**NYSC: The GOOD, The Ugly, The Bad.**

The deep sigh, the relieve to be unburdened from 5 years of pressure. That was me in November 2017. Happy to be finally free - ironically - from the four-walls that nearly bent me over like a forger. But I was worried just as much on what step to take next. At the time, I had two options but I was damn broke to pursue either confidently. I needed two things now to avoid a standstill: luck and help. No assistance was coming from my home that one was sure - home was broke too. Despite that, I was yet to come to terms with the fact that I was on my own now. The time - when reality would slap me awake - was to come soon.

Between that time and convocation ceremony in February 2018, I'd groped for luck to land a job - spending an unexpected industrial training allowance of 15k ($42) from the government - and ended up at a loss, still. That wasn't all; fate still had some beating for me. That experience of been fooled by my enthusiasm and optimism hurt my pessimistic spirit and plunged me into depression.

I survived – hallelujah – and by now you must have figured what option chose me. Otherwise, the title of this article would have likely been some wordings bordering around validating my reason to boycott the compulsory service. Now let’s talk about some good and ugly things.

**NYSC: The Good**.

A year before graduation, I was audience to an argument that ensued amongst my radio colleagues. Whether NYSC should be scrapped or not and why Nigerian fresh graduates are better off without it. One of the strongest points for those that supported it was the fact that they wanted to enjoy their share from the national cake they may ever get. That would be N19800($55) every month for 12 months, at the time. And while it’s tempting to argue why anyone would be excited about $55 per month when their monthly stipend from home while in school was probably more than that, I’d stick to **The Good,** and thrash that later on.

Of course, besides the N19800 allowance, there are other good reasons to embark on NYSC after graduation.

It’s the best time to explore the country. To see its beautiful landscapes and the brokenness of its citizens that keep hoping for better days. This is especially beneficial to kids who claim to be youths but haven’t stayed more than 50km away from their parents.

There’s also the connection. This is like a gold mine to take advantage of. I’m sorry, if you’re the shy type, just forget it. You’re doing yourself a big disservice. One of the best moments to your network wide and deep is during service year – starting from the orientation camp. So long you play your cards well and smart – I don’t mean the corrupt way – you wouldn’t be caught in the web of what do to next after service. It could get as good as been retained by your PPA (place of primary assignment), if you’re up for it and if they value you; because those PPA’s aren’t worth the thought. For those, you just serve, doing your best to contribute to the nation’s development and leave ASAP after POP(passing out parade).

And oh, there’s the love factor. You must have heard the 3 weeks of orientation is one and about the only (for many) memorable periods during the service year. The first few days might appear awkward, you know, the usual, strangers trying to get acquainted and adjust to each other’s differences. But trust me, once that dust is clear, the rest is history. It’s mad fun and all sorts. You can’t beat that imagination unless your camp is cursed by the spirit of boredom. For some, the emotions and affections (if you get the real gist) shared during this time ends right there. For others, it’s the dawn of happily-ever-after. Frankly though, as much love is made during service year, the breakups and heartbreaks are nearly double. I was favored by one of those two. Don’t ask me which.

The skill acquisition program(SAED) of the organization would have come under this umbrella, but I would be sincere, it hasn’t lived up to its expectations compared to the capital invested into it. So, nah; it goes into the ugly category.

**The Ugly**

There are many shady activities about NYSC. Right from the registration process, to redeployment application down to ghost corps members. It’s a breeding ground for organized greed at the expense of corp members welfare.

NYSC officials at different levels in different states, are as corrupt and greedy, like you can’t imagine. Not all of them though, that has to be said and always the management has warned against such activities and admonished corps members not to patronize these bad eggs. But come on, even the DG is aware that everything has a price in this country; good or bad and his officials don’t care what code of ethics they have to break as long as the right price is paid. To nip this rot, within the organization, in the bud a lot more bite than bark would be needed.

Or do I bring up the matter of the poor quality of food and clothing given to corps members at the camp, despite a comprehensive budget been allocated? I don’t even have the guts to state the budget allocation here, because I can’t believe it myself.

What of the special treatment given to kids of an elite group? I won’t dive into the alleged case of the president’s son completing his NYSC in less than a year after he started. Social media trashed that enough and I would say no more. And oh, I know you’re probably thinking, what of Davido. Yea, he too got his special treatment and then had his ass kicked out of the service. I bet you why.

