
The Nigerian Youth and National Development: A Prescriptive Exploration

Njoku Raymond Ph.D & Isigwe, Paulinus Obinna
Department of Public Administration
Abia State Polytechnic, Aba
raypower102@gmail.com, obinnapaulinus@yahoo.com

Abstract

The youth globally are recognized as a formidable and critical segment of the population of every society whose strength and dynamism are essential in the process of development engineering. Unfortunately, in some developing countries like Nigeria, the government has not really embraced the youth as a central factor in its development efforts. Successive governments apart from mere ceremonial recognition of the youth as “Leaders of tomorrow”, have not articulated concrete policies for youth mobilization as a necessary tool for good governance and development. It is against this backdrop that this article examined the need to strategically mobilize the youth for development in Nigeria. To achieve this objective, content analytical method was adopted as relevant data were sourced from secondary sources mainly textbooks, articles from reputable journals and periodicals. After critical analysis, it was found that Nigerian government has not done enough in the case of youth mobilization for good governance and development. Sequel to this observation, some strategic policy measures were recommended. These include making effective youth entrepreneurship policies for gainful employment and self-fulfillment, provision of qualitative education opportunities for the youth and sustainable civic education programmes for youth re-orientation. These suggestions among others if adopted and implemented by the government would definitely help in the country’s quest development.

Key Words: Youth, Good governance, Development, Mobilization, Entrepreneurship.

Introduction

One of the fundamental challenges facing governments globally and at all levels of governance is how to effectively mobilize the youth, harness their dynamism and potential, and meaningfully integrate them into the national development engineering. The problem of youth mobilization for good governance and positive change in Nigeria has continued to be a major sociopolitical issue field.

The concern and consciousness about youth mobilization among major political gladiators in Nigeria indicate the centrality of the youth in the nation’s development equation.

Our leaders rightly recognize that the youth constitute a reservoir of dynamic human capital-energy, capacities, potentialities, know-how and infinite abilities which need to be properly harnessed and mobilized for positive change and progress of the society. It is therefore essential that nations that aspire to greatness and prosperity must seek ways to positively mobilize and tap the great potential of its youth.

However, most governments and leaders have not adopted appropriate strategies for youth engagement and mobilization. It is against this background that this lecture seeks to examine the nexus and or relationship between youth mobilization, good governance and development.

Specifically, it sought to identify possible strategies for positive youth mobilization and engagement and ultimately attempt a prescription of roles for the youth “in times like these”.

Conceptual Perspectives

In this section we shall attempt a decomposition of the major concepts embedded in the topic of this article to enable us to appreciate the relationship and or nexus between the variables. We shall specifically conceptualize the terms youth, good governance, and development.

Youth: The opinion of scholars and organizations on the concept of youth varies. We shall consider a few perspectives here;

- Hamlyn’s Encyclopedia word dictionary: Youth means the condition of being “young”.
- Oxford Advanced Learner’s dictionary of current English: Youth refers to young men and women. This means that whoever is young, fresh and vibrant both in looks and at heart, full of hope, of promise, enthusiastic ideas is a youth even at 70 years.
- The Nigeria National Youth Policy (2009) defines youth as persons between 18 – 35years.
- The African Youth Charter States that youth or young men refers to people between the ages of 15 – 35years.
- The United Nations defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 – 24.

Whatever definition is adopted, the central thread that appears to hold the views about the concept “youth” can be expressed as follows: It is synonymous and associated with dynamism, creativity, enthusiasm, youthfulness, hope, innovativeness, promise, vigour, positive thinking, sociability, cosmopolitan and progressive mindset, self-esteem, spirit of camaraderie, explorative, etc.

Good Governance:

The concept of good governance has been treated by some scholars and governments of certain nations with caution because of the way it emerged and used in the international development literature. Generally, it has been used in the development literature to describe the way institutions of governance manage public resources in order to ensure that the general well-being of citizens is guaranteed and with respect to human rights, dignity and rule of law. But also, the concept has been used with elements of ideological bias for comparing economies and political institutions with viable economic profiles and political bodies, treating those of the liberal states of Europe and the Americas as the most successful because they are said to be more effective in promoting viable economies and in ensuring respect for human rights.

