

YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

BY

JEREMIAH TERSUR VAMBE

Abstract

According to 2006 Census the youthful population constitute over 70 percent of Nigeria's population. Therefore, this quantum of population is a great asset for national development if they are harnessed and utilized in the right direction. However, events over the years have shown that attention by successive governments to youth has not been sufficient and more needs to be done considering the role they can play in development. The paper made use of secondary data which was obtained mainly from documentary sources such as textbooks, Journal articles, official gazettes, conference papers and internet. The data generated was analyzed using content analysis. Findings revealed that youth in Nigeria are pushed to the edge of the society and prevented from participating fully in national development by virtue of their limited political inclusion, high levels of poverty; and limited access to health systems, educational opportunities and decent jobs. The paper concludes that Nigerian youth if properly equipped with requisite intellectual, moral, social and other relevant skills can provide leadership in Agriculture, Industry, Government and economic development projects. The paper recommends that deliberate efforts should be made by government at all levels to improve access to quality health care; provide the youth with new ways of thinking, creating, promoting quality education; and with science, technology and innovation systems that can offer new knowledge, allowing them to participate fully in national development.

Key Words: *Youth Participation, National Development, Empowerment, Skills, Exclusion.*

Introduction

The youth have a crucial role to play in Nigeria's National development. While it is believed that the quality and commitment of leadership is the most crucial ingredient to growth and development, it is clear and evident that if effectively mobilized, Nigerian youth can be potential to stimulate economic growth, social progress and overall national development. A critical knowledge of the Nigerian institutional landscape would reveal that the youth have been caught between the devil of educational system that despises entrepreneurship, leading to mounting unemployment, and the deep blue sea of a constricting economy that deprives the youth self-reliant initiatives. This no doubt limits the contribution of youth to national development. Despite the elevated awareness that involvement of the youth policy decisions at all levels can enhance in national development, noted by previous studies, successive governments in Nigeria still do not seem to have developed effective measures to deal with the issues facing this large and growing segment of the country's population or to have in place a means to assess the progress made. The purpose of this study is to examine the problems facing youths in Nigeria and assess how their limited participation in the designing, planning, implementation, assessment and evaluation of policies and programmes affect national development in Nigeria. The paper is divided into five sections. Section one provides an introduction and states the objectives of the paper. Section two reviewed related literature on youth and youth participation. The section also explains the methodology employed by the

paper to generate and analyze data. Section three examines the relevance of youth participation to national development. Section four examines the challenges to youth participation in Nigeria; and section five consists of conclusion and recommendations.

Objectives

The aim of this paper is to achieve the following:

- (i) To examine specific areas of youth participation in national development.
- (ii) To identify the factors that prevents young people in Nigeria from participating fully in national development.
- (iii) To determine the extent to which inability of youth to fully participate in decision making and implementation affects national development in Nigeria.
- (iv) To recommend measures that can be adopted by government at all levels in Nigeria to enhance the capacity of youth to participate fully in national development.

Literature Review: Youth and Youth Participation

Youth

The United Nations General Assembly has defined ‘youth’ as the age between 15 and 24. However, there is no single agreed definition of whom and what constitutes youth and definitions vary between countries and organizations. For example, the lowest age range for youth is 12 in Jordan and the upper age range is 35 in a number of African countries including Sierra Leone and Rwanda (Social Development Direct, 2009). The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF use the term ‘adolescent’ for those aged between 10-19, ‘youth’ for those between ages 15-24, and ‘young people’ for those within ages 10-24. There is also a degree of overlap between international definitions of ‘youth’ and ‘children’, with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defining a child as everyone under the age of 18, unless under the law applicable to the child, maturity is attained earlier. According to Mokwena, (2003) youthful age may vary amongst sexes, varying between the ages of 13-16 years for male and between 11-14 years for the female.

The pan-African Youth Chatter (2006) defines youth or young as ‘every human being between the ages of 15 and 30 years’. This corresponds with the English convention which classifies the period of youth as falling within the ages of 15 to 30 years (William-west 2007). The peculiarity of the Nigerian situation has led to the invention of social and economic definitions, which treat youth as a thing of the mind and so admits people up to the age of 40 years and beyond. Economically, the lateness of the period of independence for the average young Nigerian leaves them socializing in the realm of youth for as long as they remain dependent on their parents or guardians and this could be well beyond the age of 30.

