

**YOUTH EMPOWERMENT, POLITICAL INTEGRATION AND THE
CHALLENGES OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.**

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Abstract

Young people play a crucial role in the prospect for development hence should be integrated in all national development plans and programmes. This conclusion is premised on the realization that the population of every society is dominated by the age bracket classified as the youth. Over 60% of the one billion African populations are young men and women under the age of 35, while, Nigeria has a youth population of 80 million representing 60% of the total population. But the reality shows that the people under the age of 35 are rarely found in formal political institutions and leadership positions and it is the common practice to refer to politicians as 'young' if they are below 35-40 years of age in Africa and Nigeria in particular. This paper discusses the conceptual issues and literature related to barriers to effective youth participation in national development, such as lack of education, extreme poverty, amongst others, all of which combined to deny society from harnessing and benefitting from the drive, energy and potentials of the youths as encapsulated in the Nigerian National Youth Development Policy (2001). The paper adopts the historical descriptive method to enrich current discourse and to supplement existing information on youth empowerment programmes and youth political integration processes in Nigeria within the context of the African Youth Decade and Plan of Action, 2009-2018. The paper conclude and recommends social, economic, cultural and political context sensitive to national development and identify best practices and empirical approaches needed to enhance meaningful youth empowerment and integration towards national development.

Keywords: *Youth, Youth Empowerment, Political Integration, National Development*

INTRODUCTION

The youths are the indispensable, dynamic and greatest assets of the population of any nation. Potentially, they are the greatest investment for a society's future and sustainable development; apart from being the owners and leaders of tomorrow, they outnumbered the middle-aged and the aged. (Onyekpe, 2007). The National Youth Development plan, 2001 and 2009, 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. Hence, no society can experience positive change and advancement if its youths are not strategically and constructively invested upon, empowered and integrated.

This paper therefore examines how youth empowerment and youth political integration could impact on national development in Nigeria. It argued that youth empowerment and integration is pivotal to economic growth and national development. Nigeria as a developing country must adopt an integrative and bottom-up strategy of empowering the citizens most especially the youth through an aggressive youth empowerment programme, a deliberate youth political integration policy and ensure infrastructural and human capital development for her teeming youths if the country must join the league of developed nations by 2020.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to the United Nations (2012), Africa's 2011 population was estimated at 1.05 billion and expected to double by 2050. Africa is the youngest continent in the world with about 60 percent of its population within 30 years of age or younger. (Gyimah-Brempong and Nwangi Kimeyi, 2013). Nigerian 2006 National Census put the youth population at 84 million which translates to 60 percent of the 140 million population. Youths are the most vulnerable segment of the population socio-economically, emotionally, culturally, religiously, politically and otherwise. They live with peculiar and unmet needs and aspirations which lead them into lots of social problems ranging from poor or inadequate parental care, poverty, lack of quality education, cult activities and militancy, unemployment and underemployment, moral decadence, health and negative political manipulation. According to Isibor, (2011), approximately 33 percent of youths in Nigeria have no access to

formal education, youth that lack protection from their families or responsible adults have taken the streets, unoccupied buildings, wastelands, bus stops, under bridge e.t.c. as their places of abode and hooliganism as their source of livelihood. Thus, Oludotun (2001) concluded that the increasing rate of crime such as armed robbery, prostitution, advance free fraud, drug trafficking, cultism and other vices prevalent amongst the youths have adversely affected national development. To this end youth empowerment is imperative as it emphasized the need to put in place major and new policies to eradicate poverty, provide more diversified employment opportunities and reduce income inequalities (Egbon, 2009). In the UNDP 1993 report empowerment and integration is at the centre of the 1990's paradigm shift in development thinking with an in-built understanding that development must be woven round people and not people around development and it should power individual rather than disempowered them. Consequently, one of the greatest challenge facing governments and policy makers in Africa today is how to provide opportunities for the continent's more than 200 million youths so that they can have descent lives and contribute to the development of their countries. In Nigeria, the challenges of youths that are central to national development are numerous and varied- it include amongst others; quality education, employment, health and political participation.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed the historical research method and descriptive analysis. This is due to the nature of the research which sought to unravel those challenges of the past and those of the recent and contemporary times that are impinging genuine youth empowerment and integration into mainstream political decision making and the implications for national development in Nigeria.

