

AFRICAN CULTURE, MODERN SCIENCE AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHT



Editor-in-Chief
P. Ade Dopamu

EDITORS

* S. O. Oyewole * R. A. Akanmolu
* M. A. Akanji * R. O. Ogunade
* R. D. Abubakre * I. O. Oloyede
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CONTENTS	PAGE
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>About the Editors and Contributors</i>	x
<i>Preface</i>	xvii
INTRODUCTION	
African Culture, Modern Science and Religious Thought <i>G.O.M. Tasié</i>	3
African Culture, Human Health and Scientific Enquiry: Some Reflections <i>Adeoye Adeniyi</i>	14
RELIGION AND CULTURE	
Basic Concepts of Culture and their Application to African Social and Spiritual Development <i>Joshua 'J. Akong'a</i>	24
Elements of African Cosmology: A Case Study of the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria. <i>S.J. Obeta</i>	39
African Cosmology and World View: A Case Study of Uganda <i>A.B.T. Byaruhanga – Akiiki</i>	49
The Nigerian Theatre and Cultural Development <i>A.O. Akinwale</i>	81
Cultural Development through Language and Communication <i>Juliet Macharia</i>	90
Religio-Cultural Significance of <i>Ouwmini</i> (Aquatic Spirits) Songs Among the Ikwerre of Upper Niger Delta. <i>Wellington O. Wotogbe – Weneka</i>	107
Christianity and Culture in Western Kenya: A Biblical Perspective <i>E.M. Kasiera</i>	120

Origin of the Universe: An African Perspective
T.T. Asojo

138

African Religion and Science
Adam K. Arap Chepkwony

152

Eku Performance Among the Ebira:
 An Interface of Techno-Cultural Aesthetics
S.E. Ododo

163

The Golden Rule:
 The Islamic and African Religious Perspectives
Z.I. Oseni

184

Basic Concepts in Culture
Patrick A. Edewor

195

Moral Issues and Development:
 The Perspective of Yoruba Religion
K.E. Obasola

200

Scientific Findings in Relation to Christian Theology:
 Archaeological Perspective
E. Ade Odumuyiwa

210

A Search for the Biblical Language of Eden
R.J. Ijaodola

224

One-Dimensional Culture and Africa's Development
C.E. Ukhun

235

African Culture in Perspective of Contemporary Science
R.A. Olaoye

243

Affinities Between the Registers of Medical Science and
 Christian Religion
Victoria A. Alabi

254

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

God's Two Books: Revelation, Theology,
 and Natural Science in the Christian West
Peter M.J. Hess

267

African Culture and Science in Dialogue <i>Oludare Olajubu</i>	290
Dark Matter Matters: Appropriating the Discourses of Physics and Cosmology for the Liberation of Africana Communities <i>Barbara Holmes</i>	308
Cultural Technology in Perspective of Science: The Myth and Science of Lightning, Thunder and Rain. <i>I.E. Owolabi</i>	319
Mind and Matter Relationships in Christian Faith <i>F.A. Oladele</i>	336
Science in the Service of Theology: A Case Study of Moon Sighting in Islam. <i>A.A. Akanni</i>	344
In Everything Lies an Evidence: Science and the Theology of Islam <i>M.T. Yahya</i>	362
African Cultural Response to Ecological and Environmental Concerns <i>S.O. Oyewole</i>	368
Nature and Creation: Theology and Science in Dialogue <i>Okachukwu Chris Manus</i>	373
Religion and Science with Focus on African Culture <i>D.N. Wambutda</i>	387
Cloning, God and Evolution <i>Ayo Fadahunsi</i>	394
The Future of African Religion, Islam, Christianity and Science in Africa <i>Raymond Ogunade</i>	408

