



Impact of Youth Participation on Attainment of Agenda 2063 and Sustainable Development Goals (Sdgs) in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the extent to which effective and constructive involvement of Youth in development processes can enhance the attainment of Agenda 2063 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 in Nigeria. The paper adopts Gabriel Almond's structural-functionalism as a framework of analysis. Using majorly documentary sources of data the paper contends that given their energy, youth constitute a critical stakeholder in African development agenda. They serve as object and subject of political socialization, aggregation and articulation; complement and supplement the effort of government in rural development by undertaking self-help projects; protect the environment etc. The paper identifies bad governance, poverty, unemployment, lack of access to data and information on issues that affect Youth, armed conflicts, girl child discrimination, etc as hindrances to effective and constructive Youth participation in development processes in Africa, especially Nigeria. The paper concludes that attainment of Agenda 2063 and SDGs 2030 in Nigeria depends essentially on the extent to which deliberate policy initiatives are not evolved by government to eliminate the factors that prevent youth from participating meaningfully in decision making and implementation especially on matters that affect them. The paper recommends good governance, increased girl child education, provision of social and economic infrastructure to enable youth practice the skills acquired through vocational skill training, increased access to data and information on issues that affect youth etc, as measures that can enhance youth participation and the attainment of Agenda 2063 and SDGs 2030.

Keywords: Youth; Participation; Sustainable Development Goals; Poverty; Unemployment.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years there have been significant advances in terms of human development in Africa due renewed efforts by leaders in the continent to create a more prosperous future in which all citizens of all creeds and backgrounds are empowered to realize their full potential, live with satisfaction and pride about their continent as envisioned in the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 which fed into the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. Despite these advances, deep challenges remain. Progress has been uneven, with many young people across the continent still experiencing interlocked forms of discrimination, limited political inclusion, high level poverty, and limited access to health systems, educational opportunities and decent jobs etc.

With 60 per cent of Africa's population currently within the age bracket of 24 and below (AFDB, 2013) young people constitute a critical stakeholder in nation building. Their knowledge, reach and innovative solutions are essential if sustainable development is to be achieved. Thus providing opportunities for their involvement by removing obstacles to their participation in decision making and implementation will ultimately enhance the attainment of Agenda 2063 and SDGs 2030. Despite the elevated awareness that involvement of the Youth in policy decisions at all levels will facilitate the attainment of sustainable development, noted by previous studies, successive governments in Nigeria still do not seem to have developed effective measures to deal with the issues facing this large and growing segment of the country's population or to have in place a means to assess the progress made. It is therefore, imperative to reiterate the place of youth in sustainable development; examine the challenges to youth participation in development process in Africa especially, Nigeria with a view to determining how those challenges link to attainment of Agenda 2063 and SDGs 2030.

1. OBJECTIVES

The aim of this paper is to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyze efforts by successive governments to attain Sustainable Development in Nigeria.
2. To explain the link between Youth Participation and Sustainable Development.
3. To explore the challenges to Youth Participation in sustainable development.
4. To recommend measures that can be adopted to improve Youth Participation and enhance the attainment of Agenda 2063 and SDGs 2030.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper majorly relied on secondary sources of data in the form of textbooks, journals, documentary papers, official gazettes, policy documents, circulars and guidelines. Interaction with practitioners especially during conferences lectures and workshops also helped in enriching the sources from where data were ferreted.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted Gabriel Almond's Structural Functional Theory as a framework of analysis. In his search for a functional theory of the polity, Almond proceeds from the point of views that every society is a system with inter-related parts. A system is defined as an entity made up of interconnected and inter-related parts (Uhunmwuango and Ogbator, 2013). Organized human society fits into this connotation of system, herein referred to as the social system (Varma, 2003). The basic assumption of the theory is that, for a social system to survive and maintain its going concern, a certain degree of order and stability is required. To achieve this order and stability, the theory maintained that every functional part of the social system must perform its role. It is this functional pre-requisite that serves to connect the various parts and thus integrate the social system as an organic system (Uhunmwuango and Ogbator, 2013).