THE CONCEPT OF YOUTHS

The word youth is a relative term which has no universal connotation. Generally, it connotes a young person between childhood and adulthood. The concept varies across society, culture, groups, organizations and countries. The Cambridge International Dictionary of English (2002) defines youth as “the period of life when you are young, the state of being young or a young person.” In the same manner, Collins English Dictionary for Advance Learners (2000: 1822) sees youth as transitional phase in an individual’s life between childhood and age of full maturity as an adult.” To Audu, (2011) youths are young people who are neither psychologically adolescent nor sociologically adult.

Several institutions, agencies and countries, in defining youth put it within a certain age bracket. The United Nations General Assembly conceives the youth as those “between the ages of 15 and 24 years.” The World Bank peg youth age between 15 and 25, while United States government considers everyone under the age of 21 years to be a youth (Agbese 2007). However, Ikenkwe (2012) quoted in Aliegba (2013) noted that in Nigeria, University graduates aged 30 years and below are recognized by the National Youth Service Corps as eligible to serve the nation under the scheme. Also, the Pan African Youth Charter (2006) and African Youth Decade (2009-2018) Plan of Action (2011) define youth as every human being between the ages of 15 and 30 years. For the purpose of this study however, we shall rely on the Second National Youth Policy of Nigeria 2009, which defines the youth as all young persons of ages 18-35 years. But the peculiarities of the Nigerian situation has led to the invention of social and economic definition which treats youths as a thing of the mind and so admits people up to the age of 40 years and beyond due to the lateness of the period of independence for the average young Nigerian who may be dependent on their parent well beyond the age of 35 years.

CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

The new Webster's Dictionary says to "empower" implies to give power to or to enable someone. It is linked to the concept of self-help, network, participation and equity within the context of community development. According to Arvind and Everett, (1989) empowerment refers to a widely participatory process of directed social change in a society, intended to bring about social and material advancement including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities for the majority of people. Within the society, empowerment is critical in the process of change because rather than forcing people to change, it provides a way of attracting them to change since they own the change process. The fundamental goal of empowerment is; (i) to help individual to improve the quality of their lives and share equitably in the benefit of economic growth. (ii) It helps people to realize their creative and productive energies to achieve sustainable growth and continuous improvements in their living standards. (iii) In developing countries like Nigeria, there is the need to empower people so as to create enabling conditions for a more equitable distribution of wealth and productive assets among citizens. And lastly, empowerment is expected to transform the unequal power relations to equitable power sharing in favour of the less powerful, hence, the phrases "women empowerment," and or 'youth empowerment.'" Empowerment strategies should generally include:

- (i) Financial intervention in other to assist local business activities.
- (ii) Enterprise development for citizens increased access to skills, business and management training and improved production technology.
- (iii) Marketing and bargaining strategies for locally produced goods and better working conditions.
- (iv) Training and education consistent with skill requirement in the economy (Jimah, 2011)

In relation to the youth, empowerment means involving young people in decision-making processes on issues that affects them as well as entrusting them with the knowledge and skills necessary for meaningful participation in the society. Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural and cultural process where young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement changes in their own lives and lives of other people (Vavrus and Fletcher, 2006).

According to Madunagu (2005), Youth empowerment refers to the process by which youths gain inner power to express and defend their rights and gain greater self confidence, self identity, self esteem and control over their lives, personal and social relationships.