The Sanctity of Life: A Religious Dogma with Moral Implications for Biomedical Practices <i>J. Kehinde Ayantayo</i>	419
Biblical Perspective of Wind: A Case Study in Historical Climatology <i>Adeyemi A.S. & Odebunmi O.</i>	432
HEALTH AND MEDICINE	
Scientific Basis of African Magic and Medicine: The Yoruba Experience <i>P. Ade Dopamu</i>	442
Developments in Traditional Health Care Delivery System in Yorubaland <i>Danoye Oguntola – Laguda</i>	465
Integrating Traditional and Western Medicine in Health Care System in Nigeria <i>Aderemi Suleiman Ajala</i>	474
African Culture, Human Health and Scientific Enquiry: The Need for Synthesis of Tools and Theories. <i>Joseph Okokon Charles</i>	489
Islam and Healthcare <i>Rasaq D. Abubakre</i>	499
Muslim Scriptures and the Use of Honey for Health-Care and Metaphysical Purposes <i>S.A. Shittu</i>	508
Christian Religious Practices and Their Influence on Health <i>Maria M. Ikorok</i>	518
Cultural Factors and Health behaviours Among the Yoruba <i>Wole Obiyemi & J.A. Adeniyi</i>	526
Development of Medical Practices in Islam <i>S.M. Jamiu</i>	535

Health Care System in Islam <i>M.O. Adeniyi</i>	546
Folk Medicine in the Taxonomy of African Oral Literature: An Example of Ajadilopea Anti-Malaria Spice <i>Gabriel A. Ajadi</i>	552
Faith Healing and the Need for Church Effectiveness Research in Nigeria: Some Psychological Perspectives <i>Olabisi Olasehinde-Williams</i>	560
SOCIO-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES	
Pathways to Wisdom: Western and American Indian Systems of Natural Philosophy <i>Martinez J. Hewlett</i>	570
Environmental Management from the Perspective of Culture <i>O.J. Olaniran</i>	577
Promoting Resource Management and Utilization through the Nigerian Culture <i>Adeyemi Idowu</i>	594
Development, Exploitation and Management of the Natural Environment: An Islamic Perspective <i>M.A. Muhibbu-Din</i>	601
The Challenges of Globalization and Development to the Church and Theology <i>Nwora S. Nwigwe</i>	616
Globalization and Development: A Philosopher's Bird-Eye View <i>R.A. Akanmidu</i>	622
Women in Development from the Perspective of Islam in Nigeria. <i>B. Aisha Lemu</i>	632
Women and Power Structure in Africa <i>Oyeronke Olajubu</i>	642

Women and Development
from the Yoruba Traditional perspective
Oluwatosin A. Akintan

652

An Islamic Perspective of Youth Development
Is-haq Oloyede

663

Da'wah and Information Systems in the 21st Century
Waheed O. Azeez

674

Index

684

AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

IS-HAQ OLOYEDE

Introduction

Through compartmentalization of learning, it is becoming increasingly difficult for disciplines to benefit maximally from one another. Generally speaking, inter-disciplinary efforts reduce the emerging damaging effects of compartmentalization of knowledge only in the obviously related disciplines. Some disciplines are connected in an obscure but critical points, which require extra-ordinary reflection to pinpoint.

The valley between disciplines are promoted to a gulf and further deepened and widened by simplistic propositions, meaningless sophistry, ill-tested assumptions and archaic beliefs and stereotypes.

Divergence is misconstrued as conflict while distinctions are misinterpreted as incompatibility. Science or better still, secular disciplines and religion have suffered enough from such unwarranted dichotomization which creates the notion of incompatibility between science and Religion. The two, in reality, have co-existed and still do, in one form or the other, in every human being since human being is made of spirit and matter.

The connectivity of religious sciences (Islamic in particular) and (natural or human) sciences can be observed through an understanding of the fact that Religion is not mere interaction between God and a human being. It is also the effect of such interaction on the method and manner through which the human being relates with other creatures (particularly animals), the environment (nature), and other human beings. In effect, whether acknowledged or not, one's understanding and application of religious sciences influence one's relationship with other creatures, human beings and the environment.

Contemporary Muslims have observed the danger inherent in isolation of the sciences (religious, natural, human, social and applied). In 1977, the first International conference on Muslim Education was held in Makkah where it was resolved that integrated approach to education is the recipe for proper development. The formation of International Institute of Islamic thought (triple I and T) in 1981 gave an impetus to integrated education through the "Islamization of knowledge programme". By 1996, the 6th International conference on Islamic education, held in cape -town, developed practical scheme to ensure interactive and integrative approach to education and develop-

ment. The Institute, through its regular journal *-American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences (AJISS)-* provides a global platform for meaningful interactions between Islamics and other sciences. The focus of the centre for Theology and the Natural Sciences (CTNS) makes it a natural partner of the Institute and other Islamic agencies for integrated education.

