakers reveal to the audience how simple it is to get codeine and this is because most pharmaceutical companies supply it illegally and some pharmacies sell it over the counter to addicts. On this premise, the reporters went undercover in search of the suppliers.

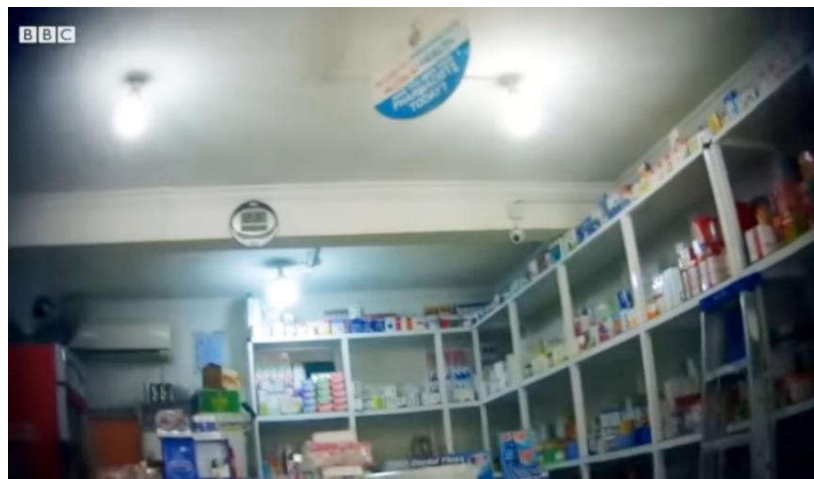


Plate 7: (Adejuwon showing a pharmacy where codeine is sold. 11:05 - 11:17 minutes of the film)

Pharmacist: I do distribution for Emzor. These products, if I want to get them, it'll be easy for me. I'll establish the relationship between you and the rep. I'll call them, they'll come.

The reporters establish the chain from the Pharmacist who is a /wholesale/retailer to the manufacturers who distribute to him. He helped set up a meeting with the sales rep of Emzor Pharmaceuticals. One of the supply chains is already established in the above documentary. As codeine ravages some parts of northern Nigeria, methamphetamine (*Mpuru Mmiri*) takes its toll on south-eastern Nigeria. Most of the abusers or addicts are youths as could be inferred from the case study. Social vices are significant problems for most Nigerian youths, who are often affected by poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education and resources. Examples of social vices among Nigerian youths are not restricted to drug abuse, cultism, cybercrime, and violence. These vices can have a negative impact on the development and progress of Nigerian society. Addressing these issues and drug addiction requires a holistic approach that includes orientation, re-orientation and enlightenment programmes which could be seen as the fundamentals of documentary films. Perhaps, this explains why Ewrierhoma, Oklobia and Thomas assert that the onus lies on the producer of the

documentary film to keep an open but receptive mind undertaking in-depth research on the topic to lead the general populace right and not astray. A documentary film is meant to educate and inform; and if at the end of the day, the vast majority of people who are the target audience cannot relate with and benefit from the information given, then the producers and crew must have succeeded in faltering the thoughts of people and feeding them the wrong details which can be very incurable (22-23).

Conclusion

In this article, we have demonstrated that documentary film could be used to depict some disturbing issues in society. *Sweet-Sweet Codeine* is a good commentary on the prevailing problem of drug abuse and trafficking among Nigerian youths. The case study properly examined above is in line with the Social Responsibility Media Theory (SRMT) that charges media organisations, filmmakers, even the government to work in the interest of the people. The producer of *Sweet-Sweet Codeine* prioritised the interest of the youths in Nigeria and the demerits of the highlighted social vices with the intent that the youths having seen such film will eschew such vices. The study concludes that the youths' attention could be diverted from social vices to become strong crusaders against the use of illicit drugs, drug abuse and addiction through effective platforms of sensitization such as documentary films. The government's fight against the challenges of climate change in Nigeria could also be further enhanced through documentary films which would outline the details of curtailing deforestations, and anthropogenic processes that affect the environment negatively.

The government and relevant nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) can utilise the opportunity offered by documentary filmmakers to further the campaign against drug addiction and climate pollution in Nigeria. Drawing on the SRMT, the private and government media houses, can create robust jingles and messages that are geared towards enlightening the Nigerian populace about the devastating processes and events that culminate in drug addiction and climate crisis. The energy of the young people can be channelled positively to carry out this campaign, advocating against drug addiction, drug trafficking, deforestation, gas emission, and anthropogenic processes that affect the environment negatively. 'The future belongs to the youths' should cease to be mere aphorism but treated as a serious issue that affects all and sundry. As such, the youths should be at the forefront of the campaign against drug addiction or abuse by shifting attention from social vices to positive engagements that would secure their future and protect the environment.

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