Now, one of the reasons NYSC was constituted was to foster peace and harmony among Nigerians. Let me state this: that’s a wild goose chase. Quote me anywhere. This country will remain so divided along ethnic and religious lines until we work on our individual mentality as a country. NYSC won’t fix that mess. Rather, its members end of becoming targets if some form of tension ensues from our intolerance for each other.

Back to the allowance. There is no how a member of NYSC can survive on the paltry pay of N19800 every month in a strange or new place without financial assistance from family or loved ones. I mean, come to think of it, we talking $55 in this economic mess we are in right now in this country. It’s preposterous, to say the least. I really felt sorry for myself and my colleagues at some point during my service year; especially in the month monthly payment was late by two weeks because SEC had some disagreements with NNPC’s remission for that month.

Fortunately, the finance minister has stated there would be an increase to about N30000 ($84)/month alongside the increment of the minimum wage. And I hope the modalities being worked on happens soonest.

There’s also the issue of being truly engaged at your PPA. This questions the core values and objectives of NYSC. Quite a number of my colleagues who were posted to government ministries didn’t have to do more than move papers and waste the rest of the day gisting and taking selfies like the staff of the ministry themselves. They didn’t particularly complain, but I couldn’t help but wonder why anyone would be so comfortable being unengaged for almost a complete year. What then is the point of the service, if one is not contributing or being impacted. Imagine graduating as an electrical engineer and then you’re asked to teach three primary or secondary school classes almost all their subjects including art subjects. First of all, you’re only very familiar with a few science subjects; and secondly, you are not even qualified as a teacher. But who cares. It’s a literal depiction of putting a square peg into a round hole. If you don’t fit in, you’re forced in. Damages everything. Phew, let me not take it personally. That will be all on that.

Lastly, before I leave this ugly side, I would want to make a case for the NYSC certificate itself. That’s just about the main reason most youths are participating; because without it, you hell as sure don’t want to further your education or even get a job in this country. Why then doesn’t the same rule apply to politicians gunning for a post that’s so important to the country’s development and not to forget how lucrative it is?

**The Bad**

Here, is the bedrock for all arguments on why NYSC should be scrapped and banished from memory books. They are many and I can’t exhaust them all but I will mention a few that’s too bad to be ignored.

The issue of NYSC members’ security will always top the list. They are always a target, and the menacing memories of the previous elections, especially 2011, still lingers. Fortunately, there were few cases of casualty during the 2019 elections but it beamed focus on another sensitive issue. The negligent attitude towards the welfare and the rude disrespect for corps members. I was a victim of those, and as demeaning as my situation was, some of my colleagues experienced worse. The embarrassing pictures of how a so-called giant treated its youths undergoing compulsory service were awash social media platforms. It was a national disgrace and a breach of MOU between NYSC and INEC. Don’t ask if we were compensated.

But as much attraction as that accrued, it’s a norm for most organizations seeking the services of corps members. NYSC members are treated as cheap labor in a very despicable manner. School principals, State government, business owners will demand corps members from NYSC, make them work tirelessly and then pay them peanut stipend that doesn’t go beyond N5000. And then the circle restarts when the batch is dispatched to go and serve. It’s sad, very.

Another issue that’s very important, one that affected me personally, is the health of members. NYSC members need health insurance. A wholesome one. Usually, the deal is, if you have a health issue, apply to go treated but you have to fund your medical bill and then you can return to seek a refund. If you didn’t get treatment from a government hospital, just forget it. Sounds pretty straightforward as annoying as it is.

In my case, I remember my father thinking NYSC would cover my surgery bill, I had to laugh to seal my anger. I covered my bill using my savings and by the time I returned after recuperation to start the procedure to get my refund of over N100000 ($278), I was greeted by the organization’s paperwork process that frustrated me. My LGI (Local government inspector), really tried to help out but I was frustrated to the point I was mentally drained and so couldn’t continue the process. I chose my psychological stability over the money.

And to cap this off, I would warn, any member that wants to redeploy, should better do so immediately after camp. If you opt to redeploy after 3 months or 6 months into your service, make up your mind to forfeit your allowance for that month your redeployment was approved. It’s pretty messy that the 36 states and FCT aren’t so harmonious in their operation to know a member moved from point A to point B, and still pay such his or her allowance. If you try to pursue it, your present state of deployment and your previous would toss you back and forth until you will know better to forget about that month’s pay. Crazy yea? I hope you don’t experience it.

In all, NYSC still stands to benefit the nation greatly, but there need to be several restructuring. And I must say, the bill passed by the president that prevents the posting of engineering corps members outside an engineering firm is a good step in the right direction.