Thus, from a functionalist point of view, the social system has certain basic needs which must be met if it is to survive. These needs are known as functional pre-requisites. The function of any part of the society is its contribution to the maintenance of the society (Haralambos, 2001). Using structural functional theory as a basis for analysis in this paper suggests that the youth is an important part of the Nigerian society with specific functions to perform. These functions are not only meant to ensure the continuity of the Nigerian state but also to achieve what functionalists refer to as some degree of fit and compatibility (Afonja, 1994). The political system is a specific system within the social system to which we can relate the functional pre-requisite of the youth.

Almond argued that in any political system, there are four input functions which 'are performed by the non-governmental sub-systems, by the society and the general environment. These are political socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation and political communication (Varma, 2003). Contemporary articulation of the role expectation of the youth fit into these functional categories and should be treated as informed response to the social forces of democratization. Given their energy, innovation and knowledge, the Youth form the subject of political socialization. Organized Youth movement which has received a boost in the wake of democratization process has also provided a platform for interest aggregation and articulation. Political communication provides the information flow that determines the character and orientation of political system. The relevance of Youth in this process cannot be overemphasized, especially in an emergent democracy like Nigeria (Ozohu-Suleiman, 2006). In their interface with the establishment, the Youth largely represent the 'feedback loop', through which critical views of government action or inaction flow from society into the political system (leaders/Decision or policy makers). However, Nigeria, with 193,392,517 million people and with over 50 per cent of youth cannot afford to lock out the Youth if the country must compete politically, technologically and scientifically in order to align itself with the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and A.U. Agenda 2063 (NBS, 2017; and Ukwu, 2017).

4. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

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

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

In practice, youth can be understood as a transitional stage in life between childhood and adulthood, rather than a rigid construct based on age. This new life stage can be characterized as a period of semi-autonomy, when young people experiment with adult roles but do not fully commit to them (World Bank, 2007). Achievement of adulthood can be determined by various factors including achieving economic independence, leaving the parental home, getting married and having children. In some societies, particular social or cultural rituals may also mark the transition to adulthood. Many countries see Youth as ending at the age when a person is given equal treatment under the law – often referred to as the ‘voting age’. In many countries this happens when the young person is 18 years old. After this age, the young person is considered adult. After this age, the young person is considered adult. In spite of the disparity in these views, it is generally agreed that Youth is the period that marks the physical, psychological and social transformation into adulthood. Based on this characterization, many government policies consider to include people aged 13-25 years old (William-West, 2007).

5.2 Youth Participation: This refers to involvement of young people in socio-economic and political development processes of the society in every aspect - social, economic, political – and at different levels – community, country and national (National Youth Policy, 2009). Youth participation is borne out of the realization that the Youth constitute a significant proportion of the population and also possesses enormous energy and capability that need to be harnessed. Youth participation represents a progressive perspective on the role of young people in the society. The young people are no longer passive recipients of social-economic and political transformation. They are stakeholders with vested interests and role in the implementation of development programmes. Thus, Youth participation would require full inclusion of the young people in socio-political and economic life of the society.

The objective of Youth participation is to ensure that all young persons have access to the skills and opportunities they require to make a living, become responsible citizens and contribute to progress in the communities. Youth participation essentially concerned with social transformation and inclusion; nurturing compassionate, sustainable and equitable societies. The major elements of Youth participation are: equalization of power relations between young people and adults at institutional and non-institutional level, including the school, family, religious and governmental structures; right to participate as enshrined in the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as well as the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; youth as citizens who should share in the burdens and benefits of citizenship, which entails full inclusion in society through education and political life; involvement in formal decision-making process in schools, community bodies, programmes, national government and international bodies. It is about having adequate mechanisms to ensure that young people are always at the table to represent the ideas and feelings of their peers in a real way; adequate policies and programmes designed to ensure economic and social integration of those marginalized and those outside the social mainstream; and social transformation that nurtures compassionate, sustainable and equitable societies (Burkey, 1993).

