

ROLE OF THE YOUTHS IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

It is axiomatic to posit that there is a linkage between youth and national development. This intercourse is not only symbiotically connected; but, one depends on the other for its sustenance. Therefore, the role of youth on national development can not be over emphasised. The wheel of development of any country lies on the shoulder of how productive and creative the youthful populations are. The youth in any society are the engine of growth and development; because, they provide the labour force for production of goods and service to take effect. And also, are the critical masses of people, whose action and inaction can develop or destroy the hegemonies/fabrics of their society. For example according to the 2006 census, the youthful population constituted over 70% of the population. So, therefore, this quantum of population is a great asset for the Nigerian state if they are harnessed and utilized in the right direction. Interestingly, the transition of society from one generation to another is critical to the formative and developmental aspiration of such society. That, is why society that prepare their youth for the sake of future aspiration will not only secure her future development; but, will prepare her next set of leaders with the challenges of national reconciliation and development. So, therefore, the role of youth on national development is sacrosanct to the whole developmental aspiration of any society. The youth are the cornerstone to societal rejuvenation. Societies are not only recreated through the youthful population, but, youth are often referring to as leaders of tomorrow. "The youths bulge represents both a challenge and an opportunity for development. For example, in Uganda it is estimated that the country needs to create over 600,000 new jobs per year for the next 12 years – equivalent to the total size of the formal employment sector at present. If this is not achieved, it will be impossible to reach the Millennium Development Goals targets, particularly on extreme poverty and hunger (MDG 1), child mortality (MDG 4), and environmental sustainability (MDG 7) (World Bank, 2010). Many of the youths who are productive and energetic remain unemployed, continue to suffer from poor health, and lack sufficient support. Some of them have special needs that require attention. These include those living on the streets, those living with HIV/AIDS, the girls and those with disabilities. It is perplexing to say, that, no nation will experience development when the preponderance of the population that constitutes the largest percentage of the population are idle and ineffective. So, therefore, the youths have a greater role to play on national development. It has been suggested that Nigeria could by 2030 reap the benefits of what some called a "demographic dividend" if it invest now in human development. Nigeria current

demographic structures could be future assets when a demographic window of opportunity opens as fertility and high youth dependency declines. The responsibility of ensuring that the aspirations and hopes of the youths are met lies with a multiplicity of stakeholders. Everyone in the community, both young and old, must play their role. So, their mindset and roles is of major importance to the development of any society. In fact, The Nigeria youths, not oil is the future of Nigeria in the 21st century the paper concludes.

Keywords: Youth and National Development, Unemployment and Underemployment, National Youth Policy, Social vices, Millennium Development Goals Targets and Youth Bulge.

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges facing governments and policymakers in Africa today is how to provide opportunities for the continent's more than 200 million youths so that they can have decent lives and contribute to the economic development of their countries. According to the United Nations (2010), Africa's 2011 population was estimated at 1.05 billion and is expected to double by 2050. Africa is the youngest continent in the world: About 70 percent of its population is 30 years of age or younger. In 2011, youths, who are defined here as those between 15 and 24 years of age, constituted 21 percent of the more than 1 billion people in Africa, whereas another 42 percent was less than 15 years old. Slightly more than half of the African youth population is female, and there are more rural dwellers than urban dwellers. With such a large proportion under 15 years of age, Africa's youth population is expected to grow in the years to come while the Youths population in other parts of the world shrinks (Gyimah-Brempong and Kimenyi, 2013:2).

Undoubtedly, the challenges for youths that are central to Africa's economic development are numerous and varied—they include employment, health and political participation. These issues differ among groups within countries (by gender, education level, ethnicity and health status), and across countries and regions. Conversely, the size, energy, enthusiasm, innovation and dynamism of youths are assets that can be harnessed for Africa's development with appropriate policies that deal adequately with the issues facing them.

Despite the elevated awareness of the challenges confronting Nigerian and Africa's youths noted by previous studies, several African countries like ours still do not seem to have developed comprehensive and effective policies to deal with the issues facing this large and growing segment of the African population or to have in place a means to assess the progress made. The purpose of this study is to advance the discussion of the problems facing youths in Africa by assessing whether African countries' existing youths policies can meet the challenges and how these policies can be improved to foster the continent's equitable and efficient development in general and Nigeria in particular.

Nearly 50% of the developing world population is youths and children. "There are 1.2 billion 15 to 24 year olds in the world and one billion live in developing countries. This is often referred to as the 'youths bulge' as young people constitute a high and peaking proportion of many populations. "The youths bulge represents both a challenge and an opportunity for development. For example, in Uganda it is estimated that the country needs to create over 600,000 new jobs per year for the next 12 years – equivalent to the total size of the formal employment sector at present. If this is not achieved, it will be impossible to reach the Millennium Development Goals targets, particularly on extreme poverty and hunger (MDG 1), child mortality (MDG 4), and environmental sustainability (MDG 7) (World Bank, 2009).