In practice, youth is better understood as a transitional stage in life between childhood and adulthood, rather than as a rigid construct based on age. This new life stage can be characterized as a period of semi-autonomy, when young people experiment with adult roles but do not fully commit to them (World Bank, 2007; Soyombo, 1994). There is a growing literature on the transition to adulthood and what it means to become an adult in different cultural contexts. Achievement of adulthood can be determined by various factors such as achieving economic independence, leaving the parental home, getting married and having children. In some societies, particular social or cultural rituals may also mark the transition to adulthood. Many countries see youth as ending at the age when a person is given equal treatment under the law—often referred to as the ‘voting age’. In many countries this happens when the young person is 18 years old. After this age, the young person is considered adult. In spite of the disparity in these views, it is generally agreed that youth is the period that marks the physical, psychological

and social transformation into adulthood. Based on this characterization, many government policies consider to include people aged 13 to 25 years old (William-west, 2007).

It is important to recognize that “youth” is not a homogenous construct, but encapsulates several different experiences and diversities, for example according to gender, class, disability, ethnicity, education and provenance (e.g. region, rural/urban). In some of the literature, “youth” is used as shorthand for young men and the potential threat posed by male youth. Young women can be invisible and doubly disadvantaged, and are left out of many youth-focused interventions in part because they are not perceived to represent a threat. In some cultures, female youth as a category scarcely exists, for example in Darfur females become women when they menstruate, before which point they are considered girls. Sommers (2006a) has also noted that in many contexts, motherhood tends to alter the social status of female youth far more than fatherhood changes the lives of male youth.

It is important however to maintain that despite the debates, the most vital point is that the youth are indispensable facet of any given society. The task of developing them to enhance their participation in societal growth rests squarely on the shoulder of the state that beholds them.

Youth Participation

Youth participation is the involvement of young persons in socio-economic and political processes of the society in every aspect-social, economic, political- and at different levels-community, country and international (National Youth Policy, 2001). Youth participation is borne of out of the realization that the youth constitute a significant proportion of the population and also possesses enormous energy and capability that need to be harnessed.

Youth participation represents a progressive perspective on the role of young people in the society. The young people are no longer passive recipients of social and political transformation. They are stakeholders with vested interests and role in the exercise of power at all levels of the society. Thus, youth participation would require full inclusion of the young people in socio-political and economic life of the society.

The objective of youth participation is to ensure that all young persons have access to the skills and opportunities they require to make a living, become responsible citizens and contribute to progress in the communities. Youth participation is therefore concerned with social transformation and inclusion: nurturing compassionate, sustainable and equitable societies. The major elements of youth participation are:

- (i) Equalization of power relations between young people and adults at institutional level, including the school, family, religious and governmental structures. It entails nurturing of more horizontal relationship between young people and adults in institutional and non-institutional settings.
- (ii) Right to participate as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as well as the 1999 constitution. The CRC in particular has provided that children will no longer be regarded as ‘not- yet-persons (UNOWA, 2006)’.
- (iii) Youth as citizens who should share in the burdens and benefits of citizenship, which entails full inclusion in society through education and political life.
- (iv) Involvement in formal decision-making process in schools, community bodies, programmes, national government and international bodies. It is about having adequate mechanisms to ensure that young people are always at the table to represent the ideas and feelings of their peers in a real way.

- (v) Adequate policies and programmes designed to ensure economic and social integration of those marginalized and those outside the social mainstream.
- (vi) Social transformation that nurtures compassionate, sustainable and equitable societies (Burkey, 1993).

The foregoing implies that youth participation is an essential part of human growth involving the development of self-confidence, pride, initiative, creativity, responsibility, cooperation. It is a situation whereby people learn to take charge of their lives and solve their own problems. It is indeed, the essence of development (Mokwena, 2003). In more specific terms youth participation is a process which ensures that those at the risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live. It ensures that they have a greater involvement in decision making which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights (Hache and Cullen, 2010).