The African Youth Decade Plan of Action (2009-2018) defined youth empowerment as a process where young people would realize that they have or can create choices in life, are aware of the implications of those choices, make informed decisions, freely take actions based on those decisions and accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions. (AU, 2011). In essence, youth empowerment is an approach to stop all sorts of marginalization and negligence against the youths and to give them equal opportunity and access to education, financial control, political participation and leadership e.t.c regardless of gender or educational level. It is an initiative aimed at re- engineering their potentials and energies for peace and stability to reduce poverty, unemployment and criminality as captured in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (2005), which emphasized in its thrust towards empowering people to improve lives through plans for creating jobs, strengthening the skill base, protecting the vulnerable and promoting peace and security. It concluded that the future prosperity of Nigeria depends on producing children and youths who are well prepared to take their place in tomorrow's society.

The purpose of youth empowerment includes:

- (i) To enhance the ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making
- (ii) To provide equal opportunity and access to gainful employment.
- (iii) To encourage skill acquisition among youths by providing vocational, professions and technical training.
- (iv) To reduce poverty, eliminate vices and enhance peace, stability and development.

Hence youth empowerment is not about spoon feeding youth or dropping some money into their pockets typical of Nigerian experience but a means of making the youth meaningfully beneficial to themselves and to the larger society. This was corroborated by Aruna (2012), the young adult population as the live-wire of any country must be empowered appropriately with relevant knowledge and skills in order to enable them to be job creators instead of job seekers and wealth creators instead of wealth consumers. Also, Ojekunle (2011) asserts that, it was necessary to improve the entrepreneurial capacities of the youths so

as to empower them to earn a livelihood as well as enable them to contribute to the upliftment of their society.

POLITICAL INTERGRATION

Political integration is a human right. Under the United Nation Convention on the right of the child, all Nigerian young people are entitled to have a say in decisions that affects their lives. Youths, according to the Nigerians Youth Policy (2009), constitute the engine room of growth in the society, the most vibrant and productive segment for societal development hence, they must be positively and consciously integrated into the nation's political landscape.

Youth political integration is a deliberate opportunities for young people to take leadership roles and be responsible while partnering with caring adults who respect and value them and are willing to share power with them (Wikipedia, 2016). This sentiment is best summarized by Strangler and Shirk (2004) that "nothing about us without us". The essential elements for youth political integration include: establishing a youth-friendly environment, building a sense of belonging and nurturing a sense of self –efficacy. Unlike political participation, political integration is an inclusive participation process aimed at mainstreaming the youth agency towards re-engineering the transformation of the Nigerian society. (Abdullahi and Mohammed, 2013). Empowering the youth have always been used as a propaganda during political campaigns, yet, no action has been put in place to mainstream the youth into the political decision making process.

Surprisingly, most of the States and National Youth leaders amongst the major political parties in Nigeria- the All Progressive Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)- were adults above the age of 40years (Tribune Newspaper, July, 2014).

Also the UNDP, Global parliamentary Report (2012) revealed that only 1.65 percent of parliamentarians around the world are in their 20s and 11.87 percent are in their 30s. While the average age of parliamentarians globally is 53 years for men and 50 years old for women. This clearly depicts the Nigerian parliamentary representation. In a survey conducted by the UN (IANYD) in August 2012, a majority of 13, 000 respondents from 186 countries including Nigeria, highlighted that the main challenge for youths were limited opportunities for effective participation in decision making process (UNDP, 2012).

CONCEPT OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Development as a concept has different definitions depending on the field of study. To a classical economist, development is growth in the Gross National Product (GNP), Per Capital Income and infrastructural facilities. To a political scientist, development constitutes political stability and liberation from oppression. An educationist sees it as doing away with illiteracy and path-way to self –actualization. Development according to Idakwoji (2006), involves structural transformation of the economy, polity and culture of the people which permit self generating and self-perpetuating use of people’s potentials. Development or under-development of a nation is a function of the individuals that make up the nation. It is the interplay between man and his environment. This is the cross-road the Nigerian nation found herself with particular reference to the youth who are the engine of growth and development but have long been neglected in the development agenda. Hence, development in contemporary usage transcends the idea of growth to incorporate human capital development and improvement in the quality of life of the people.

