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Role of Youth in National Development in Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Think about these quotations on the youth before the definitions: Youth is when you blame all your troubles on your parents; maturity is when you learn that everything is the fault of the younger generation” Harold Cotin. That’s what being young is all about. You have the courage and daring to think that you can make a difference Ruby Dec. There is a place in God’s sun for the youth, “farthest down” who has the vision, the determination and the courage to reach it. O.A Battista. The young do not know enough to be prudent, and therefore, they attempt the imposible and achieve it, generation after generation” Pearl Buck. Each youth is like a child born in the night who sees the sun rise and thinks that yesterday never existed” W. Somereset Maugham.

Youth

The concept of youth is devoid of unanimous definition among social scientists and analysts. Biologically, youth is the quality of being young, youthfulness, and juvenility. It is that aspect of one’s existence that succeeds the childhood stage but precedes the adult age. The age limit for the youth varies from one country to another. According to the [1], in some countries, the lowest age limit is 10 years (Haiti), 14 years (Costa-Rica), (Nigeria) is 16 years. There are also variations in the upper limit, some are 29 years (Honduras, New Caledoma), 25 years (Europe and North America). In Nigeria, it is 30 years as reflected in the different ethnic cultures of Nigeria, and in the National Youth Service Scheme. In the different ethnic culture of Nigeria, a youth is any person who is still not too minor in age nor too old in age. The youth is a period of life during which the growing individual makes the transition from childhood to adulthood [2]. It is a period marked by what Anthropologists call “rites of passage” from birth, puberty, marriage. The period may last for years rather than months [1]. The youth/adolescent stage is a period of some stress, and has reached his full height covers years of primary, secondary, high school and starting a job. Within this period, the youth is under the guidance of the parents for financial support, personal and social guidance.

Development and National Development

Let us look at the word “Development” before national development. Development means a process by which the society is improved in their standing on socio-economic measures in terms of higher level of economic prosperity and political stability [3]. Development, no

matter how it is viewed, is people oriented. It is about putting human face to human affairs. In this paper, we define development in its broadest sense, as a sustainable multi-prolonged process of good governance and socio-economic progress that has integrity, well being, security of the individual and the society at large as its core. Then, what is national development?

National development therefore, refers to a process of reconstruction and development of in various dimensions of a nation and development of individual. It implies full growth and expansion of our industries, agriculture, education, social, religious and cultural institutions. It also incorporates all round and balance development of different aspects and facets of the nation's political, economic, social, cultural, scientific and material conditions. The United Nations defines national development as "growth plus change" - - - positive change in social quantitatively [2].

Consequently, National development, will thus encompass two major variables; economy growth and human development. National development is conceived in three components: (a) economic growth (b) human development (c) transformation. These will determine and shape the quality of life which is the main thrust of all national development efforts. [3]

This can be achieved through the following;

- a. A planned national economy
- b. Increase in agricultural production with the application of modern tools.
- c. Harnessing industrial production
- d. Development of human resources
- e. Application of science and technology in production sector
- f. Provision of mass education with quality.
- g. Provision of essential facilities to meet the needs and aspirations of the deprived and poorest of the poor segments of the population.

Having done with the conceptualization of the major variables, we now ask, what roles can youth play in National development index? This is the theme of our paper.

- (a) Youths occupy a formidable and vital segment of the population of any country. For any nation or country to attain a reputable social, economic and political growth, it has to be aware of the vital position of the youths and treat them accordingly [3]. Late Alh. Ahmadu Bello described the youth as " the vanguard for the advancement of any society".
- (b) In economic terms, youths are the most productive members of any nation. They are the most active and energetic workforce that contribute to socio-economic development of the society. Certainly, youths are one of the greatest assets any nation can have. They are not only regarded as the leaders of tomorrow, they are potentially and actually the greatest investment for a country's development [4].
- (c) The youths occupy a strategic position in the country, as they are the engine room for development and social re-engineering. The successful implementation of any national programme or policies depends to a large extent on their participation [5].
- (d) Youths are engaged in the civil service and security agencies such as armed forces and other security outfits for the territorial and internal security of any nation. No country aspiring to be great will toy or ignore the contributions of its youths or

allow them to constitute major threat to the realization of its policies and programmes of development such as Boko Haram was allowed to grow and become a colossal threat to national and international security.