In Nigeria, promotion and encouragement of young people to fully participate in national development has become a slogan often used by the political leadership especially, since the return to democratic rule in 1999. The reality of youth participation in Nigeria shows that there is a gulf between ideal and reality. In practice, young people do not have a voice in the determination of policies or programmes beyond youth policies, and they lack adequate representation in structures that shape the society, including those that discuss matters that affect them directly. Even the right to participate is dwarfed by the absence of legal framework and innovations. There is the absence of progressive policies in such critical areas like voting and youth representation in political structures including parliament. Most of the youth are marginalized and excluded in social and economic matters. The social condition of youth is made more pathetic by social disadvantages such as poverty, unemployment, and diseases (Vambe, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted Gabriel Almond's structural functionalism as its framework of analysis. In his search for a functional theory of the polity, Almond proceeds from the point of view that every society is a system with inter-related parts (Uhunmwangho and Ogbator, 2013). A system is defined as an entity made up of interconnected and interrelated parts. Organized human society fits into this connotation of system, herein referred to as the social system (Varma, 2003). The basic assumption of the theory is that, for a social system to survive and maintain its going concern, a certain degree of order and stability is required. To achieve this order and stability, the theory maintained that every functional parts of the social system must perform its role. It is this functional pre-requisite that serves to connect the various parts and thus integrate the social system as an organic system (Uhunmwangho and Ogbator, 2013). Thus, from a functionalist point of view, the social system has certain basic needs which must be met if it is to survive. These needs are known as functional pre-requisites. The function of any part of the society is its contribution to the maintenance of the society (Haralambos, 2001). Using structural functional theory as a basis for analysis in this paper suggests that the youth is an important segment of the social system with specific functions to perform. These functions are not only meant to ensure the continuity of the social system but also to achieve what the functionalists refer to as some degree of fit and compatibility (Afonja, 1994). The political system is a specific system within the social system to which we can relate the functional pre-requisite of the youth. Almond argued that in any political system, there are four input functions which "are performed by the non-governmental sub-systems, by the society and the general environment (Varma, 2003). These are political socialization and recruitment,

interest articulation, interest aggregation and political communication. Contemporary articulation of the role expectation of the youth fit into these functional categories and should be treated as informed responses to the social forces of democratization. Given their energy, character and orientation, the youth constitute the object and subject of political socialization. Organized youth movement which has received a boost in the wake of democratization process has also provided a platform for interest aggregation and articulation. Political communication provides the information flow that determines the character and orientation of a political system. The relevance of the youth in this process cannot be over emphasized, especially in an emergent democracy like Nigeria(Suleiman, 2006). In their interface with the establishment, the youth largely represent the ‘feedback loop’, to borrow the words of Easton, through which critical views of government action or inaction flow from the society into the political system. However, Nigeria with over 140 million people and with over fifty percent of youths cannot afford to lock out the youths if they must compete politically, technologically and scientifically in order to align itself with the sustainable development in African in particular and the developed world in general (Uhunmwangho and Ogbator, 2013) .

Methodology

This paper relied majorly on documentary sources of data obtained from textbooks, journal articles, official gazettes, conference papers and internet. Key policy and academic literature on youth participation, exclusion, and economic development were reviewed to examine the nature of evidence on the linkages between these issues and determine where there are gaps.

Youth participation and National Development

The role of youth in the development of any given nation can never be over emphasized. Youth could be a source of labour inputs as well as human capital in production, which would improve total productivity in a society where capital formation is limited. When employed, youth could be a reliable source of demand for the economy through their consumption activities. The following are specific areas in which youth can actively contribute to national development.

- (i) **Peace Building:** Youth have a significant role to play 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-Suleiman, 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. As observed by Eberly and Gall (2007), young people in national youth 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 a bid to foster peace and unity in Nigeria after the failed attempt by Biafra to secede (1967 to 1970), the then Military government of General Yakubu Gowon issued a decree in 1973 creating the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to develop ‘common ties among the youth of the country and promote national unity (Udoh and Eme, 2014).

The NYSC requires all University and Polytechnic 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 primary 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. The corps members serve in their professional areas and 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 entitles 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).

- (ii) **Community Development:** Youth in many societies play the crucial role of complementing and supplementing the effort of government in the development of rural communities through self-help projects. Odoh and Eme (2014) classified these self-help projects into two: Government Aided Projects (GAP) and Non-Government Aided Projects (NGAP). GAP are those executed with assistance of government in either finance or material resources while NGAP are those executed solely with collective effort of community members. In recent time, youth have realized the importance of self-help projects in improving the way of life and living standards of their communities. In Nigeria for example, youth are deeply involved in self-help projects in various local governments especially projects that involve trade, commerce, home economics, small and medium term enterprises and agriculture. Similar contributions have been made in areas like educating the rural community on use of improved seeds or farming techniques through the Young Farmers Club; clearing and draining of drainages and culverts; sinking of ordinary dug-out wells; renovation of clinics, health centers and dispensaries in the rural areas; construction of rural feeder roads; and assistance to less privileged in the society.
- (iii) **Protection of Environment and Promotion of Sustainable Livelihoods:** As heirs of the environmental risks and hazards the world is producing today, the youth could take a leading role in protecting the environment and promote sustainable livelihoods. Africa and indeed Nigeria faces a number of environmental risks and hazards that disproportionately affect young people, not only because they result in deteriorating physical conditions for rural and urban dwellers. Erosion, pollution in all its forms, reduced bio-diversity, over-exploitation of natural resources such as water and forests, and desertification, among many others, also severely compromise economic development and prosperity. In Nigeria for example, migration of cattle herders from the Northern part of the country to other areas especially the south largely due to increasing wave of desertification is already fast becoming a reason for conflict. Similarly, the rate of urbanization in Nigeria poses environmental challenge in waste management, access to water and sanitation facilities. With only an estimated one-third of the total municipal waste in the country formally disposed of, the amount of waste generated in Nigerian cities far exceeds the capacity of most municipalities.