Kenyans in the age bracket 1- 30 years constitute 75% of the country's population, forming the largest source of human resource. However, they have remained on the periphery of the country's affairs and their status has not been accorded due recognition. They have been excluded from designing, planning and implementing programmes and policies that affect them.

Many of the youths who are productive and energetic remain unemployed, continue to suffer from poor health, and lack sufficient support. Some of them have special needs that require attention. These include those living on the streets, those living with HIV/AIDS, the girls and those with disabilities. The responsibility of ensuring that the aspirations and hopes of the youths are met lies with a multiplicity of stakeholders. Everyone in the community, both young and old, must play their role.

The National Youths Policy recognizes that the youths are a key resource that can be tapped for the benefit of the whole country. Thus, the policy endeavours to address issues affecting young people by including broad-based strategies that would provide the youth meaningful opportunities to realize their potential. The policy provides a broad framework within which all stakeholders, including the private and civil society, will contribute to youth development. An implementation mechanism is inbuilt in the policy.

This policy is prepared within the context of existing sectoral policies, national development plans, international policies and charters to which Kenya is a signatory; as central to the holistic integration and inclusion of the youths in Kenya's development. Cognizance is given to the Charter of United Nations, the Commonwealth Youths Charter, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations World Programme for the Youths to the year 2000 and beyond (UNESCO, 2011a,b,c,d and 2012).

The rest of the paper is structured as follows; Section 2 discusses the definitions and characteristics of African youths, including demographic and economic aspects, which provide insights into their challenges, although data are limited. Section 3 looks at importance and contributions of youths to national development in Nigeria. Section 4 addresses the challenges and constraints of the youths to meet the challenges. The study concludes in Section 5 with recommendations.

Contextualising Youth, Youth Profile and Development: the African/Nigeria Experience

Youth

There is no universal definition of the youth population. "Youths" is traditionally defined as a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. In the *African Youths Report 2009* (hereafter, the AYR) (UNECA 2009), "youths" are defined as people between 15 and 39 years of age. However, several African countries define their youth population differently. For example, Ghana, Tanzania and South Africa define the youth population as those between 15 and 35 years of age; Nigeria and Swaziland define it as those between 12 and 30 years; and Botswana and Mauritius define it as those between 14 and 25 years. These varying definitions of the youth population make it difficult to effectively discuss issues affecting youths in Africa generally and to compare information across countries. The age band used in the AYR is too wide because it is generally agreed that people in their 30s are adults, and hence not part of those youths who are in transition to adulthood. For statistical purposes, the United Nations (2011d) defines youths as those aged 15 to 24 years.

Although arbitrary, this is the age group that has been recognized internationally as "Youths." Though generally acceptable and preferable, its implementation often poses problems because the data for different countries are not provided using this definition. For example, population data are commonly presented in five-year age bands or presented for children (below 15 years) and for adults (15 years and above). Similarly, labor market data are typically presented for adults (16–64 years).

For statistical purposes, the UN defines youths as individuals between the ages of 15 and 24. Youths do not constitute a homogeneous group; their socio-economic, demographic and geographical situations vary widely both within and between regions. Notwithstanding these differences, regional-level analysis provides a general understanding of their development profile. Some 87 per cent live in developing countries and face challenges deriving from limited

access to resources, education, training, employment, and broader economic development opportunities (UNO, 2007).

The Youths are defined as persons resident in Kenya in the age bracket 15 to 30 years. This takes into account the physical, psychological, cultural, social, biological and political definitions of the term.

The youth policy defines the youths as all young persons of the ages 18-35 years. The youth population according to the 2006 is almost a hundred million. This means that they constitute the more than two thirds of the country's population of 140 million. They are the backbone of the development of the country. Indeed, if Nigeria is to be sustained as a viable entity there must be a very good plan to tap the energy and resourcefulness of the youth population to fast track economic development (Aiyede, nd).

This study adopts the United Nations' definition of youths. However, given the discussion above, in some situations we depart from the 15–24 year bracket because of data availability. One of the challenges of developing policies for youths is finding the appropriate data on the youth population in Africa because such data are not routinely collected by government agencies. This study relies on limited data from several sources, including the United Nations, the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Economic Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as well as national sources whenever possible.

The available data suggest that the youth population is large and growing, but there are limited data on gender and rural/urban distribution. The youth population in Africa is relatively large and is growing very fast. As shown by the UNO data, youths constitute about 20 percent of Africa's population. Thus, the absolute size of the continent's youths population is slightly above 200 million (in 2011, Africa's total population was estimated at about 1.05 billion). Although Asia has the largest youths population in the world because of its large total population, Africa is the region with the highest youth population relative to its entire population. Because Africa's population is relatively young (about 42 percent of Africa's population in 2010 was estimated to be below 15 years of age) and has a high fertility rate, the youths population in Africa is projected to grow very fast and is likely to remain high for a long period of time. Africa is the only global region where the proportion of the youth population increased between 1990 and 2010. This youth bulge has consequences for the development of Africa.

