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CURBING CYBERCRIME IN NIGERIA: FIGHTING THE MASKED ENEMY AND PROMOTING PRODUCTIVE ALTERNATIVES FOR THE YOUTH

With each passing day, we witness more and more alarming cases of Cybercrime in Nigeria, with each new case more shocking than the one before. It has become a stubborn mouth – sore which causes us a lot of pain and shame but is hidden from plain sight. Truly then, cybercrime is woven neatly into the fabric of our society. It is therefore a ‘thread’ that every right – minded Nigerian must fight to loosen.

To fight and gain victory over an enemy in a war, we must first understand the true nature of that enemy. Since cybercrime is not a war we can afford to lose, we must therefore understand it. Just what is cybercrime? The Internet Crime Complaint Centre (IC3) defines Cybercrime as any Internet or computer – assisted crime; that is e-mail scams, hacking, distribution of hostile software (viruses and worms), denial of service attacks, and theft of data, extortion, fraud and impersonation.

Of these above mentioned vices, the most notorious in Nigeria is the E-mail scam. In fact, the IC3 also reports that in the United States alone, the “Nigerian Letter fraud” (E-mail scams from Nigeria, more commonly known as “*yahoo yahoo*”) constituted 1.1% of the 2007 top IC3 Complaint Categories received. But who are those responsible for these scams? For the most part, it is the Nigerian Youth.

One of the reasons for this is not far-fetched from the attitude of today’s youth. Deep-seated and entrenched in the heart of some young people is the complete disregard for the rights, the happiness, and the well – being of others.

Others on the other hand excuse their involvement in cybercrime by pointing accusing fingers at ‘corporate criminals’ who to them are the real criminals. By ‘corporate criminals’ we mean fraudulent government officials who embezzle public funds. They say that compared to what these officials embezzle, theirs is just peanuts.

Some are drawn into cybercrime because of the kind of friends they keep. Before long, they get trapped and find it very difficult to loosen themselves from the grips of greed.

And others engage in cybercrime, on a never-ending quest for thrills and ‘kicks’ associated with swindling others. Whether these youths are in it for the fun of it, or view it as a means to an end, are they not all accommodated by a society that allows and therefore encourages people to get rich quick by any means necessary, no question asked? Yes, this is the real enemy, the one we must fight against. How?

A good first step would be to introduce cybercrime as a course in the curriculum of secondary school students. The purpose of this course would be to enlighten young ones about how cybercrimes are committed and the consequences of such actions under law. It would also be used as a means to make young ones conversant with the pain they cause others by committing cybercrimes. Posters, placards, television and radio programs would be used to reach those who are not able to offer this course in secondary schools due to financial or circumstantial constraints. They would carry messages such as “*Cybercrime (yahoo yahoo) destroys hopes and dreams*”.

Most importantly, in order to win the battle against cybercrime, every Nigerian has a part to play. IC3 noted that although Nigeria is in the top ten countries where internet crime is perpetrated, the country is, ironically, not among the first ten nations that complain to the IC3.

Therefore we must be ready to denounce the act and those who practise it. This involves being ready to report to the police or other concerned authorities anyone we might suspect of engaging in

cybercrime. One pillar that cybercriminals hide behind is the fact that online their acts leave no trace as to the actual identity of the perpetrator, but we know when someone around us is involved in cybercrime because of the lifestyle of such a person. If we can crush that pillar, then we would have reached a significant milestone in our fight against cybercrime.

Recently, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in its banking sector supervision report revealed that the banking sector lost 7.2 billion naira to internet fraud in Nigeria. Losing 7.2 billion naira in a developing economy such as ours is not something to be proud about. It is as though our young ones, the main perpetrators of cybercrime are drilling holes into instead of building, our economy. This therefore unveils the urgent need to redirect the energy of young Nigerians towards productive online engagements. How can this be done?

Firstly, we need to organize free workshops where selected youths who voice their interest in building a career in IT are trained. There would be courses on Website development, Networking, 3D modelling, Graphics design, and FOREX (Online FOREIGN EXchange) trading. The workshop would be established in many centres across the nation. Graduates of such workshops would then be able to devote some time to training others within the same capacity and leading successful lives free of crime.

Secondly, Nationwide Quests may be introduced where young ones mostly from secondary and tertiary institutions are given the challenge of building IT based applications such as database registers for hospitals or computer controlled traffic lights to serve a small area. They would register with the organizers and be given a deadline within which they would present their projects using whatever software programs they can use. Awards would be given to winners of the challenge. The winning projects would then be sponsored by financial backers so that they can be implemented where necessary to aid infrastructural development in Nigeria.

To add to this, an online network of young ones in Nigeria may be created where students from mostly secondary schools and within certain age-groups are given an opportunity to access online libraries, view online contests that they can take part in, to write and read blogs and have access to "How to" ebooks. In this way, they would be developing the necessary skills required to earn themselves a means of livelihood and hence turn away from crime.

Even when the best efforts have been made to put many on the right track, some may still turn to a life of crime. Such ones must be punished according to the law to deter others from following their course. In order to apprehend these criminals, officials of anti-graft bodies such as the EFCC (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission) need to undergo regular training to equip themselves with the skills to curb cybercrime. They also need to incorporate the use of software applications designed to monitor internet usage in the country with the particular aim of tracking and arresting internet fraudsters.

In conclusion, I believe that by denouncing cybercrime in everyway we can and promoting these exciting productive alternatives we would not only be loosening the corrupting thread of cybercrime from our society but also building a reputable Nigeria.