# YOUTH PARTICIPATION: AN ELIXIR FOR INSECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

**KALU, IFEANYICHUKWU INNOCENT PhD PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT ABIA STATE POLYTECHNIC, ABA.**

# [anyikalu@yahoo.com](mailto:anyikalu@yahoo.com) AND

**ALUM, CHARITY N. PhD**

# PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT ABIA STATE POLYTECHNIC, ABA.

[**charityalum22@gmail.com**](mailto:charityalum22@gmail.com)

# ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study was to examine the nexus between youth participation, insecurity and extension sustainable development in Nigeria. In spite of the growing population of young people in the country, they are largely excluded from core decision making. Thus, the young people in Nigeria feel largely marginalized from governance, leaving them helpless about their continued exclusion as evidenced in the low percentage of youth who hold political and leadership positions in the country. This study adopted ex-post factor method of analysis. The findings revealed that youths have not been participating effectively not only in decision making but also in the trajectory of Nigerian security. This has significant effect to achieving sustainable development in the country. It was therefore recommended in this study among others that government should strengthen the capacity of youths in governance as well as incorporate them in peace building mechanism.*

# KEYWORDS: Youth, Political Participation, Insecurity, Exclusion, and Sustainable Development.

**Introduction**

Security is the concern of every human society, irrespective of its level of civilization. It is a pivotal condition for national development (Ibrahim, 2018). Though security is everyone’s business, it is the primary responsibility of the state to protect the lives and properties of her citizenry. Drawing from the contract theorists, Radda (2008) as cited in Ibrahim (2018) boldly states that failure to fulfill this role makes the state an illegitimate one; thus citizens have no obligation to obey the state’s commands.

The current national security situation in Nigeria is affecting the rate of human development and posing many challenges among which Nigerian youths are major contributors. Some of the youths succumb to armed-robbery, religion/public disturbances like that of the Niger Delta Militants (NDM), Odua People’s Congress (OPC), and the Boko Haram (BH) sects because they are jobless. In fact, Nigeria is at war with self as insecurity remains her greatest challenge.

As Ibrahim & Mukhtar (2017) rightly pointed out, since 1960s militia groups began to be formed in different parts of Nigeria, mostly on ethnic sentiment, but disguised to provide security (e.g. Bakassi Boys), self-determination (e.g. Movement for the Actualizations of Sovereign States of Biafra), and to gain advantage for their own ethnic group (e.g. Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People). Maitatsine uprising of the 1980s was on religious radicalism. Also, kidnappings, vandalizations, and hostage-takings by members of Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) were because of environmental injustice on the people of the region by the government. Some of these have taken place for some decades back, but story of Nigeria’s present security challenge sis not complete without mentioning Boko Haram. These violent groups and other organized criminal syndicates have ravaged the Nigeria’s national security. However, since youths are at the forefront of the rebellion and perpetration of many crimes; they equally constitute an important structure for bringing positive change in the country.

Nigeria is witnessing a number of security challenges associated with militancy (Oladeji 2000). About 67 million young Nigerians are jobless because they do not possess the relevant skills that will make them to be employable (Kola, 2020). These problems also have the very damaging consequence of giving the signal to the rest of the international community that Nigeria is not a safe and secure place and as such not suitable for economic investment and activities. This is particularly important in view of the efforts being made to create the desired atmosphere to attract foreign investment (Oladeji, 2000).

As the Nigerian population continues to increase, so does the number of youth. The population of youth (18–35 years) in Nigeria is 52.2 million (i.e., about 28% of the total population), which is more than the entire population of Ghana, London and Benin Republic put together. In spite of the prospects that this number holds, young people in Nigeria are largely marginalised from governance, leaving them helpless about their continued exclusion. The leadership cadre is filled with aged politicians who think nation building is their exclusive preserve and as such youth should not be given a chance. Perhaps, their stand explains why though youths are said to be leaders of tomorrow, that future never comes (Abah, 2015). This is evidenced in the low percentage of youth who hold political and leadership positions in the country (Afolayan, 2018).

