**TOPIC- OPEN: CATALYST FOR CHANGE**

**END SARS PROTEST AS A CASE STUDY**

**“The bird that flies off the earth and lands on an anthill is still on the ground."** This saying from the Igbo people captures the spirit of the 2020 #EndSARS demonstrations in Nigeria. It serves as a reminder that the fundamental concerns always important no matter how far one goes. This proverb offers a moving perspective through which to examine the important yet nuanced phenomena of openness displayed throughout the protests. The #EndSARS movement was sparked by the public's outrage over the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and served as a powerful illustration of the advantages and disadvantages of speaking out about systemic injustices.

The end sars protest started as an X sensation(formerly known as Twitter). It was an extraordinary display of civic courage and collective action. The Nigerian youth, fueled by years of brutality and corruption of the government and many security forces in the country, decided to step out into the streets, openly expressing their demand for justice and reform. This open display of unhappiness was not only a response to particular instances of police brutality; rather, it was a more general appeal for structural reform as well as accountability and transparency in government.

The protests were remarkable for their sheer scale and the unity they embodied. Imagine vast crowds gathering in major cities like Lagos, Abuja, Port-Harcourt, etc, their voices rising in unison against a common enemy. This collective openness was a potent tool for catalyzing change. Social media's ability to broadcast events in real time was vital in amplifying the voices of the demonstrators and turning local discontent into a worldwide uproar. The Yoruba proverb, “A child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth,” this proverb perfectly encapsulates the protesters' drive. They sought recognition and redress for their grievances, demanding that their plight be acknowledged and addressed.

Amid the chaos, there was an undeniable sense of empowerment among the demonstrators. When people come together openly, their collective strength becomes a force to reckon with. The protests evolved from mere outrage over police brutality to a

broader demand for comprehensive reform.

Additionally, the protests facilitated communication between the citizens and the government. Protests in public provided a forum for discussions on issues of governance and police reform. Pressuring the authorities to respond to the demonstrators' demands required this conversation. The #EndSARS protests' transparency or rather, openness played a crucial role in igniting long-suppressed and neglected conversations.

Despite the potential for positive change, the openness of the #EndSARS protests also exposed significant risks. The very visibility that magnified the protesters’ message also made them vulnerable to severe repercussions.

The violent repression that ensued was one of the most terrifying consequences. The very unfortunate Lekki Toll Gate shooting on October 20, 2020, where armed forces allegedly fired on unarmed protesters, was a tragic demonstration of the dangers inherent in public dissent. The brutal response from unknown forces or possibly compromised elements within the government highlighted the risks of open protest in a volatile environment. In addition to violence, the protests faced manipulation and division. The open nature of the demonstrations made them susceptible to infiltration by individuals or groups seeking to incite violence or create discord. Confusion and heightened tensions during the demonstrations were caused by infiltrators and false information, undermining the movement's objectives and provoking more turmoil.

Furthermore, the temporary nature of the impact caused a significant challenge. Despite the initial energy and widespread support, sustaining the drive for reform proved difficult. The initial fervor of the #EndSARS protests gradually waned, and the promised reforms were slow to materialize. This highlights the inherent difficulty in maintaining momentum and achieving lasting change in the face of opposition and disillusionment.

To conclude with, The #EndSARS protests were a profound illustration of the impact that openness can have on social and political movements. The citizens' willingness to openly express their dissatisfaction brought critical issues to the forefront and mobilized both local and global attention. The visibility and unity achieved through their openness were crucial in initiating dialogue and pushing for reform.

However, the violent response, manipulation, and the struggle to maintain momentum revealed the complexities and dangers associated with public dissent. The #EndSARS protests serve as a reminder that while openness is a powerful tool for highlighting injustices and driving action, it must be approached with caution.

As the Igbo proverb suggests, “When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you.” In order to make genuine progress, one must possess both the bravery to be honest and the strategic vision to manage the associated dangers. The #EndSARS movement has taught us that openness and dissent require a balanced strategy that addresses fundamental concerns and carefully considers the possible consequences of public participation.