The best prospect for the environment in Nigeria is an empowered youth. The involvement of youth in environment and development decision making at the local level, national and state levels is key in implementation of sustainable development policies. Many youth organizations are already taking a leading role in the area of environmental protection by carrying out education campaigns, tree planting and waste management exercises in their respective communities especially during the commemoration of the World Environment Day.

- (iv) **Mobilization of People to Participate in Policies and Programmes of Government:** Trained and motivated young people can themselves play a sustainable role of garnering support for government policies and programmes through peer education initiatives, especially at the grassroots. Peers can reach out either in an organized

manner or informally to other youth, imparting information and knowledge on issues such as health and well-being. Peer education can happen in small groups or through individual context, and can take place in a variety of settings such as in schools and universities, clubs, workplaces, on the street or in a shelter. In Nigeria for example, peer education has been used successfully for raising HIV/Aids awareness and developing life-skills amongst vulnerable youth. In addition, there exist various types of community-based organizations in most rural areas, many of which are formed by youths. The essence of the formation of youth community-based organizations is to supplement government efforts in community development projects. These organizations are the closest to the people at the grassroots, because the organizations are formed by the members of the community themselves. These organizations enhance community development through development, promotion and implementation of development projects sustainable for the benefit of their communities; mobilizing members of the community for national development; strengthening community resources management; improving the general skills of youths to be productive; promoting sustainable human development; encouraging the participation of the marginalized in the promotion of rural development that affects them; and ensuring proper accountability of community resources.

Effort by Government to Enhance Youth Participation in National Development.

Since independence in 1960, several attempts have been made by successive governments in Nigeria to encourage youth participation in development processes of the country. One of such efforts was the formulation of the National Youth Council of Nigeria Act in 1963 which recognized Council as an apex body of all voluntary youth organizations in the country (Jike, 2002). It serves as a bridge between the youths and governments at all levels, as well as national and international governmental and non-governmental organizations. The major activities of the council, which is structured along the Nigerian federal system include organization of conferences, seminars, workshops bordering on Youth and national issues, some of which includes, Youth leadership training, campaign against HIV/AIDS, Youth empowerment, Youth camp, Youth cultural art carnivals, sport competition, etc. It is doubtful if the council is not being manipulated and tele-guided by state officials in collaborations with Youth leaders who may not necessarily be youth but adults. Over politicization of the National youth council has also constrained its ability to foster youth participation in national development. Aside the National Youth Council Act of 1963, certain programmes and projects were initiated and designed to develop the youths and foster their participation in society. These include in-school programmes such as formation of clubs, installing organizations like Boys Scout, Girls Guide and Man O' War. There has also been such out-of-school effort that includes encouragement of voluntary self-help activities, which contribute to community development skills and vocational training programmes, competitive activities and cultural festivals. In the 1970s and 1980s, the government elevated programmes of youth development by the establishment of a ministry of Youths and Sports. In 1973, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was introduced to foster national unity. However, no coherent policy on Youth development was conceived by government until the introduction of the National Youth Policy in 2001 (National Youth Policy, 2001).