Definition of Terms

(i) Definition of Youth

In the categorization of human beings on the basis of chronological age, certain terms are used: infant/child; boy/girl, man/woman; the aged or old and the youth. Among the terms, youth appears to be the most problematic to define. The youth can be either man/woman or boy/girl. The youth is neither a child nor the aged. This explains why nations or groups differ in their description of a youth.

In Nigeria, for example, the youth is defined by the National Youth Policy¹ as "Young persons of ages between 18 and 35. It is generally put at between 14 and 24 years of age in many other countries.

Factors such as average life span; socio-political history of the society; economic health of the community; school system, culture and technology play significant roles in the definition of "youth"

TABLE I (a)

REGIONS	AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY (2001)
World	67 years
Africa	54 years
Asia	67 years
Europe	74 years
N. America	77 years
Latin America & Caribbean	71 years
Oceania	74 years

Source: 2001 World Population Data Sheet Population Research Bureau (PRB)

TABLE I (b)

COUNTRIES	AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY
Nigeria	52 years
U.S.A	77 years
Sierra Leone	42 years
Angola	38 years
Libya	75 years
Kenya	48 years
Zambia	37 years
Saudi Arabia	67 years
Bangladesh	59 years
Pakistan	60 years
China	71 years

Source: P.R.B (2001)

It is probably due to culture (more than any other factor) that the nations of Africa have the highest figure of between 35 and 45 years as the upper limit of their youths while other continents with higher average life expectancy fixed the upper limit at between 24 and 30. The fact that an average age of rulers of African Nations is the highest is also instructive. Though the youth in Nigeria is defined as between 18 and 35 years, the National youth service corps prevents any graduate beyond the age of 30 from participating in its youth scheme.

It appears to us, that Islamic traditions tend to support the upper limit of 40 years for youth. Prophets except one or two were not appointed from ages below forty. In addition the Qur'an states:

And we have enjoined on man to be dutiful to his parents. His mother bears him with hardship and she brings him forth with hardship, and the bearing of him, and the weaning of him is thirty months, till when he attains full strength and reaches forty years, he says: My Lord, grant me the power and ability that I may be grateful for your favour (Qur'an 46 Verse 15).

While inferences could be drawn from the two examples cited, it is generally believed among Muslim scholars that the life span of man has three distinct stages. The juvenile, the youth and the aged. The youth is perceived as the period starting from puberty to the commencement of old age. Qur'an 30 verse 54 which is generally quoted in support of this classification, is as follows:

Allah is He who created you in weakness, then gave you strength after weakness, then after strength gave you weakness and grey hair. He creates what He wills. And it is He who is the All-knowing, The All-Powerful.

(ii) What is Development?

“Development” in broad terms is the improvement in the quality of life as a result of relatively easy access to life-improvement services. It can also be seen as sustained reduction in poverty of health, wealth enlightenment and participation in the management of the society. The focus of these and similar definitions is mundane whereas the Islamic faith considers eternal comfort as the ultimate. Within the context of Islam and youth development, we perceive “development” as an efficient utilization of acquired knowledge and revealed knowledge (religious sciences) through responsible use of nature to the advantage of humanity and the sustenance of the environment towards the attainment of God’s pleasure.

Genuine development is, therefore, the one that ensures not only momentary comfort but also the eternal one, which can be attained only through legitimate means. This explains why Muslims are urged to pray as follows:

Our lord! Grant us in this world that which is good and in the hereafter that which is good, and save us from the torment of the fire (*Qur'an* 2: 201)

The prayer envisages a development that is both material and spiritual.

Global Efforts Towards Youth Development

Youth development, just as women development, is a strategy for overall development of the human race. The youth is a significant proportion of the population of any society, so youth development has impacts on a great percentage of the citizens. The United Nations Organization, (U.N.O) has given considerable attention to issues that concern the youth.

1985 was declared by the U.N.O as the International Youth Year. In 1985 and 1995, the world body held special sessions of the general Assembly on youth and adopted “The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond”. The second and third sessions of the World Youth Forum of the United Nations were held in Vienna (1996) and Braga, Portugal (1998). On the 12th of August 1998, ministers responsible for youth adopted “Lisbon Declaration of Youth Policies and Programmes”.² The declaration sets a rich agenda for National governments on youth development.