Whatever are the ideological problems, Ibodje (2009) posits that good governance for us here is one that is characterized by accountability in the management of public resources, rule of law in the conduct of public affairs, predictability of institutional performance and behaviour, justice and equity and effectiveness in the management of the economy. He noted that these characteristics of good governance are also the elements constituting the environments for development.

For Duru (2005) good governance is the use of political power to manage public affairs and to shape its economic and social environment in line with perceived notion of public interest and societal progress. According to Otto and Ukpere (2012), good governance depends on “the extent to which a government is perceived and accepted as legitimate, committed to improving the public welfare and be responsive to the needs of its citizens, competent to ensure law and

order and deliver public services, able to ‘create an enduring policy environment for productive activities and is equitable in its conduct’.

The above analyses show that good governance has indices and therefore for a government to be regarded as good, it has to possess notable essential ingredients as respect for separation of powers, and the independence of the various arms of government, exhibition of accountability, good/effective management of the economy, respect for rule of law and the constitution, dedicated to programmes of national development in spheres of social, economic and political sectors of the society.

Development

The concept “Development” has lent itself to several definitions and interpretations by scholars. It is not uncommon for a social scientist with classical economic orientation to have a conflicting checklist of what constitutes “development” different from that of his counterpart with western liberal Marxist persuasion or conviction. Without recourse to the diverse definitional semantics associated with development, it is used here as the sustained elevation of an entire society and social system towards a better human life. Within the context of our country, therefore, Development has to do with the progressive reduction of poverty, inequality and unemployment. It involves a sustainable and comprehensive change or transformation in cultural, educational, economic, social and political fields to enhance the living condition of the greater majority (Tatvana, 2008). It means improving existing ways of doing things to make the processes more efficient and more productive than before. It also has to do with creating opportunities through people’s abilities and talents. Development becomes meaningful when it serves to increase the access of people to basic necessities of life, allow people to participate in defining their priority needs, proffer solutions to their problems and make tangible investment in their solutions (Ibodje, 2009).

Hence, drawing from Rodney (1972), Adebayo (2000), Kalagbor (2004) and Obikeze (2002), Njoku (2005:10-12) submits that in a developed society, all meaningful development programs must embrace the following sectors:

The Economic Sector: This involves industrialization, employment opportunities for the people, reduction in the level of inflation, food for the people, mechanized agriculture, efficient banking and insurance services, and the provision of other material things that would help to alleviate poverty and improve the living standards of the people. Also, included in this economic sector are the provision of transportation services, effective communication through diverse means, provision of electricity that is regular and full, provision of shelter and portable water.

Social Services: This sector comprises mainly the tangible aspects of development and takes place on a direct relationship of man with other individuals in society. Such issues as discipline, honesty, security and peace are desirable parameter of developed societies. All people and societies seek some basic form of self-esteem. This is also referred to as authenticity, identity, respect, honor or recognition. Essentially, the social aspect of development is of enormous relevance in terms of development as it will manifest in the order and civility of an organized society and help to check the magnitude of corruption in such a society. Additionally, peace and justice are vital ingredients of development in the society.

Political Indicators: This again is very vital in measuring development in any society. The prevalence of a well organized political system is a consequence as well as the cause of

development. Here we shall be thinking of the stability of the political process, the existence of political institutions and the efficiency of their operations, the operations of democracy and majority participation in the political process, the existence of the rule of law and the respect for the freedom of the individual.

Education Sector: Education is now accepted as a means of meeting other needs and also a means of accelerating development and improving productivity by promoting economic growth. Development in this sector would be tantamount to rehabilitation of the infrastructure so as to enhance the quality and facilitate raising standards. It will also involve provision of equipment for workshops, laboratories, modern science and technological gadgets and ensuring their sustained operations, the provision of textbooks and adequate funding of educational institutions in order to be able to engage in effective teaching and learning. Development here should encompass mass literacy and making education affordable to majority of members of the society. This is in recognition of the fact that an educated society is one that is equipped for ordered living.