The first attempt to introduce a national youth policy was in 1988, which did not materialize, until 1989 when it was incorporated in the social development policy where youth development was equated with sporting activities and competition (FGN, 2001). A comprehensive national policy was introduced in 2001 after extensive consultations and involvement of youth as stakeholders. The vision of the policy is to 'create future role of the youth in national

development'. The mission of the policy is to among other things 'build a youth with the sense of hope, self-confidence, imagination, creativity and pride in the nation's heritage: youth who represent hope in future Nigeria, who are disciplined, well focused, and law abiding (National Youth Policy, 2001). The policy is also based on the values of social justice, equality of opportunity, accountability, hard work, human rights, democracy and good governance. The policy defined the rights of Nigerian youth in the context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, African Charter on Human Rights and the 1999 Constitution (FGN, 2001). It defined the obligations of the youth to the country, government, parents and guardians. It enunciated key areas for policy intervention to include educational and vocational training, employment and entrepreneurship, health care, sports and recreation, arts and culture, environment and citizenship. The policy targeted different youth groups such as students in post-primary schools, (Pre-youth), students in tertiary institutions, out-of-school, unemployed and underemployed youth, female adolescent, youth with disabilities or health problems; youth in crime and gifted youth (National Youth Policy, 2001).

The youth policy also developed an implementation strategy designed with specific programme and plan of actions in the major policy areas. It also identified institutional framework and agencies for the effective implementation of the policy such as a ministry, National Youth Development Council, National Youth Development Agency, National Youth Advisory Council; National Youth Council and so on (FGN, 2001).

Youth participation prior to the introduction of the National Youth Policy was marginal. Youth participation was defined in a narrow sense in terms of an in and out-of-school activity. There were no clear provisions for youth entrepreneurship, political participation, citizenship and involvement in the socio-economic development of the country (Mokwena, 2003). The National Youth Policy was a significant improvement in Nigeria. However, it has not provided sufficient enabling environment for youth participation. The impression among most youth appears to be that they are told that they are citizens but they do not really feel as such. There are no opportunities for them to exercise their rights as citizens not just in words but also in deeds. The policy vision of the youth as future leaders also indicates the policy expectation of the present role of the youth. They should not just be seen as leaders of tomorrow but they must be given special opportunity to exercise appropriate leadership and self-direction on a range of issues.

In recent times, efforts to initiate youth development programmes have been made. These initiatives are contained in policy documents such as SURE-P, promotion of Small Scale Enterprises, and the National Poverty Eradication Programme (1999-2015), among others. However, 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 comprehensive policy to provide a blue-print for youths. Youths organizations have come up with innovative programmes to address the youth's economic needs, health interventions, especially those aimed at productive health and alleviating the spread of HIV/Aids among the youths, environmental and character building programmes, literacy, vocational training, sports and recreational as well as socio-cultural programmes. In all these novel efforts there has been an underlying lack of genuine support from government at all levels.

Challenges to Youth Participation in Nigeria's National Development.

There are many factors that limit the participation of Youth in Nigeria's national development. Some of these factors are discussed below:

- (i) **Insufficient, Unequal and Inappropriate Education:** Young people need access to both formal education and opportunities to acquire a range of vocational and life skills to actively participate in all spheres of an increasingly knowledge-intensive society, today as young citizens and tomorrow as society's future leaders. Unfortunately, young people in Nigeria struggle to acquire an education that provides them with the right set of skills and knowledge (Makwemoisa, 2002). As a result, the transition from school-to-work is a major challenge such that many young Nigerians end up unemployed. Successive governments and international partners have made concerted efforts to empower young people to improve access to education in Nigeria. In particular, to achieve the goal of Universal Primary Education, much effort and resources have been directed in improving primary school enrolment. The abolishing of school fees and introduction of free feeding at primary level has been a major force to achieve this goal. Even while enrolments have been increasing, the quality of education appears to be on the decline. Inadequate infrastructure and training facilities, poor and inappropriate curricula, and lack of well-trained and motivated teachers are among the main reasons explaining this decline. Though access to primary education is a necessary first and fundamental fulfillment of human right, it is also clear that it does not provide needed skills for young Nigerian to compete in an increasingly competitive labour market. In addition, critical mass of secondary and higher education graduates is required in order to accelerate economic development. Many secondary schools in Nigeria are limited in capacity which is largely due to inadequate budgetary resources for this sector. Consequently, the chances of young people proceeding to secondary school, not to mention tertiary institutions, are significantly hampered. There is also regional disparity in terms of education and educational attainments. In this regard, the uneven distribution of educational infrastructure in Nigeria reflects the commitment of government in addressing this issue. Most secondary schools and tertiary institutions are located in the cities, with rural pupils struggling for access. This situation contributes to the persistent urban-bias that so much distorted Nigeria's national development.
- (ii) **Underemployment and Lack of Livelihood Opportunities:** Having a job provides a person not only with a source of income but also a basis for dignity and self-respect. To be leaders in the context of their families and in the broader community, youths in Nigeria need to find decent jobs. However, young people have a hard time in Nigeria job markets. Without access to employment or livelihood opportunities, most young people cannot afford a house or a dowry, cannot marry and their transition to adulthood is effectively blocked. Many undertake menial jobs with little prospect for advancement which may in turn destroy their self-worth and confidence that they require to contribute meaningfully to national development.
- (iii) **Limited Access to Quality Health Care, HIV/AIDS:** The ability of youths to contribute to national development and become leaders in all walks of life critically depends on their health status. Today, young people in Nigeria are vulnerable to debilitating illnesses and health problems such as malaria, tuberculosis, water-borne diseases, maternal complications and above all HIV/AIDS. Young people are more vulnerable to HIV/infection than adults with young women being at the highest risk of getting the virus (Social Development Direct, 2009). The vulnerability of young people in Nigeria to HIV infection stems from both physical and social aspects of their lives.