Although Africa's youth population is relatively large, throughout the continent there are regional and country differences in the size of the youth populations and in the rates at which these populations are likely to grow. The youths bulge is larger in North Africa than in Sub-Saharan Africa, but the growth of the youth population is likely to be higher in sub-Saharan Africa than in North Africa because of differences in the dynamics of the populations across regions and countries. Though the youth population is expected to reach a plateau in North Africa by 2030, in sub-Saharan Africa it is projected to grow in both absolute and relative terms until about 2050. There are differences in the rates of growth in the youth populations across countries as well. And though the relative sizes of the populations are expected to decrease in countries like Tunisia and Morocco by 2030, they are expected to continue to increase in countries like Kenya and Uganda. There are limited data on gender composition of the youths in Africa. However, if one assumes that the gender distribution of the youth population parallels that of the general population, then the youth population is composed of slightly more females than males (UNO, 2012).

Similarly, there are limited data on the distribution of the youth population between rural and urban locations. However, given the geographical distribution of the general population in Africa, a larger share of the continent's youth population resides in rural areas as opposed to urban areas and is more likely to be engaged in agricultural activities than in the modern

economic sector. In general, urban youths have better opportunities for education than their rural counterparts.

In the 1960s, the Government and other voluntary youth agencies did not target the youths in the development agenda. The Nigeria Government started the National Youths Service, in 1973 and has supported it to date. Most other youth programmes are largely social and recreational in nature. In addition, they are urban-based. The current Government has taken a keen interest in youth issues in its efforts for national integration. The problem of unemployment has continued to be a big challenge. The various National Development Plans of 1962-2014, while acknowledging the efforts made to address unemployment among the youths, warned that the problem would in future loom large.

Efforts to initiate youth development programmes have been made in other subsequent policy documents, such as SURE-P, promotion of Small Scale Enterprises, and the National Poverty Eradication Plan 1999-2015, among others. But, despite these efforts, as well as an increase in the number of agencies dealing with the youths, problems affecting young people have continued. This situation has been attributed to the lack of a comprehensive policy to provide a blueprint for youths. Youths organisations have come up with innovative programmes to address the youth's economic needs, health interventions, especially those aimed at reproductive health and alleviating the spread of HIV/AIDS among the youths, environmental programmes, character building programmes, literacy, vocational training, sports and recreational as well as social-cultural programmes.

However, the following constraints have hampered their effectiveness in achieving their objectives:

- i. Pressure from the high population growth: The high population growth, currently standing at 2.5% (2006), puts pressure on available resources as the number of young people keeps on rising.
- ii. Lack of appropriate skills: The 6-3-3-4 education system and tertiary training institutions continue to release thousands of graduates, who are neither properly equipped for entry into the labour market nor possess the necessary life skills.
- iii. Unclear and uncoordinated youth policies and programmes: While a number of Government Ministries and youths organisations have their own programmes and sectoral youths policies, lack of a national youth policy and effective co-ordination mechanisms hamper their effectiveness.
- iv. Resource Constraints: Most of the youth programmes, run by both the Government and non-governmental agencies lack adequate funds and equipment, which limits their success.
- v. Low status given to youths: Existing structures and prevailing attitudes do not provide an enabling environment for youths participation in decision-making, planning and implementation processes.

Development

Development is a contested concept. The concept development has been quite problematic as many attempts made by scholars to arrive at a concise and generally acceptable definition have seldom been distorted by individual prejudice and ideological proclivities (Okolie and Ajih, 2008). From its earliest concept to the 1960s as modernization, there have been competing meanings of development. When the modernization paradigm held sway, development was viewed as total transformation of a traditional or pre-modern society into the types of technology and associated social organisation that characterize the 'advanced' economically prosperous and politically stable nations of the western world (Moore 1963:89). In this wise the future of the developing world was already in existence and was seen in the form of the advanced western societies of the United States and Europe (Aiyede, nd). Modernization theories Rostow (1960), Coleman (1968), Pye (1966) among others perceive development largely in relation to economic growth and transformation of existing

infrastructural and structural facilities. This school of thought contends that development refers to the capacity of a nation's economy, which initial condition had been more or less static overtime, begins to generate and sustain annual increase in Gross National Product (GNP) at the rate of 5%-7% or more and income per capita benefit of which will invariably extend to all segment of the society (Todaro and Smith, (2004) in Nwanegbo (2006). This view was later challenged by several schools of thought not in terms of the goal of development but in terms of whether it was achievable as envisaged by the modernization school. For the modernization school development was achievable by the application of rational management techniques and planning.

However, scholars like Seers (1969, 1977), Mabognuje (1981:6), Nnoli (1981), Ake (1972), Rodney (1982), Okolie (2001, 2003) among others disassociated from the above modernist perspective. They contend that modernists glossed over human factors as critical issues in development. These scholars fundamentally perceive people as an essential ingredient in development. However, others perceive man as both the object and subject of development.