The declaration implies the commitment of the participating governments to:

- (i) Formulation and adoption of National Youth Policy. Many Nations have since adopted their youth policy. In Nigeria, for example, both the National Youth Policy and its implementation strategy were published in February 2001.
- (ii) Participation of Youth in decision-making processes at all levels of

- government.
- (iii) Development of socio-economic measures aimed at youth development. One of the significant features of this declaration is the commitment to the reinforcement of families. Many nations, including Nigeria, would need to emulate Kuwait³ in giving practical effect to this commitment. The Nigerian Government appears set to implement this commitment. The proposal⁴ of a full ministry of Youth Affairs, National Youth Development Council, National Youth Development Agency and the National Youth Development Fund need to go beyond pious declaration.
 - (iv) Assurance of Peace
 - (v) Youth Education
 - (vi) Employment of Youth
 - (vii) Health Programmes for the Youth especially the H.I.V and other sexually transmitted diseases.
 - (viii) Reduction of Drug and Substance Abuse.

The *Ummah* (Islamic Global Community) has also made significant contribution to the development of its youth. For Example, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth was founded with headquarters in Riyadh in 1972. Its mandate includes the spiritual training of Muslim youths for contemporary and future challenges. It also co-ordinates other specialized international Muslim youth bodies such as International Islamic Federation of Student Organisations (IIFSO) from which it emanated. In additions it has working relationship with bodies such as Arab Council for Children and Development.⁵ The Assembly is the authoritative voice of Muslim youths in international circles. As an illustration, WAMY protested to the United Nations Conference on Population and Development, which in 1994, recommended safe sex outside matrimony through the use of condom and support for abortion⁶. All the Muslim nations adopted the position of WAMY.

National Youth Organisations of different backgrounds co-ordinate the activities of their respective interest groups in different countries. National Council of Muslim Youth Organisation (NACOMYO), for instance, is the umbrella Muslim youth organisation in Nigeria which champions the realization of the Islamic mission for youth development. NACOMYO is also an offshoot of the Muslim Students Society Nigeria founded at King's College Lagos, Nigeria in 1954.

Mission of Youth Development in Islam

The Islamic mission of youth development is to inculcate in the youth through a combination of revealed and acquired knowledge, skills and atti-

cludes the qualities of a responsible and accountable vice-gerent (*Khalifah*) of Allah. The goal of the development transcends selfish or parochial interest of self - glorification or worldly pleasures. Through this comprehensive approach to development, destitution in morals, spirituality, intellect, health, material wealth and participatory ability in societal management is effectively combated in a mode that is resolute and focused but not desperate. The major objectives include:

- (i) Respect for the rights of, and obligations to God. While fundamental human rights must be protected, a well-prepared youth does not compromise the divine rights too. Allah the creator has rights (*huququllahi*) which must not be violated.
- (ii) Respect for the rights of others including the rights of the person, himself; the environment, animals and other resources, which must not be abused.
- (iii) Proper perspective of leadership role. The youth must be trained to realise that leadership is a trust from both God and man. A leader in Islam is a representative of his/her followers who entrusted leadership to him/ her yet, he/she is responsible ultimately to Allah. The Qur'an advocates as follows:

Those (Muslims) who, if we grant them power in the land, order worship (*salat*) and payment of *Zakat*, enjoin virtues and forbid vices. And with Allah rests the fate of all matters (Qur'an 22: 41)

The modern democracy advocates the rule of the majority who should decide the mode and type of governance. Yet when Muslims, through the polls, were at the verge of winning a national election in Algeria, they were halted, paradoxically in the name of democracy which seems to outlaw obeisance to Allah's injunctions (*the shari'ah*). A well-developed Muslim youth does not compromise the supremacy of Allah's injunctions over all man-made laws.

The Prophet Muhammad said:

Religion is sincerity and we said to whom? He replied: To Allah, the Apostle, the leaders of the Muslims and their generality (*Bukhari*)

- (iv) Dynamism and currency.