- (e) During the colonial period, the youth made indelible marks in the struggle for independence and national development. The roles played by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Alh Amadu Bellow, Chief obafemi Awolowo among others were vital enough to secure us independence in 1960. During the civil war, the youths played vital roles in restoring peace in the country.
- (f) In the South East, youths through the age grade system or town union associations, are the most committed group in the execution of voluntary social works or community self help development projects.
- (g) In sports, the youths have done very well and made Nigeria proud in all categories of sports such as football, boxing, athletics, basketball. Nigeria has ruled the world in age grade football on several occasions.
- (h) In other endeavours of life, some youths have equally excelled in academia such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Adichie Chimamanda, etc. They have done well in farming, business, crafts, technical works, religion, and other trades.

Youthful Challenges

Youth being a vulnerable segment of the society with peculiar but unmet needs and aspirations, faces some challenges and problems. Some of these challenges include;

- a. Inadequate parental care
- b. Poor education and illiteracy
- c. Unemployment and underemployment
- d. Political manipulation
- e. Poverty and diseases
- f. Indiscipline
- g. Negative values.

The conditions of the Nigeria youth still leave much to be desired. The current social, economic and political realities leave a sour taste the mouth of the youths particularly those from poor social and economic background. Poor socialization processes with parents, teachers, elders and peer groups, lack of vision and commitment arising from sectionalism, clannishness and other parochial sentiments have impacted negatively on the youths leading to reduced patriotic zeal.

High rate of unemployment has equally dealt a devastating blow on the youths, eating deep into their youthful and productive age. Current statistics of Nigeria Bureau of Statistics show that over 29 million Nigeria children are engaged in exploitative labour which places them at the risk of being victims of human trafficking or become drug agents, robbers, kidnappers, prostitutes, thugs etc. over 230,000 NYSC members are discharged every year with less than 10% getting jobs. The number of unemployed went up from 3.5 million to 11.5 million in 2016. Youths lose faith in their country because they have no jobs.

There is the problem of poor facilities in our institutions, schools (both high and low), leading to production of half baked graduates who are unemployable. Youths also get involved in anti-social activities such as riots, demonstrations, cult activities etc. The annual budget allocated to education in Nigeria is very low. In 2017, only 5.41% of the national budget went to education while 26% was budgeted for in South Africa, Ghana

23.1%, Cote d'Ivoire 21.1%, Benin Republic 15.9%, Cape Verde 13.8%, Liberia 12.1%. Nigeria Universities are ranked low in Africa and the world due to poor funding by government. See figure 2.

Figure 1: Webometric ranking of some Nigeria Universities as at July, 2017.

S/N	Name of University	Rank in Africa	Rank in the world
1.	University of Ibadan	9	1,032
2.	Covenant University	27	2,034
3.	University of Nigeria	31	2221
4.	Obafemi Awolowo University	33	2239
5.	Fed. University of Tech, Minna	50	2538
6.	University of Lagos	62	2776
7.	Abu, Zaria	72	2,980
8.	University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	85	3,192
9.	University of Ilorin	86	3,225
10.	Federal University of Tech, Akure	95	3,365
11.	University of Benin	107	3,547
12.	University of Port Harcourt	109	3,599
13.	Federal University Tech, Owerri.	113	3,658
14.	Ladoke Akintola Uni. Technology	115	3696
15.	Bayero University, Kano	119	3,879
16.	University of Uyo	125	4,008
17.	Lagos State University	127	4,071
18.	University of Calabar	142	4351
19.	University of Abuja	148	4,484
20.	Afe Babalola University, Ado -Ekiti	150	4,565
21.	University of Jos	151	4,569
22.	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	153	4,614
23.	Ebonyi State University	226	6,953
24.	Enugu State Uni. of Sc. & Tech	276	8,931
25.	Abia State University	278	8,978
26.	Imo State University	303	9,978
27.	Michael Okpara Uni. of Agriculture	339	11,200