In this regard, Okolie (2003) conceives development as man directed and propelled socio-economic and political transformation of self and entire structure of a given political system from a comparatively low or present level to a more qualitatively and remarkably improved form. These transformations have their primary objective as the improvement of the living conditions and material standing of the citizenry. As a corollary to the above, UNDP (2004) report indicate that people are the real wealth of nations. Indeed, the basic purpose of development is to enlarge human freedoms. The process of development can expand human capabilities by expanding the choices that people have to live full and creative lives. And people are both the beneficiaries of such development and the agents of the progress and change that bring it about (UNDP) Human Development Report, (2004:127). Therefore, in as much as man has natural affinity for improvement and strives hard to achieve improvement, the above named centered perception of development by scholars captures the view of the researchers in conceptualizing development in the context of Youths and National Development in Nigeria.

The dependency school forcefully maintained that the global economic structures make development unachievable by periphery. In the last two decades also saw the shift from the view of the state as the central agency of development to a view that perceived the market and the private sector as the engine of development. At the centre of these debate is the generation of prosperity and the spread of these prosperity to a majority of the population of a country, the role of the state in the process, the cost of the social and environmental transformation that it entails, as well as the distribution of the burden among the various strata of society. Generally development related to the human capacity to improve the quality of life by transforming the way production and other human activities are carried out in order to eradicate poverty, unemployment and social inequalities. Dudley Seers (1972) defines economic development as the progressive elimination of poverty, unemployment and inequality while Arnarya Sen (1999) places emphasis on the concepts of capacities and entitlements (or social rights). In general development has six components according to Goulet 1992. These are:

An economic component dealing with the creation of wealth and improved conditions of material life, equitably distributed;

A social ingredient measured as well-being in health, education, housing and employment;

A political dimension including such values as human rights, political freedom, enfranchisement, and some form of democracy;

A cultural dimension in recognition of the fact that cultures confer identity a self-worth to people;

A full-life paradigm, which refers to meaning systems, symbols and beliefs concerning the ultimate meaning of life and history; and

A commitment to ecologically sound and sustainable development so that the present generation does not undermine the position of future generations.

Conceived in this manner development is a comprehensive process that is underlined by values both in terms of its goals, process and sustenance. Indeed, at the centre of development is human agency with both individual and social dimensions. Also very critical is the implicit assumption that the state system provides the essential framework for the development of peoples in our contemporary world. Accordingly efforts have been made to identify the key elements of the state system that engender development. These elements can be teased out of the elaborate debate around the idea of the developmental state. A cursory review of the literature reveals that states that have succeeded in engendering the development of their societies from the advanced countries of the west to the new industrialized state of Asia, are states that are able to clearly set development objectives and establish the institutional structures to achieve those objectives. Such states are able to form alliances with key social groups in society that helps it to achieve its developmental goals. This usually involves establishing a programmatic relationship between citizens and political parties. Programmatic politics are based on collective deliberation on public issues and are characterised by dense networks of civic associations. This helps to generate consensus and create stability in the political system. On the other hand is clientelistic politics, which is based on the award of personal favours; and at times coercion. Under such a dispensation, voters make their choices on the basis of primordial factors such as religion, ethnicity, race and personality, rather than alternative developmental programmes. The youths have a role to play in this process as social strata with its own organisations and other resources. The place and importance of the Youths in the development process is aptly described by the Nigerian National Youths Policy in this way:

Youths are one of the greatest assets that any nation can have. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the future leaders, they are potentially and actually the greatest investment for a country's development. They serve as a good measure of the extent to which a country can reproduce as well as sustain itself. The extent of their vitality, responsible conduct, and roles in society is positively correlated with the development of their country (FGN, 2001).

National Development

The term national development is a term that refers to a sustainable growth and development of a nation to a more desirable one. National development is people oriented and its success is evaluated in terms of the impact it has had in improving the lot of the masses. In defining the concept, the Third National Development plan of 1980s says;

True development must mean the development of man, the unfolding and realization of his creative potentials, enabling him to improve his material conditions of living through the use of resources available to him. It is a process by which man's personality is enhanced, and it is that enhanced personality creative, organized and disciplined-which is the moving force behind the socioeconomic transformation of any society (FGN, 1980).

According to Onabajo and M'Bayo (2009), says 'national development should be man oriented and not institution oriented, that is, individually in collectiveness and not individual. To Elugbe, (1994), 'national development refers among other things, to the growth of the nation in terms of unity, education, economic well-being and mass participation in government. In summary development entails the provision of all the necessary materials and equipments that will guarantee that man in every society make a living and essence out of life.