Health Sector: Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Development in this sector will mean the removal of all biological, environmental and social, cultural, psychological factors that could cause health hazard in the society. A situation where a greater percentage of the citizens is malnourished, and lack the basic medical care cannot be said to be in a state of development.

Strategies for Youth Mobilization in Nigeria

Nigerian youth constitute the most active and productive sub-sector of Nigerian population, committed to socioeconomic and community development. If correctly guided and mobilized, the society will be better. It is in recognition of the need for strategic mobilization and effective integration of the Nigerian youth for national development that the following strategies are advocated:

1. Making effective youth entrepreneurship policies for gainful employment and self-fulfillment

Government at all levels must strive to create opportunities for the youth to be gainfully employed so as to channel their energy to productive endeavours. There is a saying that “an idle mind is the devil’s workshop”. To this effect, government at all levels must have viable and robust youth entrepreneurial policies.

For youth entrepreneurial policies to be effective, it should be approached within the context of wider employment policies and programmes and an integrated approach with interventions across multiple sectors and at multiple levels. Interventions should therefore target the specific challenges that the youth face with regards to:

- i. The promotion of entrepreneurship culture** — social and cultural attitudes along with family values and norms have a strong influence on whether a young person decides to pursue an entrepreneurial career. Whereas society’s norms influence an individual’s approach to life they similarly influence entrepreneurial activity. Entrepreneurship culture campaigns, the promotion of young successful entrepreneurs as role models, business idea competitions, awards, media coverage, youth business events and entrepreneurship education are important strategies for creating a culture of entrepreneurship.

- ii. **Introduce entrepreneurship education at different education levels** — presenting students to the world of business and transferring knowledge and entrepreneurial skills through formal and informal education is crucial to creating responsible young entrepreneurs, including social entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship education is not only a means to create young entrepreneurs but also to equip young people with entrepreneurial attitude and skills which will benefit them in other areas of life, their communities and society as a whole.
- iii. **Improvement of the legal and regulatory environment** - with emphasis on the specific barriers and burdens faced by young entrepreneurs - and especially young women entrepreneurs is especially important. Often the administrative and regulatory burdens — such as business registration, the time it takes to register, the cost, the number of steps/procedures, minimum capital requirements, property rights etc. - have a disproportionately negative impact on youth-owned businesses, which are more likely to remain informal as a result. Business environment reforms are necessary to unleash the entrepreneurial efforts of current and emerging young businesswomen and men.
- iv. **Access to affordable finance** — is often perceived as one of the biggest impediments for younger people who, compared to older age groups, have no or less savings and resources, lack of securities in form of e.g. land and property that can be used as collateral in debt-financing, lack of business experience etc. Easing the collateral and legal requirements on young entrepreneurs is important and improving access to various types of finance micro, equity, venture and credit guarantee schemes — in some countries backed by governments — are important factors in improving the access to finance for young entrepreneurs.
- v. **Relevant business development services and support schemes** - for youth already in business or for those interested in pursuing an entrepreneurial career is important. Through the pre- start-up, start-up and growth phases of a business venture, there is a need for specific training in entrepreneurial and business management skills. Potential young entrepreneurs often lack business connections, have little or no knowledge about where to access business support services and often not adequate workspace and business infrastructure. Addressing these constraints through e.g. “one-stop” shops, youth enterprise centres, business incubators and entrepreneurship and start-up training is increasingly being experimented with in several countries.

To have a lasting impact, the promotion of youth entrepreneurship should be approached comprehensively, emphasizing sectors with job creation potential and integrating the three components of sustainable enterprises, social, economic and environmental environments. Human progress and sustainable economic development depend on new ideas and the ability of young and future entrepreneurs to implement these ideas. The only means to bringing about sustainable development is through investments in the creativity, innovation and problem solving skills of youth.

2. Provision of sound and qualitative educational opportunities for the youth

Government at all levels must strive to provide sound and qualitative educational opportunities for the youth. The truth is that the quality of education Nigerian youth receive today is too poor.