The table shows that University of Ibadan, the first in Nigeria, is ranked 9th in Africa and one in Egypt. The table also shows that ESUT is ranked 276 in Africa and 8,931 in the world. The fact that no Nigerian university is ranked among the best 1,000 universities in the world speaks volume about the quality of education in the country. Contrary to what obtained in the past, University in Nigeria are now known for the production of half-baked and unemployable graduates. The case of three university graduates, who could neither do simple documentation nor communicate effectively in English language during their NYSC programme in 2013, paints a clear picture of the scenario as it concerns standard of education in Nigeria. This makes some of the youths unemployable. Our education is rather certificate based instead of issue focused. Most certificates are worthless and cannot be justified by their holders [4]. Youths are usually manipulated by some politicians who use them to acquire their selfish political end and dump them after elections. Inadequate parental care has contributed negatively to the plight of the youths. Parents devote more time to chasing wealth and have little or no time for proper socialization with their

children. This goes to hunt the children as they go into adolescent and adult stages of their lives without adequate preparation with the right values.

Ameliorating the Problems of the Youth

- (a) Education is fundamental for empowering the youth as it is the means for passing information and values to younger generations. There should be a well defined education policy that should be issue oriented to peer into the future and make the products employable.
- (b) It is important to reflect the rights, responsibilities and obligations of the Nigerian youth as enshrined in Chapter Four in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Some of these rights include human rights, freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of thought and religion, association, movement, right to proper education and health care, social and food security, right to participate in decision making proper mobilization of the youths can make our youths capable of performing the feats associated with their counterparts elsewhere.
- (c) There should be a clear and implementable youth policy in Nigeria which will create a conducive atmosphere for this important segment of the population.
- (d) Government at all levels must address the problem of high cost of health service since youths need good health care to perform to optimal level.
- (e) The problem of unemployment should be given top priority in the government. Our government should be innovative, creative, proactive and provide job opportunities for the youths. The civil and public services should be computerizes to absorb the teeming youths instead of allowing old hands to recycle themselves for endless years in the system.
- (f) The economy should be properly diversified to create more strategic opportunities to engage the youths in productive ventures in agriculture, tourism, sports etc.
- (g) There is also need for quality and transformative leadership in the country to create a radical and transformative strategy to energize the engine of economic growth and development in Nigeria. The country has remained dormant, untapped and unenergized. A leader that is proactive to influence real positive change, with vision and life balance is needed. The youth should also change their attitude by being inward thinking, thoughtful and independent.

CONCLUSION

Permit me to draw an analogy which I think will be useful to the youths and our leaders between Farmers and Hunters. Farmers and Hunters have common ultimate goal - - - solving the problem of hunger and making a living. However, they pursue their goal in different ways and with obviously different philosophical approaches. The hunter lies in wait to capture the finished product created by someone else, the farmers take the pain of creating their own food by preparing the soil for cultivation through the crop painstakingly when necessary and harvesting the crop at maturity. The farmers preserve good seeds for propagation in the next season, and often keep small animals. The farmers replenish and multiply their resources. Not so with the hunters. All they do is to kill and eat what is already available without replenishing the source [2]. Nigeria politicians, from this analysis, are hunters, sharing the national cake which they did not bake. They lie in wait for

projects or resources meant for the people and they consume same with avaricious insatiable appetite. Under this situation, the youth can make little or no contribution. We should all be farmers to propel this nation to full maturity, not hunters. All hopes are not yet lost. Youths must learn to do things for themselves, think for themselves and innovate for the future.

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