Anaeto and Anaeto (2010) citing Todaro and Smith (2003), identified three objectives of development which are;

1. Increase availability and widen the distribution of basic life sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health and protection. 2. To raise levels of living in addition to higher incomes, the provision of more jobs, better education, and greater attention to cultural and human values, all of which will serve not only to enhance material well-being but also to generate greater individual and national self esteem and 3. To expand the range of economic and social choices available to individuals and nation by freeing them from servitude and dependence, not only in relation to other people and nation states but also to the forces of ignorance and human misery.

Development is the socio-cultural, political, economic and the spiritual well being of a society. In a truly developed state there is assurance of good quality of life, exercise of all human rights, and freedom to participate in the democratic process. From the foregoing, development implies enhanced quality of life, equity and justice, as it takes into consideration the wellbeing, growth and advancement of individuals within the society.

Importance of Youths in National Development

The Role of the Youths in Human Capital Development

The potentially important role of youths in Africa's development cannot be overemphasized. Youths could be a source of labor inputs as well as human capital in production, which would improve total factor productivity in a region of the world where capital formation is limited. When employed, youths could be a reliable source of demand for the economy through their consumption activities. In addition, the youths of Africa could be critical for the development of a new class of entrepreneurs that African countries need to prosper. Furthermore, Africa has an opportunity to harness a "demographic dividend": With the projection that most countries in Africa will have more working-age adults per child in 2030 than in 2006, there will be a large workforce supporting fewer children and the elderly. This trend would result in a lower dependency burden, freeing up resources for development; see, for example, Ashford (2007).

Almost half of the world's population is under age 25. Although youths between ages 15 and 24 are in greatest need of sexual and reproductive health services, those who are younger will quickly come of age and share these same needs. The size of the population ages 15 to 24 is currently 1.2 billion and is expected to continue growing for at least 20 more years. With the swelling wave of young people, access to reproductive health information and services becomes critical so that they can choose the number of children they want and can obtain the information and services to avoid unplanned pregnancy, HIV, and STIs. With this knowledge, youths are better able to make choices that support the pursuit of educational goals and the development of life skills necessary for national and local leadership positions. Ignoring the reproductive and sexual health of youths today will have dire global consequences for decades (UNO, 2011).

According to UNO each day, about 6,000 youths are infected with HIV—the majority of whom are young women in developing countries. Each year youths also experience more than 100 million new cases of sexually transmitted infections, which increase their risk of HIV. Young women have high rates of unintended pregnancy—as many as 40 percent of adolescent pregnancies in Latin America and the Caribbean are unintended, as are between 11 percent and 77 percent of pregnancies among teens in sub-Saharan Africa. In low- and middle-income countries, complications from pregnancy are the leading cause of death among young women ages 15 to 19, and their maternal death rates are twice as high as for older women. Providing youths with access to reproductive health education, services where they are welcomed, and accurate and comprehensive information will empower them to make healthy decisions.

The Role of Youths in Peace Building

Youths occupy a prominent place in any society. Apart from being the owners and leaders of tomorrow, they outnumber the middle-aged and the aged (Onyekpe, 2007). Besides

numerical superiority, youths have energy and ideas that are society's great potentials (Onyekpe, 2007). The National Youths Development Policy asserts that:

Youths are the foundation of a society. Their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides in economic development and socio-political attainments. In their dreams and hopes, a nation finds her motivation; on their energies, she builds her vitality and purpose. And because of their dreams and aspirations, the future of a nation is assured (FGN, 2001: 1).

The statement above acknowledges the role of the youths in the peace and security of a nation. As the most active segment of any society, youths are the major determiners of peace and stability of a nation (Ozohu-Sulaiman, 2006). Conversely, the degree of disorderliness and instability in society is also determined in part by youths. Peace is a precursor of development. The absence of peace means that no meaningful development can take place. The National Youths Policy affirms that the extent of the youth's *"responsible conduct and roles in society is positively correlated with the development of their country"*. (FGN, 2001:1)

According to Eberly and Gal (2007), young people in national youths service organizations can play a vital role in post war community reconstruction, in maintaining peace in tense situations, and perhaps in preventing post-conflict squealed. Nigeria offers an excellent example of the utility of youthful participation in effecting post-conflict reconciliation. In the late 1960s Nigeria was plunged into civil war when one region – called Biafra – tried to break away from the rest of the country. The attempted breakaway can be traced directly to the fact that Nigeria is not a natural country, formed from within. Rather, its borders were drawn by the European powers meeting in Berlin late in the 19th century. They divided people of common language and culture, and they joined people of different cultures.

Biafra failed in its effort to secede, but Nigeria decided it must endeavor to foster national unity. University students and other youth groups called for a national youths scheme, whose first project would be providing relief in war-torn areas. The Committee of Vice-Chancellors called for one year of service by all university students following their first year. After much debate and considerable controversy, Head of State General Yakubu Gowon issued a decree in 1973 creating the National Youths Service Corps (NYSC) to develop "common ties among the youth of Nigerian and to promote national unity."