Therefore, national development refers to the unending process of qualitative and quantitative transformation in the capacity of a national entity to organize the process of production and distribution of the material benefits of a society in a manner that sustains improvement in the well-being of its members in order to enhance their capacity to realize their full potentials in furtherance of the positive transformation and sustenance of their society and humanity at large, (Isa, and Vambe, 2013). There is a linkage between youth and national development because, the youths not only provide the labour force for production of goods and services, they are also the critical mass of people whose actions and inactions can develop or destroy the hegemonies of their society. The second National Youth Policy of Nigeria (2009) suggests that Nigeria could by 2030 reap the benefits of her youth demographic dividends if she invests now in human development. Thus, the need for genuine youth empowerment programmes cannot be over emphasized in the country’s development process.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

NEW GROWTH THEORY

In the 1980s, field of economic growth saw new beginning, it lead to development of endogenous growth theory or New Growth Theory as champion by Romer (1990) in response to criticism of the neo-classical growth model. They developed the endogenous growth theory that includes a mathematical explanation of technological advancement. This model

also incorporated a new concept of human capital, the skills and knowledge that makes workers productive. Unlike physical capital, human capital has increasing rates of returns to capital, and economics never reach a steady state. Growth does not slow as capital accumulates but the rate of growth depends on the types of capital a country invest in. An interesting idea in their work was that in the long run output per unit could increase even when inputs were exhaustively accounted for. Technically advanced human capital and a growing knowledge-based appear to be part of this wellspring of growth.

HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY

This theory posits how education leads to increase in productivity and efficiency of workers by increasing the level of their cognitive skills. Theodore, Schultz, Gary Becker and Jacob Mincer introduced the notion that people invest in education so as to increase the stock of human capabilities which can be formed by combining innate abilities with investment in human beings (Oduola, 1998). Examples of such investments include expenditure on vocational and on the job training, health and nutrition etc.. However, the stock of human capital increases in a period only when gross investment exceeds depreciation with the passage of time, with intense use or lack of use. The provision of education is seen as a productive investment in human capital, and investment which the proponents of human capital theory considers to be equally or even worthwhile than that in physical capital. Human capital theorists have established that basic literacy enhances the productivity of workers of low skills occupations. These theories were adopted because they emphasised the need for human empowerment as a basis for individuals independence and societal development.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND INTEGRATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

This is geared towards assessing the extent to which the Nigerian government (past and present) is ensuring human capital development with the youth in focus. In consonance with the role of human capital and the realization of youth empowerment as a tool to achieve economic development, the government over the years has initiated many youth empowerment schemes and integrative political policies, though with less impact on the status of Nigerian youths, among which are:

- ❖ National Directorate of Employment (NDE)

NDE was established to provide employment for Nigerian youths or retired persons. Those who require the services of the NDE are assured of being trained in their chosen vocations and assisted with soft loans to establish. But little have been seen in this direction.

❖ Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN)

It was established by SMEDAN ACT of 2013 to promote the development of the MSME sector of the economy. Small and medium Enterprises development agency of Nigeria was expected to establish an efficient micro, small and medium enterprises sector that will enhance sustainable development. A well-developed MSME sector has proven to be one of the most veritable channels to combat poverty.

❖ Youth Empowerment Scheme

The National Information Technology (IT) policy objective was to empower youth with IT skills and prepare them for global competitiveness.

❖ Youth Empowerment Network

This came into existence under the millennium Declaration by the Federal and States government to give youth a real chance to find decent productive jobs anywhere they find themselves.