Through appropriate education, the youth becomes flexible to confront different tasks in an ever-changing world. His education is integrative enough to create humility and adaptability. He is a total man whose perception of development is based on ethical standards. The means are as important as the end. The youth is equipped not to lose contact with history but not to be enslaved by it. He is a

- Mujtahid* (an inventor) not a *Muqallid* (an imitator).
- (v) **Global Vision**
 The objective of Islamic youth development incorporates making the youth a global rather than a local personality. Tribe, race, nationality, language are parts of the signs of Allah which are not meant to inhibit man's perception of his goal on earth. While modern Nation-States frown at tribalism they, almost without exception, promote nationalism. Islam promotes brotherhood of humanity and faith which transcends all boundaries of nationhood, ethnicity or any other parochial interests. The discharge of his obligations to his tribe, nation, class, group or the world must be fair and equitable. Sectional interests must not cage him.
- (vi) **Duality of Roles**
 The youth has duties and obligations towards his ascendants and their relations just as he has towards his descendants. In most cases, he/she becomes confused as to where his priority attention lies. The Qur'an asserts:
 ...you know not which of your parents or your children are nearest to you in benefit... (Qur'an 4:11)

The youth in many cases are the one faced with the delicate task of balancing of interests in both parents and children. Islam expects him or her to discharge both responsibilities equitably. The notion of nucleus family that excludes the parents is unacceptable to Islam. The youth is thus faced with an inter-faced task, which increases his/her responsibility. Beyond the family, she is responsible to two generations if not three. His or her own generation, {including his/her spouse(s)}, the generation of his parents and that of his offspring have some demands to make of him or her. There is no doubt that the youth requires proper guidance and training to face the multi-dimensional responsibility.

Luqmanic⁷ Paradigm for Youth Development

An Islamic model of youth training can be inferred from the conversation, reported by the Qur'an, between Luqman and his child, thus:

And indeed Luqman was bestowed with wisdom... And when Luqman said to his son, when he was advising him. O my son! associate not any partner with Allah, verily, associating partner with Allah, is indeed a great wrong... give thanks to me (Allah) and your parents unto Me (Allah) is the final destination But if they (Parents) strive to make you associate partner with me... then, obey them not, but behave kindly to them in the world and follow the path of those who turn to Me (Allah) in repentance... O my son!

(Luqman continued) if it be anything equal to the weight of grain of mustard seed, and though it be in a rock, or in the heavens or in the earth, Allah will bring it forth... O my son establish *salat* (worship) enjoin virtues and forbid vices and bear patiently whatever befalls you. Verily, these are some of the important commandments. And turn not your face away with pride, nor walk arrogantly on earth. Verily, Allah does not like an arrogant boaster. And be moderate in your walking and lower your voice. Verily the harshest of all voices is the voice (braying) of the ass (*Qur'an* 31: 12-19).

In a nutshell; the counselling of Luqman contains a number of lessons for the youth. They include:

- (i) Avoidance of injustice. It is injustice to ascribe absolute authority to any source besides Allah.
- (ii) Appreciation of parental goodness through kindness and love to them and by implication the same things to others.
- (iii) Accountability to Allah.
- (iv) Discretion and responsibility. Love, appreciation and loyalty are no acceptable excuse for committal of offence or sins. A youth is with his/her full faculty (*Mukallaf*) and is thus liable for his/her deeds.
- (v) Association with virtues and virtuous ones.
- (vi) All secrets are open and shall ultimately be revealed, therefore do not hide under anonymity or illusion of secrecy to commit injustice or crime.
- (vii) Inculcation of art and act of worship. Submission totally to Allah
- (viii) Promotion of virtues
- (ix) Prevention of vices
- (x) Endurance and perseverance
- (xi) Humility and courtesy
- (xii) Moderation of emotion

With the enumerated qualities expected of youth, it is inexplicable that they be referred to as leaders of tomorrow, when indeed many of them are ready today to assume leadership roles.

A Contrastive Analysis of Luqmanic and U.N.O Models of Youth Development

Except in the area of details, the broad policies for youth development formulated by the United Nations are similar to the teachings of Islam and the model inferred from the admonition of Luqman to his child. There is however a major difference.

The Islamic model revolves around spiritual upbringing and character formation whereas the other model places no premium on character formation

and spiritual development. It is however important for Islamic nations to discharge faithfully their obligations as contained in the declaration. In addition universality of brotherhood as against nationalism which the UNO emphasises, is obvious from the Islamic model. The goal, in the Islamic model transcends mere worldly pleasure and indulgences.

While the UNO model devotes considerable attention to rectifying self-inflicted negative effects of its pleasure-driven 'development'; the Islamic model is preventive and deeply rooted in solid discipline and self-restraint.