In Nigeria in 1962 I dropped in on a biology class in a high school in Benin being taught by a Peace Corps volunteer. I was enthralled by his description of the disease kwashiorkor – as were his students – and stayed for the whole class period. Only a few teachers I had had over the years measured up to his standard. In 2004 I dropped in on a high school geography class in Ikenne being taught by a member of the National Youths Service Corps and was equally impressed. I also met with 16 other NYSC cadets serving in the same area; all were from other parts of Nigeria, most were teachers, a few worked in village administration and one was a physician. All were serving in the fields in which they received their university degrees. (Eberly, 1990)

The NYSC requires all university graduates to serve for one year in a part of the country different from where they grew up. Following a quasi-military orientation period, Corps members are posted to their places of assignment where they are expected not only to work for eleven months in a regular job, but also to initiate community development projects in the areas they serve. Corps members serve in their professional areas. Agricultural graduates advise farmers on crops and pesticides, while English majors teach high school English. The government provides stipends for them. After service, Corps members are brought together again to discuss their experiences, participate in a parade, and receive Certificates of National Service that entitle them to be employed in Nigeria. Although neither entering members nor

their families like postings to distant parts of Nigeria, a study of ex-Corps members posted away from home showed that in retrospect, only one in ten viewed the experience as negative, with the rest judging it positive (Enegwea, 1993).

Although the Nigerian case is perhaps the most direct example of utilizing youth participation to foster post-conflict reconciliation, service by young people appears to be a common element in the various patterns of building post-conflict civil societies.

The Role of Youths in Community Based and Faith Based Organisations

In most rural areas in Nigeria, various types of community based organisations exist. But the thriving organisations now are the ones formed by youths. In the southern part of Nigeria, youths community based organisations have been in existence. It has also emerged in Northern Nigeria especially among the Christian based communities. Efforts are being made to encourage the Youths Muslim Ummah to integrate into the formation of youths based community organizations. But the essence of the formation of the Youthss community based organisation is to supplement government efforts in community development projects. These organisations are the closest to the people at the grassroots level, because the organisations are formed by the members of the community themselves.

Like any other community based organisations, youths community based organizations enhance community development through:

- Development, promotion and implementation of development projects sustainable for the benefit of their communities.
- Mobilising members of the community for national development.
- Strengthening community resources management.
- Improving the general skills of youthss to be productive.
- Promoting a sustainable human development
- Encouraging the participation of the marginalised communities in the promotion of rural development that affects them.
- To ensure proper accountability of the community resources (Ayuba, 2012).

Youths and Self-Help Projects in Nigeria

In an effort to accelerate rural development through youths participation cannot be over emphasized as youths are deeply involved in self-help projects in various local governments in Nigeria especially projects that involve Trade, Commerce, Home Economics, Small and Medium Term Enterprises and Agriculture. These self-help projects can be classified into two: Government Aided Projects (GAP) and Non-Government Aided Projects (NGAP). Government aid projects are those executed with the assistance of the government in either finance or material resources while non-government aid projects are those executed solely with collective effort of community members.

In recent time, youths have realised the importance of self-help projects in improving the way of life and living standards of their communities. Such self-help is collective efforts of the community to ensure that their efforts are based on their initiatives to achieve maximum benefit with or without the assistance of government.

Some of the contributions of youths in community development projects include:

1. Educating the rural community on the use of improved seeds or farming techniques through the Young Farmers Club.
2. Clearing and draining of drainages/culverts
3. Sinking of ordinary dug-out wells
4. Renovation of clinics, health centres/dispensaries in the rural areas
5. Construction of rural feeder roads
6. Assistance to the less privileged in the society and
7. Other community programmes include; Youth clubs enlighten fellow youths and women on HIV/AIDS, Women and Children trafficking, child labour and VVS.

Youths and Political Development

While discussing the role of youths in contemporary political participation and development, there are certain underpinning assumptions (Suleiman, 2006). Firstly, we are assuming a political system that is endowed with a significant proportion of its youthful population who are highly informed and consensitized. Secondly, we are also assuming an organized youth with clearly defined objectives and a variety of legitimate methods to make input in the political process. Thirdly, we are assuming a political system with sufficient public space that allows for unfettered citizens participation and robust engagement in the governance process. Meanwhile, the degree of these variables in the Nigerian political system is at best measured and sometimes highly debatable, it has been observed generally that over twelve years of democratic experiment has created opportunity for actors in the civil society, or what social entrepreneurial scholars now call 'citizens sector' to take on their role in the political participation process (Bornstein, 2005).

In a recent research on government – civil society partnership in Nigeria, it was observed that: "Civil society groups are reaching out and trying to work with various government agencies and parastatals in efforts to build their capacity for service delivery and be accountable to citizen" (Chukwuma, 2005:15).