❖ Amnesty Programme of the Federal Government; Initiated by Late Umar Yar'adua and inherited by Goodluck Jonathan and the present Buhari regime which aims to re-integrate the militant youths into socio-economic sector of the nation and take them away from the illegal bunkering and economic sabotage activities they were used to. The post-amnesty programme and development of the Niger Delta region has also yielded measurable result. Also the FG education for street children in Northern Nigeria is tailored towards empowerment (FGN, 1999: 2004).

In recent times, the FGN through the Public Works, Youth and Women Empowerment (PW/WYE) component of the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) established the GIS (The graduate Internship Scheme). Its aims is to provide the unemployed graduate youth with job apprenticeship opportunities that will expose them to skills and experiences relevant to the current labour market and enhance their employability. GIS seeks to create opportunity for eligible graduate youths to be placed in reputable public/private sector firms to build the manpower requirement, to drive the Nation's Vision 20:2020 project. The GIS is to ensure that graduate skills are developed towards empowering them to be employable in the short/medium/long term. GIS will ensure that youths are

attached as apprentices in reputable public/private firms for a period of one year where the skills of such individuals will be sharpened.

The SURE-P seeks to target the largest population of unskilled, unemployed and under employed poor young men and women as well as other vulnerable groups in the society by presenting them with ample opportunities in the Public Works Programmes and internships in firms for the skilled and educated. The PW/WYE according to the Nigerian government is designed to create immediate employment opportunities for women and youth in labour intensive public works. The project is expected to generate 50,000 skilled jobs and 320,000 unskilled job opportunities by December, 2013. It is to be implemented in partnership with the states, Local government and private sector (FGN, 2012).

Parliamentary Act on the reduction of age limits to 30 years for elective and appointed positions in the legislature and the executive offices in Nigeria which was passed in April 2016 by the 8th legislative assembly. The act is a deliberate integrative policy and an amendment to section 65(1a) of the 1999 constitution aimed at broadening and mainstreaming youth participation in the electoral process.

THE IMPERATIVE OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND INTEGRATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Beginning with the Harare declaration on the plan of action for youth empowerment in 1995 through the world youth ministers meeting in Portugal in 1998 to the youth ministers meeting in Solomon Island in 2000 (Suleiman,2006, quoted in Jimah, 2011). The relevance of youth in contemporary development has received increased recognition in official circle. In Nigeria, the importance of youth empowerment and involvement in policy decision making towards the growth and development process cannot be overemphasized, neither is its essentialness to stability questionable as affirmed by the 2001 and 2009 national youth development policy. According to World Bank (2011), an empowerment process cannot be approached exclusively from economic point of view but consideration must also be given to the socio-political and cultural aspects. As a cross-cutting issue, empowerment activities take root from education, healthcare to governance and socio-economic policies, all of which are expected to increase development opportunities, enhance development outcomes and improve people's quality of life. Therefore to stimulate these conditions, enhance family well-being and stability and fulfill children's rights, youth employment, education, political integration and governance must be encouraged.

Equally important is the need to put in place legislative, financial and administrative measures to encourage entrepreneurial spirit in the young ones (UNICEF, 2007). In all, addressing political underrepresentation and empowering youths are necessary steps in overcoming poverty and furthering development as supported by the human development and capabilities approach and the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015).

Youth empowerment via entrepreneurial skills and craft training and acquisition, employment, economic opportunities in investment, access to infrastructure, finance and participation in agriculture encourages productivity hence, economic development. Young people belong to the generation of potentially productive force. In developing nations, they represent important opportunity for locally led economic growth, which can secure a prosperous future (RISE Network, 2013). If therefore human development indicators are raised among the youth population, productivity would also be greatly achieved. This will in turn lead to economic growth as according to Rodney (1972), there is a correlation between human development and the socio-economic conditions of a states.