Physical vulnerability results from the damaging effects of malnutrition and ailments such as bilharzias. A weakened immune system, particularly for adolescence significantly increases their susceptibility to becoming infected. HIV prevalence can also be attributed to a range of socio-economic factors such as poverty, inequality and social exclusion, low levels of education and lack of information, poor access to health services; and societal attitudes. Young women are especially vulnerable because of migration, poor living conditions in informal settlements, isolation and proneness to sexual exploitation and abuse (Social Development Direct, 2009). Several approaches have been adopted to tackle HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. These approaches are essentially conventional focusing primarily on changing people's behaviour in order to reduce HIV infection rates. Thus, young people have been targeted by such campaigns via the Media, Youth Centers and peer education. Despite several efforts aimed at curbing HIV/AIDS in Nigeria, its prevalence rate among the young population is still high because, such initiatives have failed to address the physical and social environments that create the conditions for high infection rates.

- (iv) **Poor Governance and Weak Political Participation:** Participation in the formal political system in Nigeria does not provide an outlet for youth to contribute their ideas to national development. There is in existence rigid conservative power structures, patronage networks and intergenerational hierarchies which exclude young people from decision making and do not value their initiatives. The youth in Nigeria have not relented in their effort to make their voices be heard in attempt to bring about social and political change, often at high costs to themselves through death, disability and loss of education and livelihood opportunities (Onuoha, 2008). Yet mechanisms and resources to involve the youth in meaningful ways in democratic decision-making processes remain a challenge. Key political positions or institutions such as President, Vice President, Governor, Deputy Governor, Senate, and Federal House of Representatives etc) provide little or no opportunity for effective youth representation or participation, which reduces the contribution they can make to national development. Until recently, policy makers in Nigeria rarely included youth in decision making or even consulted them on their concerns. Cultural attitudes have been the major constraint to establishing inter-generational dialogue in Nigeria. Traditional wisdom was seen to an increasing function of age, and subsequently, adult leaders and policy makers took it upon themselves to make decisions on behalf of youth. But such policy-making largely resulted in inappropriate policies that failed to address the requisite needs and aspirations of youth. This traditional attitude requires urgent modification.

There is also the tendency of the political class to network, monopolize and recycle elective and appointive positions among the older generation politicians who are undemocratic, despotic, and resistant to change. It is therefore not surprising that in Nigeria, Minister in 1970s is made a Minister in 2007. More so, a president in the 1970s is made a president in 1999 (Radda, 2000). By recycling positions among themselves, the political leadership disempowers the youth by foreclosing every opportunity for the youth to gradually master the democratic rudiments as well as participate effectively in decision-making that affects their lives. This has made it impossible for the Nigerian youth to contribute positively to national development.

- (v) **Bureaucratic Corruption:** Although corruption is widespread in Nigeria, it is in the public and political sphere that it figures prominently with disproportionate impact on the vulnerable groups especially the youth. It is estimated that Nigerian leaders have stolen about \$500 billion or 35 trillion in the last forty years (Sheyin, 2007). This has

created mass poverty and unemployment of which over five million youth are believed to be unemployed (Akosile, 2007). By mismanaging the national treasury, the political leadership undermines youth development through three major ways. First it reproduces governance by corruption as the acceptable model of management of public resources. This stifles the value of probity, accountability and hard work. Second, it leads to the collapse of existing state owned enterprises, thereby leading to the loss of job and compounding poverty and unemployment. Finally, it hampers the process of economic growth which is critical for job creation to absorb the teeming youth.