Given this opportunity, the Nigerian youths is currently faced with the task of redefining its role in the democratization process. The mission statement of the National Youth Policy is treated here as a point of departure in articulating the role expectation of Nigerian youth in the political participation process. The document stated as follows:

The present administration, having given due consideration to the significance of the youths in socio-political, economic and sustainable development, has found it most desirable, necessary and urgent to initiate this National Youths Development Policy so that there will be a purposeful, focused, well-articulated and well-directed effort aimed at tapping the energy and resourcefulness of the youths and harnessing them for vitality, growth and development of the country well into the 21st century (National Youths Political Reform Conference, 2005:17).

In the light of the foregoing, the crucial issue of creating an enabling environment for the youths to bring their productive capacity and resourcefulness to bear on the political and developmental process should be accorded priority attention. Given the right climate therefore, the following are considered as the role-expectation of Nigerian youths in the political and developmental process (Suleiman, 2006). First, the youths should parade itself as agents of political socialization. By political socialization, we mean the way in which political values are formed and the political culture is defused in the society. This socialization process ultimately determines how individuals form their political attitudes, and thus, collectively, how citizens form their political culture (Almond, 1963). In Nigeria today, the level of political culture is not sufficient enough to support our democracy. No thanks to more than two decades of military dictatorship during which the civil society was considerably militarized and civic engagement perverted (Osha, 2000).

In Nigeria, experience has shown that the youth often provides the manpower requirements for general elections. Rather than succumb to the unwholesome man oeuvres of selfish and bankrupt politicians to pervert the process of elections, by way of hugger and rigging, the youths should exhibit good conscience and insist on due process and fair play. We have in Nigeria also, an array of youth organizations with diverse and varied interest. They can begin to explore the political space to influence the decision-making process. Recent studies have proved that:

Unless young people are consulted and involved in the design of developmental strategies they are not necessarily going to be youths-relevant or accurately (sic) factor in the contribution of youths to national political

and sustainable developmental process. Participation of young people in decision-making concerns more than integrating young peoples' issue into existing policy paradigm (Amanda, 2003:6).

Active participation in governance at all levels including local government level is another process. Through which the youths can make their impact in the political and developmental process. The learning process that is so fundamental to political maturity must start from the grass-root. Grass-root politics will afford the youths the opportunity to identify with the masses, appreciate their problems and master the terrain. In a nascent democracy like in Nigeria, grass-root apprenticeship rather than glorified 'messenger' under the tutelage of bankrupt and greedy political godfathers, offer the best training ground for the youth (Suleiman, 2006).

Finally, given their vulnerability, the youth has the greater responsibility to promote peace, security, stability and national unity. Through their political education and public enlightenment campaign, through their policy advocacy, and their active involvement in the electoral process, they can build bridges of understanding across ethnic groups, across political affiliations and religious divide. Democracy and good governance can only be nurtured and sustained in an environment of peace, security and stability. Where these are lacking, it is not only democracy and good governance that suffer, but also social progress and the future of the youths is seriously compromised (Suleiman, 2006).

Issues Impinging on the Youths on National Development

The socioeconomic and political environment in Nigeria poses a great challenge to the youths. Economic and social statistics present a somber picture that leaves much to be desired. Almost half a century after flag independence, the economy continues to be dominated by the primary sector – agriculture, oil and minerals. This is partly because the country has not been able to create an environment for high value added economic activities. There is low domestic capital formation and declining direct foreign investment, with the exemption of the oil and gas sectors, until recently very heavy indebtedness, high unemployment and the informalisation of the economy where the majority of its people live in poverty. Nigeria performs very poorly in terms of global economic competitiveness. The country lacks basic social and physical infrastructure. As a result, most people on the country have no access to basic services such as potable water, electricity, good sanitation, roads and healthcare. All of this is coupled with a high illiteracy rate, especially among women. The lack of access to basic medical care occurs against a backdrop of ravaging diseases; a situation which has become exacerbated with the advent of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The country's underdevelopment has been reinforced by authoritarianism, political instability, ethnic and religious conflicts in the last decade. Even almost a decade after the return to democratic rule palpable misgovernance is marked by exclusion of the people from governance, non-accountability of public officials, lack of transparency in decision-making, electoral fraud and the colonialisation and personalisation of the state and national resources by the political elite. This situation presents particular challenges for the Nigerian youths.

There are several reasons why youths could become an integral part of Africa's economic growth and development. First, they tend to be more educated than their older cohorts. Therefore, they can better absorb new technologies and ideas and adapt them to the African environment. Second, they tend to take more risks than their older counterparts. Finally, they are more likely to challenge certain norms and sociopolitical processes that may be hindering economic development. The challenge to African policymakers is how to harness young people's desire for change that has the potential to translate into positive outcomes.