The youth constitute a large proportion of the societies in developing countries with pressing health, education, social and economic needs. As at 2009, the United Nations estimated the youth population to be billion or approximately 18 percent of the word population. About 64 percent of African youth live n countries where at least one third of the population lives on two dollar or day. (Encarta, 2009). Despite the critical value of youth to nations, Nigeria like most African countries under-invest in youth participation in the security of the society, thereby breeding an army that is turned into unprofitable activities. The age bracket within which people can be classified as youth varies across countries. The World Bank and the United Nations categorized youths as those persons between the age of 14-1 years while the world Health organization include persons up to the age 34 years (Elegbeleye, 2005).

Therefore, they are the force for nation development thus making their actions and inaction a necessary impetus for embedding and consolidation the vertical and horizontal integration of any society their under utilization has economic and psychological cost which increase poverty and social insecurity. Afolayan (2018) opined that Nigeria is at crossroad now, and only the youths can better appreciate and refocus her strength for the great re-direction and

turn-around needed to achieve a stable polity, devoid of rancorous, turbulent, and uncertainties presently characterising our political landscape.

The involvement of young people in the development, implementation and evaluation of youth mental health services, security, policy and research programs is essential to ensure they are appropriate and responsive to the needs of young people. Despite the increasingly central role that youth engagement and participation plays internationally, such activities are rarely described in detail. The task of this paper therefore is to examine the role of the youth in curbing insecurity which has become a recurring decimal in Nigeria.

# Conceptual clarification

Youth can be define as a special group of people with strong stamina and passion for realizing certain set goals and objectives. Thus, for the purpose of this paper, we shall define youths as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence. The youths share certain characteristics that distinguish them from other age group. They are vibrant, great, enthusiastic, zealous energetic and ambitious. Also, youth share certain characteristics that distinguish them from others generation. Such characteristic include, impatient for change, zealousness, radicalism, rebellions, curiosity, hard work, ego and ambition etc. These are the propelling factors for national development.

National development can be seen as the general improvement in the lives of individual, groups, and environment. Looking at these two concepts, it is safe to say, that, youth are the engine and actualizes of national development, if their mindsets are channels in the right direction. Therefore, their actions and inaction are necessary impetus for entrenching and consolidating the vertical and horizontal integrations of any society or country like Nigeria.

Youth participation can thus be regarded as the process of guiding and designing micro- and macro-society by and with young persons. It is a democratic process in which young persons challenge society to bring about positive changes for sustainable development. Youth participation centers on creating an environment where youth work in partnership with adults with mutual respect and understanding.

In terms of spheres of participation in national development, the UN General Assembly (UNDESA, 2004) defined youth participation as comprising four components: economic participation, relating to work and development; political participation, relating to local, national, regional, and international decision-making processes; social participation, relating to involvement in community activities; and cultural participation, relating to the arts, cultural values and expression.

# The Role of Nigerian Youths in Achieving Sustainable Development

Youth are one of the greatest assets any nation can be proud of. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the future leaders, young women and men are potentially and actually the vital resources worth of investment by a country as well as the valued possession for national development. As critical stakeholders, they are the center of reconstruction and sustainable development of any nation (Kura, 2008).

The role of youth on national development cannot be over emphasis. The wheel of development of any country lies on the shoulder of how productivity and creativity the youthful populations are. The youth in any society are the engine of growth and development; because, they provide the labour force for production of goods and service to

take effect. And also, are the critical masses of people, whose action and inaction can develop or destroy the hegemonies of their society. For example according to the 2006 census, the youthful population constituted over 70% of the population. So, therefore, this quantum of population is great assets for the Nigerian state if harness and utilize in the right direction.

Interestingly, the transition of society from one generation to another is critical to the formative and developmental aspiration of such society. That, is why society that prepare their youth for the sake of future aspiration will not only secure her future development; but, will prepare her next set of leaders with the challenges of national reconciliation and development. So, therefore, the role of youth on national development is sacrosanct to the whole developmental aspiration of any society.