- (vi) **Elites Sponsorship of Violence:** due to the absence of business support funds and gainful employment as a result of multiplier effect of an economy that has been criminally managed, the Nigerian youth are further dwarfed by a political leadership that prefers to invest on an enterprise that contributes negatively to youth development- the enterprise of thuggery, cultism, and militancy. For instance, it is argued that ‘the unfettered and unlimited access of the Niger Delta youth (Militants) and Boko Haram insurgents to stockpiles of highly sophisticated and sturdy weapons suggests their backing by networks of powerful and relatively rich elements.
- (vii) **Access to Information and Communication Technology Skills (ICT):** The youth cannot exploit career, business and educational opportunities available because they lack access to ICT, due to unavailability especially in rural areas and high cost. There is limited access to computers by the young population. This is to say that only a small portion of young Nigerians have access to the internet. Moreover, differences in income and access to infrastructure have created a digital divide among the youth in the country. Although decreasing prices and recent advances pertaining mobile telephony, have helped expand access to ICT among young people in the country, government need to do more to eliminate disparities in ICT adoption among the youth especially, in rural areas.

Implication of Challenges to Youth Participation on National Development:

The Government of Nigeria explains the youth generation as a group ‘who is passing through mental and physical development process in preparation to face the challenges of adulthood (Makwemoisa, 2002)’. This definition encompasses a wide range of young people in Nigeria who have faced barriers to education, employment, quality health care, political participation etc. When these youth are excluded and barred from future success through unstable political, educational, economic and social environments, they use violence to protest against the society and facilitate a movement for social inclusion. Most times this violence is directed at the government. Research done on youth shows that ‘the collapse of social services and the high level commercialization of education have barred many young people from formal education (Makwemoisa, 2002). Thus the unemployed youth without University education and the numerous graduates who lack prospects for employment have been able to develop a volatile strategy of identity transformation both at the level of consciousness and then attempt to find a space in the political process. Violence and crime have been the common features of this coping mechanism. Examples of groups that have been formed by the youth to oppose oppressive and exclusionary tendencies of government through violent reactions include The Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MOSSOB), Boko Haram among others. No nation facing this type of conflict with their youth population can achieve sustainable development.

Conclusion

The youth can be a creative force, dynamic source of innovations, and they have undoubtedly, throughout history, participated, contributed and even catalyzed important changes in political systems, power-sharing dynamics and economic opportunities. In Nigeria the youth are faced with underemployment, lack of livelihood opportunities, insufficient and inappropriate education, lack of quality health care system, HIV/AIDS pandemic, elite sponsorship of violence and poor governance. These factors undermine youth participation in decision making: and is in part the reason for increasing level of crime and violence in the country. Addressing these challenges is essential in achieving sustainable national development in Nigeria. .

Recommendations

The following are measures that can be adopted to improve youth participation in Nigeria's drive towards national development:

- (i) **Provision of Smooth School-to-Work Transition:** The problem of youth in the areas of unemployment and inappropriate education will be reduced if they are equipped with skills that are demanded by employers. One approach is to design curricula to suit the changing needs of the labour market, or alternatively, to combine formal education with work-based training as has been adopted in Egypt. Different forms of training are also needed to address limited skills of young Nigerians once they have left formal education. Government can provide public funded training or financial support for private provision of such facilities, which could focus on either general training or more specific vocational skills. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) needs to be financially empowered to carry out its activities more effectively. There is also the need to encourage more unemployed youths to make use of the opportunities provided for employment by NDE schemes. Since government is constrained by limited financial resources, political leaders at all levels of government in Nigeria should explore the use of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) to overcome shortfalls in the education sector. PPP can also enhance linkages between the formal education and the private sector. This can in turn ensure that curricula are demand-driven, helping to improve the skills match between school leavers and requirements of employers.
- (ii) **Improvement in Access to Health Care Service:** Health care policy initiatives should focus on addressing the causes of youth vulnerability. Concerted effort should be made to improve the overall health situation of youth in Nigeria including improving access to sanitation and drinking water, increasing nutritional levels; and expanding preventive health programmes. Broadening the focus of health services can help reduce stigmatization and the subsequent reluctance of youth to use those services.
- (iii) **Strengthen Anti-Corruption Institutions:** There is need to strengthen all institutions and processes that promote efficiency, accountability and transparency in the management of national resources, such as the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) etc.
- (iv) **Democratization of Youth Structures:** This will make them truly popular and representative rather than handpicked youth representatives. There is need to strengthen the capacity of youth clubs, associations and organizations through regular consultations to effectively partake in decision making process.