The consequences of not fully developing and harnessing youth's potential could be dire, including significant economic losses, armed conflict, and political and social upheaval and instability—as demonstrated recently by the Arab Spring. Youths are more likely to become

frustrated because of legitimate grievances, including a lack of employment opportunities, low educational attainment, little participation in decision making and low social mobility. In this volatile context, greedy and opportunistic politicians could even exploit these grievances by involving these frustrated youths in violent overthrows of legitimate governments—creating massive instabilities that could limit the economic growth of Africa's countries (see Collier and Hoeffler 2004). Specifically these challenges are discussed below:

Unemployment and underemployment

Youths are unemployed. Approximately 70 million young people are unemployed worldwide. The economic growth rate has not been sufficient to create enough employment opportunities to absorb the increasing labour force of about 500,000 annually. Only about 25% of youths are absorbed, leaving 75% to bear the burden of unemployment. Furthermore, some of those absorbed in the labour market have jobs that do not match their qualifications and personal development goals.

Health related problems

Youths are susceptible to disease. Young people ages 15-24 have the highest infection rates from HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. The youths face a myriad of health related problems, including widespread malaria, malnutrition, HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), drug and substance abuse as well as poor access to health services. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is more prevalent among the youths under 30 years of age. Available statistics show that the youths make up 33% of Kenyans infected with Aids. Female genital mutilation and teenage pregnancy are unique to the female youths. Some of the consequences of these are dropping out of school and risks to life through unsafe abortions.

Increasing school and college drop-out rates

According to United Nations Youths are under-educated. In the developing world, nearly one-third of youths are illiterate. In the least-developed countries, only 13% of girls and 22% of boys enroll in secondary education. Many youths drop out of school and college due to the high cost of education and increase in overall poverty levels, poor returns on investment in education and lack of a re-admission policy for teenage mothers, among other reasons.

Crime and deviant behaviour

Youths are frustrated. Evidence suggests that youths with few economic prospects and limited political voice are more inclined to be radical, fundamentalist, revolutionary, or to abuse drugs or commit suicide. Due to idleness, especially after formal education, the youths become restless and try anything. Some end up in crime or with deviant behaviour.

Limited sports and recreation facilities

Sports and recreation facilities provide the youths with an opportunity to socialize and spend their time productively, strengthening and developing their character and talents. However, such facilities are scarce and, where they exist, they are sometimes not accessible to the youths.

Abuse and exploitation

Owing to their vulnerability, the youths are exposed to sexual abuse, child labour and other forms of economic exploitation under the guise of employment and support. There is currently little protection from the authorities.

Limited participation and lack of opportunities

Youths become parents. About 17 million women ages 15-19 give birth every year and have more children than women who start childbearing later. The risk of birth complications is 25 times higher for girls under age 15 and two times higher for those between ages 15-19. Despite their numerical superiority, youths are the least represented in political and economic spheres due to societal attitudes, socio-cultural and economic barriers, and lack of proper organization.

Limited and poor housing

Many youths, especially those in the urban areas, do not have access to decent housing in environments that favour healthy living.

Limited access to information and communication technology (ICT)

The youths cannot exploit career, business and education opportunities available because they lack access to ICT, due to unavailability especially in rural areas, and high costs.

Recommendations

Many global problems have a particularly strong impact on youths. In some cases, such as the spread of HIV/AIDS or frustration due to political disenfranchisement, these problems have far-reaching consequences. Focusing on youths will substantially boost efforts by Nigeria and other nations to:

- 1 Stop the spread of, and heal the suffering, caused by HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases;
- 2 Create a stable global economic system that equitably benefits people in all nations, both poor and rich;
- 3 Promote political stability based on participation and human rights;
- 4 Limit the number of economic and war-related refugees and internally displaced people;
- 5 Stem the tide of fundamentalism, terrorism, and hatred;
- 6 Moderate population growth;
- 7 Promote equal rights for women.

Conclusion

Nearly half of all people in the world today are under the age of 25. Effectively addressing the special needs of these youths is a critical challenge for the future. Youths, individuals between the ages of 15 and 24, make up over one-sixth of the world's population, but are seldom recognized as a distinct group for the important role they will play in shaping the future.

More than any other group, today's young women and men will impact how people in rich and poor countries live in the 21st century. Unfortunately, hundreds of millions of youths—especially young women—lack education, skills and job training, employment opportunities, and health services effectively limiting their futures at a very early age. As a result, youths may react by unleashing risky or harmful behavior against themselves or society.

Although youths may often be perceived as contributing to society's problems, they are, in fact, important assets for the economic, political, and social life of their communities. Addressing key global threats—like the spread of HIV/AIDS, growing poverty, and political stability in developing countries—depends on protecting the rights of youths and providing them with the support they need to contribute to the health and well-being of society. This fact sheet outlines the major challenges facing youths and highlights policy and program recommendations in the key issue areas of education and training, economic opportunities, and health and sexuality.

The study found that policies to address the challenges facing youths have not resulted in a great deal of success. We attribute the failures to a number of factors including the inadequacy of information about youths that is necessary in the design of policy, weak coordination amongst government agencies, donors, regional organizations, and the failure to design specific policies that are suited to deal with the problems of African youths.

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