While youth empowerment encourages economic growth, economic growth as opined by Melamed et al (2011), also has the indirect potential to alleviate poverty as a result of simultaneous increase in employment opportunities and increased labour productivity. In a nutshell, country's development is related to human development, which encompasses health, education, employment and economic liberalization by way of extending property rights to the poor, the relationship between these factors and economic growth proves the point that growth and development go together much of the time.

In similar terms, youth empowerment brings about stable socio-political environment that facilitates societal stability, which in turn leads to political growth and development. Therefore, all efforts aimed at dealing with unemployment, poverty and inequity must be concerned and properly primed to engage a greater number of the youth population. This is because underpowered and disaffected youth comprise most of today's state and national armed groups. Consequently, Florquin and Berman (2005) infer that lack of economic development and wide spread unemployment make membership of organized armed groups a particularly attractive option for idle youths. In Nigeria, there have been remarkable episodes of insurrection in the country, ranging from the Niger Delta crisis, herdsmen/settlers confrontation, to the Boko Haram terrorist group, and varied subsisting level of criminality and armed banditry. All of which had been possible because of the sea-sand of unemployed

and socially and politically excluded young men roaming the streets, waiting to be recruited for any nefarious purpose. The activities of these groups have variously affected service provision, state of infrastructure and general economic performance. Hence, Olagunju, (2012) posits that these ones who Nigerian claims do not exist are the real bombs the nation must diffuse by discovering and remolding them, if the country must lie in peace and development. Friedman (2013), emphasised that poverty is hard enough to manage, but when it is also linked to loss of status and neglect, the pain is compounded and a politically potent power arises.

Therefore, providing these youth the opportunity to acquire self-reliance education, employment and pragmatic empowerment programmes is key and should be the earnest concern of all government particularly in developing societies like Nigeria. Anumnu, (2001) explicitly maintained that the greatest worry of any growing nation is how to fully utilize education to developed people's ability to manage and induce change, improve the standard of living of her citizenry and effect national development.

CHALLENGES OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND INTEGRATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

Nigeria as a developing country is seriously challenged by poverty. Out of every 10 Nigerians 7 live on less than \$1 a day, infant mortality is 77 per 1000 and maternal mortality stand at 704 per 100,000 live birth which is about the highest in the world. Only half the population of Nigeria had access to safe drinking water while unemployment and underemployment is put at 15% of the labour force, (Jimah, 2011). The situation is worse with the current economic recession occasioned by the falling oil prices.

With the swelling wave of young people, access to reproductive health information is critical so that the youth can be empowered to choose the number of children, avoid unwanted pregnancy, HIV, and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). It is worrisome that Nigeria was unable to embrace the imperative of the empowerment policies embedded in the Millennium Development Goals, MDGs,2015, nor is she rightly placed to benefit from similar opportunities provided in the Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs, 2030.

There is no gainsaying that efforts made by successive administration in Nigeria to stamp out poverty failed due to poor implementation and incompatibility of policy goals. For instance, the government of Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) adopted the policy of poverty eradication

and promotion of socio-economic development and at the same time pursued a policy of retrenchment of workers in the federal bureaucracy and the armed forces. This goes to confirm that most of the poverty oriented programmes of government like the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) etc failed to solve the problem of empowering the poor because of incompatibility of goals.

Another challenge to the actualization of empowerment and integration programmes in Nigeria is the nefarious practices of policy formulators. The policy makers in Nigeria formulate policies and programmes with some inbuilt flexibility to allow them loopholes to make inordinate gains and benefits. For instance, most of the MDG empowerment programmes do not get to the people at the grassroots/rural areas where most of the poor people reside. They are often hijacked by the cronies and agents of the legislatures or bureaucracies who make returns appropriately.

Moreover, the power sector and other complementary infrastructures are not production friendly hence the enabling environment is not guaranteed for low and medium business to thrive. This is worsened by government regulatory policies such as; local government tariff, business permission tax, environmental agency fees, etc.