The youth are the cornerstone to societal rejuvenation. Societies are not only recreated through the youthful population, but, youth are often referring to as leaders of tomorrow. So, their mindset and roles is of major important to the development of any society. It is perplexing to say, that, no nation will experience development when the preponderance of the population that constitutes the largest percentage of the population are idle and ineffective. So, therefore, the youths have a greater role to play on national development. It has been suggested that a demographic window of opportunity opens as fertility and high youth dependency declines. In Nigeria could by 2030 reap the benefits of what some called a “demographic dividend” if it invest now in human development. Nigeria current demographic structures could be future assets when fact, To the Nigeria youths, not oil is the future of Nigeria in the 21st century.

Unfortunately, these projections, expectations, and future forecasts, seem to be an abysmal blindfolded future, if the prevailing realities is anything to go by. Abah (2015) lamenting on this noted that:

*youths are the building blocks of every developed nation. The stronger the youth of a country, the more developed that country. For a country like Nigeria with about 70% youth population, one wonders why we are where we are but why would this not be so when the future of the youth has been mortgaged for selfish gains; when we have been denied the benefits of good education, when our minds have been chronically infested with low morality and loss of values, when the leadership class is riddled with notoriously corrupt individuals which the justice system has helplessly fail to punish. Why won’t it be so when government’s plans and readiness to revive youth un-productivity is but a mere lip service? They only engage us during election and turn us intelectoral thugs instead of building enough schools and creating adequate employment opportunities.*

The current state of the mind of Nigerian youth is not encouraging and does not inspire confidence. Societal neglects and government inability to design an integrated and implementable policy framework targeting the youthful energy for national development, has left the youth without guardianship, mentorship and direction. Instead of utilizing their energy, curiosity, creativity, passion and impatient for change to foster national development; unfortunately, the gamut of the society has left the youth without, hope, guardianship, mentorship and future aspiration, if the agonies of poverty, unemployment, frustration, despondences, confusion, hopelessness, parental and governmental neglects, are anything to go by.

The role Nigerian youths are never to be neglected if the country is to be among the League of Nations in terms of development. The sad reality is that the potentials of the Nigerian youths have been grossly untapped. A look at the present Nigeria policies and politics; One will realize that the youths have not been giving the ground to showcase their potential. Good policies have been made by the Nigeria over the years to arrest unemployment and lack of access to quality education which is some of the problems majorly faced by the youths. But the obvious reality is that little or nothing has been done to lift these policies out of the pages and begin its implementation (lastmessenger, 2015).

Again worthy of mentioning is the heartbreaking reality that the youths themselves have remained ignorant choosing rather to tow the same line that the corrupt politicians are, allowing themselves to be bought over by the men who have held the country hostage for a very long time. A look at the activities of the youths in the social media in defending the corrupt politicians either because of ethnic affiliations or religious grounds is a sad reality that leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. They have majored on the minor leaving behind important matters like unemployment, corruption, insecurity and lack of access to basic medical care. Yet these problems affect all Nigerian youths notwithstanding the ethnic or religious affiliations. Everybody in one way or the other is affected by the effect of bad leadership and yet we occupy ourselves in fighting to defending our ethnic nationalities at the expense of national development. This trend must be arrested and the youth must make a dramatic shift in their thinking and general evaluation of national matters (lastmessenger, 2015).

When young men and women understand their rights, they can become empowered to engage in civil society, public service and political processes, at all levels. They need to know the channels through which they may exercise their civil and political rights and contribute to decision-making processes that impact their lives (UNDP, 2014 as cited in Ibrahim, 2018). Channels for youths’ engagement include formal political processes such as youth advisory boards at local level, youth parliaments or shadow councils at national level, and engagement with United Nations processes at the global level, for example (UNDP, 2014 as cited in Ibrahim, 2018). Other entry points, include volunteerism, access to civil service positions and decision-making processes in the public administration, initiatives for transparency and accountability, promotion of human rights, legal reform, and support for youth organizations.

