Anambra NYSC betrayal: The untold story of corps members’ assault

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When the video of a young woman, stripped naked and crying in the hands of armed vigilante men in Anambra State, surfaced online, many Nigerians recoiled in shock.  
  
The victim, 24-year-old Miss Edema Jennifer Elohor, was not a criminal. She was not a cultist. She was not even accused of any specific wrongdoing. She was a youth corps member, serving her country under the National Youth Service Corps scheme.  
  
Her humiliation, and that of four of her colleagues who were beaten alongside her by operatives of the state-backed Agunechemba Vigilante Group in Oba, Idemili South Local Government Area, has since become a symbol of both physical brutality and institutional betrayal. But beyond the barbaric actions of the vigilantes lies an even more despicable revelation: the attitude of the very NYSC official charged with their welfare.  
  
According to Elohor, repeated calls to their local government inspector while they were being attacked went unanswered. The LGI—the first line of authority and support for corps members in any local government—was nowhere to be found in their hour of need. He only appeared when the viral video forced the issue into the public domain. And when he eventually did show up, rather than empathise or fight for justice, the LGI allegedly told Elohor and her female colleague something chilling: that they should “let bygones be bygones” because “some of you may end up marrying men who beat women”.  
  
That remark has since haunted the conversation around this incident. How could an NYSC official tasked with protecting corps members reduce a naked, brutal assault to the level of casual marital advice?  
  
The role of the NYSC is not only to deploy young graduates but also to safeguard their welfare. Parents entrust their children to the system in good faith. Yet in Anambra, Elohor and her colleagues were left abandoned and almost silenced.  
  
She further revealed that the initial response of the state NYSC office was to hush things up, rather than stand firmly for their members. Another male victim disclosed that the management of the vigilante group handed each of them N10,000 as “transport fare” back to their lodge—only for them to realise later that the money was meant to buy their silence.  
  
Had social media not brought the assault into the open, it is clear that both the vigilante group and NYSC officials might have colluded to bury the matter forever.  
  
The backlash has been fierce. Nigerians online expressed disgust that an NYSC inspector could downplay such brutality. One user asked: “How can an NYSC official excuse such an assault with talk of marriage?” Another wrote: “Redeploy them. Corps members shouldn’t serve where their dignity and safety are not protected.”  
  
Governor Charles Soludo’s administration, to its credit, moved swiftly to sack eight vigilante operatives linked to the attack, handing them over to the police for prosecution. The government also promised to cover Elohor’s medical bills, replace her damaged belongings, and extend an official apology. The police, civil society organisations and the Nigerian Bar Association have all demanded justice.  
  
Barrister Cyrus Onu, representing Elohor, has vowed to pursue the matter to its legal conclusion, insisting that nothing short of full prosecution and adequate compensation will suffice.  
  
What will the NYSC do about its own? The alleged words and actions of the LGI have not been denied. Neither have the allegations that state officials tried to hush up the matter. The silence is telling. If the NYSC chooses to look the other way, then it risks eroding public trust in its ability to protect the very corps members it deploys across the country.  
  
The situation calls for a deeper reappraisal. First, the identity of the LGI should not remain hidden. He must be investigated, and if found guilty, he should be publicly disciplined to restore confidence. Second, NYSC needs to reorient its staff and put in place strict monitoring and reporting systems. If the watchdogs of corps members’ welfare become indifferent—or worse, complicit—then who will corps members turn to in times of danger?  
  
What happened in Oba is not just Elohor’s story. It could have been any corps member. It could have been the daughter or son of any Nigerian parent. That thought alone is chilling.  
  
Even if the corps members had committed an offence, nothing justifies stripping a young woman naked in public, beating her, or threatening to rape and kill her. These are crimes against humanity, not disciplinary measures. And when such cruelty is met with silence or casual dismissal by those entrusted with oversight, then the NYSC itself stands indicted.  
  
Calls for Elohor’s redeployment to her home state, Delta, have intensified, not just for her safety but also for her psychological recovery. Many argue that her four colleagues, too, should be given the option to leave Anambra if they so wish.  
  
Ultimately, justice must not only be done, it must be seen to be done. The vigilante must face prosecution. The hush money ploy must be exposed. And above all, the NYSC must look inward and take responsibility.  
  
The assault on corps members in Anambra is a dark episode. But it is also a reminder that institutions cannot protect the vulnerable if their officials are indifferent or complicit. For the NYSC to retain credibility, it must act decisively—not just against external threats, but against rot within. Because if corps members cannot trust their LGIs, then who can they trust?  
  
Ladigbolu, a journalist, writes from Lagos