Also, the non availability of adequate data hinders the measurement of the well-being of Nigerian youths. For instance, there is lack of a universal definition of ‘youth’ which makes difficult the measurement of youth problems and lack of comprehensive youth policies that are integrated into the national development plans. This was corroborated by Ojimele (2012) who argued that, how can you alleviate poverty, when you have not defined the threshold of poverty, when you have not taken the census of the poor and when you excluded the youths from the design and implementation of the scheme intended for them.

Finally, a prominent challenge which is noteworthy of mentioning is the “monstrous” corruption. Corruption is always the cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society. Billions of naira voted for the running of youth empowerment programmes have been diverted to private pockets. Corruption is a serious challenge to the success of these programmes. Due to corruption, laudable programmes have been stunted in both high and low places, which meant that there is no proper management and accountability (Sheidu & Abdullahi, 2012). Indeed, various government and regimes have come up with so many youth based programmes most of which are defunct while to a large number are moribund. It

seems as if nothing was set up at all because the purposes for which they were introduced are defeated.

Finally, Egoboosterbooks (2011) concluded that poor monitoring and supervision of youth programmes, lack of funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, lack of qualified youth personnel (Leader), poor management of youth recreational facilities, and vocational centres are responsible for the poor implementation of youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATIONS

That Nigeria has come a long way in managing excruciating macro-economic challenges is no longer in doubt, given the manner she has confronted the global financial and economic crisis in recent times. However, what is factual is that Nigeria is still facing daunting socio-economic and political crisis anchored on the opportunistic attitude of the political elites, democratic legitimacy, the nexus of youths and their participation, youth unemployment and poverty as well as structures of democracy and national security challenges in Nigeria. As vividly captured by Abati (2006);

“young persons at an impressionable age in their lives read about thieving Governors..... Ministers who have inflated contracts, and collected or given bribes..... hear about Governors who dress like woman and jump bail in foreign land: Local government chairman who go to the council only to share money at the end of the month, lawmakers in the National Assembly who collect millions of naira to mortgage people’s sovereignty... they see all these persons who by Nigerian standard are considered successful”

Little wonder the Nigerian youth do not have any good examples of a role model who can motivate them for self actualization and self-development. This is because “development is all about people who are both the subject and object of development” (Uchechukwu, 2008), while the ascendancy of self and the erosion of a strong sense of civic responsibility on the part of our leaders has led to a situation whereby private interests are placed above the broader social goals of the nation. Then national development is absolutely impossible in the absence of real role models. Consequently, when youths are not adequately equipped to participate in socio-economic and political development of the nation, two issues may result, negative or positive outcomes.

In the democratic Nigerian scenario, the negative outcome has taken root, thereby creating serious macroeconomic challenges in all ramifications for the nation as a result of bad governance, i.e “the inability of state actors, institutions and agencies to (Judiciously) utilize public resources and authorities to ensure the protection of lives and properties as well as the delivering of social services or public goods necessary for the advancement of human security and development” (Onuoha, 2008). As way of moving forward therefore, the government who encapsulate the state, (in developing countries the state is central in the development agenda) must as a matter of responsibility undertake the following steps.

Firstly, for Nigeria to maintain peace and general security, the need to transit from the narrower concept of *National Security* to a broader concept of *Human Security* cannot be overemphasized. The role of the youth agency in this transition is very crucial and urgent. This also calls for a holistic and integrated approach to youth matters requiring integrated sectoral and holistic intervention through the acknowledgement of the diversity, socio-cultural and environmental factors as well as historical antecedents, religion and tradition of Nigeria and Nigerians. This is in view of the fact that in the global arena, human security has gone beyond the treat of weapons of mass destruction to the threat of youth unemployment and poverty.