# Factors Affecting Youth Effective Participation in Nigeria.

1. **Improper orientation of the Youths**

Many youths have a warped Philosophy of what life is all about and have lost will power to shun nefarious activities such as Thuggery, Cultism, Truancy, Robbery etc. This is as a result of poor orientation and motivation arising largely from failure in some aspect of the society such as negative poor group and social media influence. Dwindling habit of reading and acquisition of useful skill through format or information channels ahs contributed to improper orientation. Youths need to be well grounded in the moral value and cultural ethics.

# Lack of Social Safety Net

Policy (unemployment support scheme), There is the absence of social safety programme to financially support the unemployed youths in the country. In some advanced Jurisdiction (U.S.A, Great Britain and New Zealand) the programme helped to provide workers who are

unemployed through no fault of their own with monetary payment for a specific period of time until the workers find a new Jab.

Unemployment benefit are provided by the state unemployment insurance programmes within quislings establishment by Federal Law eligibility for unemployment insurance benefit amount and the length of time benefit are available are determined by state law. Operations of these programmes help the youth to execute career pathway entrepreneurship activities in the medium aim

# Poor societal attitude to technical and vocational education development.

There exist very low public status for technical and vocational education, this phenomenon has made vocational training unattractive. Inadequate schools: There is glaring shortage of teaching facilities are not functional which negatively attracts the quality of learning.

# High rate of unemployment

There is high rate unemployment among the youths in the world across the Federation at large. This is by implication the outcome of poor industrialization high level of illiteracy among the Nigeria local Areas and youth reduce them to the immediate job available no matter how negative or inhuman.

# Corruption and Mal-administration

Corrupt and despotic politicians as well as Bad government exposes the Nigerian Youth to armed conflicts and acts of violence by engaging them in thuggery, cultism and robbery just to satiate their selfish interest thereby causing societal unrest disturbing peaceful co- existence in the society.

# Conclusion

No doubt; Nigeria is seating on a gun powder ready for explosion, if the reality of frustration and hopelessness among the vast of Nigerian youths are anything to go by. Therefore, it is important, for policy makers, parents and gate keepers, to understand and appreciate that, youth are the future of this country; therefore, their mindset and creativity should be a major concern to the nation. There is need for the government to create atmosphere favourable for the youth to achieve their desire objectives. The agonies of Boko Haram, Militancy, armed Robberies, Scams and other social deviance are the product lack of guardianship and vision for national development.

# Recommendations

The youths must shun ethnic and religious sentiments in their choice of who to vote into political position. This is important because the cost of voting in a corrupt politician into a political position is too great. They can longer continue to make the same mistake which has kept the country moving in circles.

Again the youths must have one voice when making their stand known in matters concerning the running of affairs of the country. Enough of these ethnic and religious divide things that make us quarrel. They must begin to see themselves first as humans before considering their little differences which must also be harvested to foster a stronger unity among the Nigerian youths.

The youths should also take interest in political matters. They must stop being complacent and nonchalant in the politics of this country. You cannot change what did not touch; therefore if the political atmosphere of Nigeria will change for the good, the youths must be actively involved in politics. They must come out to vie political position with the bid to set good examples and create a lasting legacy which others will follow. Think of how advantageous it will be to have many youths as law makers in the national assembly.

Furthermore, in vesting in knowledge and skill is critical to youth development. Education is the cornerstone of Nigeria’s future.

And lastly it is time for the youths to widen their horizon and begin to actively engage in economic activities. There other areas of the economy where the youth can fully engage and make their impact felt. In the Transportation sector, manufacturing sector, agriculture sector, energy sector, oil and gas, mining etc abound opportunities yet untapped where the youth can go in and excel, contributing positively into the economic development of the country. Enough of the constant complaining that there is no job. According to the first laws of motion by Isaac Newton; nothing moves until a force is applied. The time has come for action. It is time to make Nigerian a great country for us and the future of our unborn children.

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