- (v) **Training for Youth-Based Organizations:** There is need to provide training and support for youth organizations and representatives to acquire skills that will enable them to effectively perform their roles.
- (vi) **Implement National Youth Policy:** Faithful implementation of National Youth Policy to foster youth participation and development.

References

- African Youth Charter (2006): in Vambe, J.T. (2012); *NDE and Implementation of Open Apprenticeship Scheme in Benue State*. Ph.D. Thesis submitted to postgraduate school, Faculty of Management Sciences, Department of Public Administration, University of Abuja.
- Almond, G.: In Uhumwuangho, S.O. and Ogbator, E. (2013); ‘‘Youth in Political Participation and Development: Relevance, Challenges and Expectation in the 21st Century’’. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*. Vol.15, No.4 (242-253).
- Afonja, S. and Pearce T. (1994) *Social Change in Nigeria*. Ibadan Longman Group Limited,
- Akosile, A. (2007); ‘Mass Participation: An Antidote to Poverty’. *Thisday*. October 16.
- Burkey, S. (1993); *People First: A guide to self-reliant Participatory Development*. London. ZED Books.
- FGN, (2001); Federal Government of Nigeria. *Implementation Strategy for National Youth Policy*. Abuja.
- Hache, A. and Cullen, J. (2010); ICT and Youth at Risk: How ICT-Driven Initiatives Can Contribute to Their Socio-Economic Inclusion and How to Measure it. <http://www.ipts.jrc.europe.eu/publications/pub.cfm?id=3459>.
- Haralambos, M. (2001); *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. New Delhi. Oxford University Press.
- Jike, V.T. (2002), (ed); *Ethnic Militia and Youth Rebellion in Contemporary Nigeria. A Book of Readings*. Lagos. Spectrum.
- Jimada, I.S. (2008); *Nigerian Youth and the Crisis of Poverty and Underdevelopment in Nigeria*. A paper Presented at the International Conference on Nigerian Youth, Political Partnership and National Development. Mambayya House, Kano. 5th to 6th August.
- Mokwena, S. (2003); Youth Participation: Taking the Idea to the Next Level. A Challenge to the Youth Ministers. *Common Wealth Youth and Development Journal*. Vol.1, No.2. (87-107).
- Makwemoisa, A. (2002); ‘‘Youth Existence and the Conditions of Exclusion and Unemployment in Nigeria’’. *Journal of Cultural Studies*. Vol.4, No.1 (133-155).
- National Youth Policy, (2001).

- Onuoha, F.C. (2008); *Youth Unemployment and Poverty: Connections for National Development in Nigeria*. A paper Presented at the International Conference on Youth and National Development. Mambayya House, Kano. August 5th to 6th, 2008.
- Ozohu-Suleiman, A. (2006), ‘The Nigerian Youths in Contemporary Political Development: Relevance, Challenges, and Role Expectation’. *The Constitution: A Journal of Constitutional Development*. Vol.6, No.4 (97-111).
- Radda, S.I. (2000); ‘The Contemporary Nigerian Youth’. *The Magazine Youth*. July.
- Sheyin, E. (2007); ‘Achieving MDS: Obstacles Before Nigeria’. *Thisday*, January, 24.
- Sommers, M. (2006a) ‘Fearing Africa’s Young Men: The Case of Rwanda’. Rwanda Youth Assessment Preliminary Report. <http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/con66>
- Soyombo, O. (1984); ‘Youth Culture: in Man and Society’. *National Open University Module Three*. Kaduna. Okechukwu Printers.
- Uhunmwuango, S.O. and Ogbator, E. (2013); ‘Youth in Political Participation and Development: Relevance, Challenges and Expectation in the 21st Century’. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*. Vol.15, No.4 (242-253).
- United Nations Organizations (UNO, 2007); ‘*Young People’s Transition to Adulthood: Progress and Challenges*’. World Youth Report.
- UNOWA (United Nations Office for West Africa, 2006); ‘*Youth Unemployment and Regional Insecurity in West Africa*’. <http://www.un.org./unowa/studies/yunemp-v2-en.ptdf>. Accessed 20th May, 2008.
- Vambe, J.T. (2012); *NDE and Implementation of Open Apprenticeship Scheme in Benue State*. Ph.D. Thesis submitted to Postgraduate School, Department of Public Administration, University of Abuja.
- Varma, S.P. (2003); *Modern Political Theory*. New Delhi. Vikas Publish House, PUT Ltd.
- William-West, D. (2007); ‘Youth Development and Empowerment: Have we given up? *People’s Stewards*. Vol.1, No.1 (3-4).