Secondly, one of the most unfortunate aspect of life in a democratic Nigeria is a lip service been paid to macroeconomic policies and programs that directly affect the youth. For instance, cases of NAPEP, NDE, etc. all targeting the youth never really achieved their set objectives. Both in concept and practice it succumbed to the usual machinations of elitism which (has) characterized all socio-economic policies in Nigeria (Oguonu, 2012). Therefore, as we journey through the millennium, the Nigeria leaders should create inclusive and responsive programmes deliberately built to promote value-creation by targeting the youths as a matter of priority.

Thirdly, the need to address the unemployment and poverty scourge plaguing the nations youths despite her island of stupendous wealth is another area seriously requiring both urgent and permanent solution. It is indeed sad to note that most of the approaches adopted so far are as usual fire brigade in nature. For instance, the national economic empowerment and development strategy (NEEDS) document (1 and 2) which was launched in 2004 and 2007 respectively, aimed at addressing these problems was observed to have been horridly put in place. Many lapses were observed, especially with respect to the over concentration on the private sector that are still at their infant stage and lacking conducive environment (Sheidu 2004, Abdullahi 2008). There should be an honest interest and the political will to actualize and review all poverty alleviation programmes already on ground like NAPEP , YOU WIN, Project YES, etc.

Fourthly, there is no doubt about the fact that history has shown times without numbers that the nature, quality and commitment of leadership are the most essential antidote towards sustainable economic growth and development. Consequently when judiciously co-

opted, the Nigeria youth could make meaningful contribution. The inability of the nation to tap the potentials of her youth is due to institutionalized corruption (Abdullahi et al 2011) which has negated all attempts, thus destroying efforts at fighting unemployment, poverty, social injustice, a scenario that has negated opportunities for economic reforms and the collapse of institutions, etc. In the light of this scenario, there should be a discontinuation of the current political manipulation as well as the negative economic instrumentalization of youth groups in favour of gainful employment both by the government and the private sector towards eradication of youth poverty and the prevailing atmosphere of alienation and dejection by the Nigeria youth.

Fifthly, the need for the government to create conducive environment for sound, judicious and effective socio-political and economic policies cannot be overemphasized. Hence, there should be a clear clarification of the nature and functions of government policies and their direction. In this respect, policy goals must be specific with regards to orientation, targets and operation, while eliminating the room for contradiction and duplications. In addition, youth empowerment programmes and policies should be devoid of unnecessary bureaucratic sentiments, while competent hands with human face(s) should be entrusted in order to bring overall improvement in the general human wellbeing.

Sixthly, the government should avoid a situation of subjecting macroeconomic policies to political party sentiments and affiliation by strictly basing all policy-making position on merit. In this respect, transparency and accountability must be watch word, while coordination as well as harmonization of policies at all levels of government (federal, state and local) should be favored in order to bring about maximum positive externalities.

Seventhly, there should be effective institutions for political stability as well as management of conflicts. In the light of this, the needs to revisit the nation's constitution becomes imperative. There should be a good constitution clearly spelling out the rule of law regarding the fundamental rights of all and sundry irrespective of cultural or religious background. In this regard, the need for a combination of both orthodox and heterodox approaches through participatory method cannot be overemphasized where the youths are given equal opportunity to contribute to this effort.

Finally, if Nigeria is going to maintain her giant status in Africa in particular and among the committee of great nations in general by year 2020 and beyond, she cannot afford to ignore the urgent need to include the youth agency in her match towards sustainable national development. The challenge of effective and mainstreaming of youth participation must go beyond mere political rhetoric and superficial inclusion to take cognizance of crucial issues relating to the social norms and value system of the Nigerian societies. For instance, there should be genuine efforts on the part of policy makers to promote equitable growth, generate employment, raise incomes, ensure youth political engagement and integration, improve agricultural production, promote and expand informal sector livelihood. In this regard, the leaders must not only be seen to be serious, but must be totally committed by matching words with action, bearing in mind that a destroyed youth and youth agency is a

jeopardized future, while they (leaders) should stop preaching and practicing monologue and autocracy in favour of dialogue and true democratic development.

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