The reality in our schools today is that most of the required facilities that facilitate teaching and learning are not provided. This leads to the production of unskilled and unemployable graduates.

3. Consultation of the Youth on Major National Issues

As the presumed leaders of tomorrow, efforts should always be made by leaders to create channels through which the youth can be consulted on critical issues that concern them.

4. Sustainable Civic Education Programmes for Youth re-orientation

Since ours is still a developing democracy, the electoral body (INEC) and other public enlightenment agencies like the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should make efforts in the area of civic education for the youth. Especially, the dangers of electoral malpractices must be emphasized. It is not just enough to use the orthodox means of mass media in doing this. Grassroots or local bodies like Market Women Association, Town Unions, churches and mosques should equally be used to reach and educate the youth on the dangers of electoral malpractices and other vices associated with the youth.

Other strategies that can be adopted for youth mobilization for good governance and development include:

- i.** Provision of Award Scheme for the youth
- ii.** Moral guidance and discipline through exemplary leadership by the elders
- iii.** Implementation of youth re-orientation policies and programmes, etc.

Role of the Nigerian Youth in Times like These

It must be noted that the Nigerian population is estimated at 180million. The youth constitute about 70%, which means that the strength of the nation lies in the youth. If this current democratic dispensation and even our dear nation must endure and progress, the youth must therefore stand up to the rescue.

Along with other expected official government policies, strategies and reforms to encourage active youth participation in our current democracy, the youth must consciously cultivate those attitudes and functional capacities that facilitate the success of our democracy. The clusters of youth attitude, re-orientation and actions identified below are of critical relevance to our situation.

God fearing: The youth must put God first in all their efforts to deepen the Nigerian democracy. The bible says that “the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom” and that “when the righteous is on the throne, the people rejoice”. The youth must therefore be ambassadors of Jesus Christ. They must follow the paths of righteousness and holiness in all they do for according to the bible in Matthew 6:33, “but seek ye first the kingdom of God and its righteousness ...”. The scriptures also asked “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul to eternal damnation?”

So the youth should bring the fear of God to bear in all their actions. It will help nurture them in morality, in integrity, accountability and probity. Our Lord Jesus Christ represents a good example when at the age of 12, He went to the synagogue and quizzed adult philosophers, scientists, religious and political leaders. Later in life, He chased out of the temple of Jerusalem, a bunch of exploiters, swindlers and people of questionable character who were there to exploit their society.

- **Assisting in Political Education:** The youth have a role in the political education, mobilization and sensitization of citizens in our current democracy. This will involve the youth in training the Nigerian electorate on the virtues of democracy and the need to perform their civil responsibilities. Other issues involved include:
 - They must properly preserve their voter cards
 - They must come out to vote during elections for candidates that will enhance their welfare.
 - They should be good winners and good losers.
 - They should not disrupt the peace of their communities simply because their favourite candidates did not win.
 - They must refuse to be used as thugs for intimidation of political opponents.
 - They must not encourage the underage to vote.
 - They should refuse financial inducement by politicians.

- **Youth Associations for Sustainable Democracy and Good Governance:**
 - Youth can form pressure groups to seek peaceful co-existence, especially in times like these
 - Youth free-drug clubs like YASA – Youth Against Substance Abuse should step up their activities.
 - Youth organizations against aggression and acts of vandalism of public installations such as pipe lines and power installations should be formed and actively supported by government.
 - Youth should think out of the box for innovative and creative ideas that can help enhance the welfare of the people.

Conclusion

The development profile of Nigeria is generally low when matched against all development indicators. There is a general agreement on the imperative of good governance as a way out of the nation's development problems. However, the prospect for good governance and development in Nigeria is not yet very bright.

Part of the problem has much to do with poor youth mobilization strategies by the government. The condition of the youth in Nigeria given their numerical strength, dynamism, resourcefulness and energy is not amenable to the promotion of good governance as a necessary condition for the effective management of public resources for development engineering. We have in this article postulated several policy strategies on how the youth who constitute about 70% of Nigeria's population can be mobilized for good governance and development.

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