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## Nigeria: Youths Appetite For Drug Abuse Growing

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### Introduction

According to the United Nations Population Fund, Nigeria has a youthful population, with approximately 60% of its population below the age of 30. This demographic group represents a significant portion of the country's workforce and has the potential to drive economic growth and development. However, a growing portion of that population is falling prey to the snares of drug traffickers.

Drug trafficking in Nigeria has a complex history that can be traced back several decades. The illicit drug trade in the country is fueled by a combination of factors, including Nigeria's geographic location, economic disparities, political instability, and global demand for drugs.

In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed an increase in the production of methamphetamine within its borders. Nigerian criminal networks have been involved in the clandestine manufacture of methamphetamine, often utilizing makeshift laboratories and precursor chemicals imported from countries like China.

Nigerian drug traffickers have also established connections and collaborations with transnational criminal organizations, such as Latin American drug cartels and West African criminal networks. This enables them to access a global market and sophisticated smuggling techniques.

The significant amount of drugs confiscated by the revitalized National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) from drug traffickers at Nigerian airports over the past two years provides a vivid insight into the unfortunate predicament faced by young people in Nigeria.

These seizures, occurring within a relatively short period, paint a troubling picture of the pervasive drug trade that poses a grave threat to the younger generation. The repercussions of this dire situation are evident in the rising number of young individuals who find themselves entangled in addiction and dependency issues. Rather than pursuing their educational aspirations and the opportunities provided by academic institutions, these vulnerable individuals are now compelled to seek solace and rehabilitation in dedicated facilities.

The situation is so bad that teachers have become customers to young drug peddlers within their schools while drug cartels have taken over nightclubs and the entertainment industry training our young people on how best to self-destruct while they smile to the banks with illicit wealth extracted from helpless addicts.

This must not be allowed to continue, Nigeria like many other countries, must as a matter of urgency address the growing drug appetite among its young population if not the country will have no future.

### **Why is this important?**

Reversing the growing appetite of young Nigerians for illicit drugs is vital for the following reasons:

**Health consequences:** Drug abuse can have severe health consequences, both physical and mental, especially when it begins at a young age. Substance abuse can lead to addiction, damage to vital organs, impaired cognitive function, and increased risk of mental health disorders. Tackling drug appetite among the young population is essential to protect their well-being and ensure a healthy future generation.

**Education and productivity:** Drug use negatively affects educational attainment and reduces productivity. Young people who engage in drug abuse are more likely to experience academic difficulties, drop out of school, and have limited employment prospects. Addressing drug

appetite among young Nigerians is vital for enabling them to reach their full potential and contribute effectively to society.

**Crime and social consequences:** Drug abuse is often associated with criminal activities, as individuals may resort to illegal means to support their addiction. This can lead to increased crime rates, including drug-related violence, theft, and other forms of illicit activities. By addressing the menace of fake R039 and drug appetite among young people, Nigeria can reduce the societal and economic burden associated with drug-related crimes.

**Economic impact:** Substance abuse has a significant economic impact on individuals, families, and the country as a whole. The financial costs of addiction, including healthcare expenses, lost productivity, and increased law enforcement efforts, place a strain on the economy. By tackling drug appetite among young Nigerians, the country can mitigate these economic consequences and redirect resources towards more productive endeavors.

**Social development and stability:** Drug abuse can disrupt social structures and destabilize communities. Young people who are caught in the cycle of drug addiction often face challenges in forming healthy relationships, maintaining stable families, and engaging in positive community activities. By addressing drug appetite among young Nigerians, Nigeria can promote social development, strengthen community bonds, and foster a more stable society.

### **Strategies for suppressing illicit drugs appetite**

To effectively tackle the consumption side of drugs in Nigeria, a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach is required. In this piece, we have outlined some of the strategies that can be implemented:

**Education and awareness:** Implement widespread drug education programs in schools and communities to raise awareness about the dangers of drug abuse. This can include the engagement of faith-based organizations to educate young Nigerians about the consequences of drug use, including its impact on health, education, and future prospects. Promote accurate information about drugs and empower individuals to make informed decisions.

**Prevention programs:** Develop and implement prevention programs that target high-risk groups, such as vulnerable youth, school dropouts, and marginalized communities. These programs can include life skills training, mentorship programs, extracurricular activities, and community outreach initiatives to provide alternatives to drug use and promote healthy lifestyles.

**Strengthen law enforcement:** Enhance law enforcement efforts to combat drug trafficking and illicit drug markets. This includes improving border control measures, intelligence gathering, and collaboration among relevant agencies. Stricter enforcement of drug laws can act as a deterrent and disrupt the drug supply chain.

**Treatment and rehabilitation:** With conditions such as serotonin syndrome ruining lives, globally there is a need to expand access to quality drug treatment and rehabilitation services. Establish treatment centers and facilities that offer evidence-based interventions, including

counseling, detoxification, and rehabilitation programs. Ensure the availability of trained healthcare professionals who can provide comprehensive care and support to individuals seeking help for drug addiction

**Support for at-risk populations:** Implement targeted interventions for at-risk populations, such as street children, displaced persons, and individuals living in poverty. Address the underlying social and economic factors that contribute to drug abuse, including poverty, lack of education, unemployment, and inadequate social support systems.

**Collaboration and international cooperation:** Strengthen collaboration and cooperation with international organizations, neighboring countries, and partners involved in drug control efforts. Share information, intelligence, and best practices to combat drug trafficking networks and promote regional initiatives to tackle drug-related challenges collectively.

**Research and data collection:** Invest in research and data collection to better understand the scope and nature of drug use in Nigeria. Collecting accurate and up-to-date data can inform evidence-based policies, interventions, and resource allocation.

**Community involvement:** Engage local communities, religious organizations, civil society groups, and other stakeholders in drug prevention efforts. Encourage community participation in awareness campaigns, peer support networks, and community-led initiatives to address drug abuse.

It's important to note that tackling drug consumption requires a long-term commitment, adequate resources, and a multi-sectoral approach involving the government, civil society organizations, healthcare providers, educators, families, and communities. By combining these strategies, Nigeria can make significant progress in reducing drug consumption and its associated harms.”

Dr. Otokpa is a Public Health specialist and Fellow of the Royal Society for Public Health United Kingdom.

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