Concluding Remarks

Certain agencies are the traditional institutions of socialization. They are the family, the peer group, the school, the mosque (religious community) and the society. Each has a role to play in the equipping the youth adequately for his challenges. Technology has since altered the hierarchy. The mass media have over-ridden all the traditional socialization agencies as a very important molder of the mind of the youths to be, right from their childhood. The values, customs and ethos of the traditional institutions are instantly eroded by the intruding attraction of the mass media and other modern communication devices.

Abdulaziz Sachedina observed that:

Television in particular has gone beyond its mandate to assist the family and the school in providing visual aid and education to the young. It has taken upon itself to appeal to the destructive and disintegrative instincts, to provoke greed, unlimited self-gratification, and absence of moral restraint in its young audience.⁸

One obvious implication of this development is that the youth wants to transform himself from his former state of absolute dependence on his parents and guardians to a state of absolute independence whereas interdependence is the appropriate and realistic method of survival. This trend creates counselling difficulties for those charged with youth development.

It is our candid view that the reviewed list of the influencing agencies must include the mass media and informational technology. In particular, the youth himself is an important factor in the moulding of own character and training. The socializing factors, in our view, include the mass media and information devices, the youth himself or herself, the family; the peers; the training and the exposure; the religion and the society.

It will be irrational for a society or family to assume that the discharge of her/his its responsibilities to the youth begin only when the youth attains the age of being youth. Certain responsibilities to the youth had to be discharged before the attainment of youth-age. Failure to live up to the responsibility

earlier can inflict irreversible damage on the youth. The responsibility of the society and the family to the youth predates even the birth of the youth. The parents' choice of spouse, the ordering of the society, the pre-natal, post-natal and childcares have roles to play in the development of the youth.

Technology has demolished the walls of homes, communities and nations to create a single global community. It is thus impossible for any family or community to successfully insulate and isolate its own youth from the corruptive tendencies of other parts of the globe. This poses a problem of redefinition of what constitutes the society. A concerted effort is required to moderate and control the excesses of permissive societies of the world. It is a collective responsibility if they would not contaminate the efforts of others. The United Nations and its agencies must re-appraise their indices of development. Immorality and untamed taste for pleasure can be (and are) counter - productive.

In order to successfully combat the menace of excessive materialism, drug abuse, promiscuity and their attendant destructive consequences on the youth, a network of activities across traditional boundaries, must be instituted. This is with a view to creating a common world order that is regulated by some moral ethics and divine regulations since no community is allowed by modern technology to remain an Island from the destructive influence of the other parts of the world.

The family, the school and the society must constantly create role-models for the youth. A nation, such as Nigeria, that promotes cheating in sporting activities through age falsification and gambling in the name of sport promotion⁹ would find it difficult to raise a morally upright youth who are necessary agents for National Development.

The mosque seems ill equipped by poor training of its leaders in many parts of the world to discharge its responsibilities to the Muslim youth. The noticeable tendency is towards ritualization of traditional reformatory devices such as sermon, *khutbah*, *Jum'ah* congregation, Quranic recitation (*tilawah*) propagation (*da'wah*), the school, *madrasah*, fasting and commemorative occasions such as 'Id festival, and *Haji* (pilgrimage). An integrative and demand-driven-curriculum for Imams and teachers are currently in urgent demand in many parts of the Islamic world, if the mosque is to play any significant role in Muslim youth development.

The traditional ideals of Islam in responsible parenthood which includes compatibility in marriage *kafa'ah*; child weaning, breast-feeding¹⁰, education and other child-care regulations should be derived, reviewed and energized for the discharge of the required parental responsibilities.

We must abandon the present curative approach to drug abuse and sexual misbehaviours in favour of the preventive mechanism institutionalised by Islam.

Notes and References

1. *National Youth Policy*, (Abuja: Federal Ministry of Youth and Women Affairs, 2001), p.3.
2. No. WCMRY 1998 of 12 August 1998.
3. See speech made by the minister of youth, Kuwait to the UNO in 1998.
4. *Implementation Strategy for the National Youth Policy*, (Abuja: Federal Government of Nigeria, 2001), p.21.
5. The council is focused on Yemen, Lebanon, Jordan and Morocco.
6. By its letter of August 20 1994 to the UNO.
7. Prophet Luqman.
8. A Sachedina, "Islam and Youth Development" unpublished address accessed on the Internet..
9. See *The News* vol 17 no. 15 of 15/10/2001, "Fraud in National interest," pp.43-45.
10. See the Quranic description of natural milk in *Qur'an* 16:66.