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

5.3 Sustainable Development: It is a movement, a notion and an approach which has developed into a global wave of concern today. It is an idea that was first used in 1980 in the World Conservation Strategy (International Union for the Conservation of Nature – IUCN). This first formulation stressed sustainability in ecological terms, and was far less concerned with economic development. It argued for three priorities to be built into development policies, namely:

- (a) The maintenance of ecological processes;
- (b) The sustainable use of resources; and
- (c) The maintenance of genetic diversity (Olewe, 1995).

Sustainable development, as used today is concerned with political mobilization, and the twin issues of environmental protection and economic development. It involves the notion and ideals of a development process that is equitable and socially responsive, recognizing the extensive nature of poverty, depreciation and inequality between and within nations, classes and communities. It also seriously advocates that the world be seen as one eco-system and advocates that economic development process should include ecological and environmental issues as an essential component (World Bank, 2000). As conceived by the World Bank (Brundtland) Commission on Environment and Development (1991):

Sustainable development seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future...it is a process in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potentials to meet human needs and aspirations.

Cameroon(1993) define sustainable development as the progressive economic and social development of human society through maintaining the security of livelihood for all peoples and by enabling them to meet their present needs, together with a quality of life in accordance with their dignity and well-being, without compromising the ability of future generations to do likewise. Without questioning the principle of "development" as a method for satisfying the needs of current generations, it explicitly recognizes that future generations also have interests and even rights deserving protection in this new model of development. The essential features of sustainable development are: (i) ecological integrity and sustainability; (b) equity and distributive justice at all levels; (c) socially-relevant economic productivity and technological development; (d) popular participation and collective autonomy; (e) prevalence and institutionalization of human development. It is clear from these features that Nigeria is yet to attain sustainable development. Efforts towards sustainable development are in part challenged by the lack of opportunities for young people to effectively and constructively participate in decision making processes.

5. AFRICAN UNION (AU) AGENDA 2063 AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) 2030

The AU Agenda 2063 is a strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of the continent over the next 50 years. It has seven basic aspirations; namely, a prosperous Africa, based on inclusive growth and sustainable development; an integrated continent, politically united, based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance; an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law; a peaceful and secure Africa; Africa whose development is people driven, relying on the potential offered by people, especially its women and Youth and caring for children; and an Africa as strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner.

Agenda 2063 emphasizes the importance of rekindling the passion for Pan-Africanism, a sense of unity, self-reliance, integration and solidarity that was a highlight of the triumphs of the 20th century (African Union, 2013). It is build on, and seeks to accelerate the implementation of past and existing continental initiatives for growth and sustainable development. Some of the past and current initiatives it builds on include: the Lagos Plan of Action, the Abuja Treaty, The Minimum Integration Programme, the Programme for Infrastructural Development in Africa (PIDA), the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), Regional Plans and Programmes and National Plans. It is also built on national, regional, continental best practices in its formulation. The first Ten-Year Implementation Plan 2014-2023, the first in the series of 5-10 year plans over the fifty year horizon was adopted by the AU Summit in June, 2015. This serves as a basis for the preparation of Medium Term Development Plans of member states of the union, the Regional Economic Communities and the AU Organs. Flagship projects and initiatives were approved by the AU Summit to be very urgent and relevant and whose immediate implementation will provide quick wins, impact on socio-economic development and enhance the confidence and the commitment of the African Citizenry to be the owners and drivers of Agenda 2063. These are: integrated High Speed Train Network; Africa Virtual and E-University; African Commodity Strategy; Annual African Forum; Continental Free Trade Area; African Passport and free movement of people; Grand Inga Dam Project; Pan-African E-Network; Silencing the Guns; African Outer Space Strategy; Single Air-Transport Network; and Continental Financial Institutions.

Africa's common priorities as outlined in Agenda 2063 fed into the development of the Agenda 2030 through the African Common Position on SDGs. The Sustainable Development Goals, otherwise known as the Global goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 Goals build on the success of the Millennium Development Goal, while including new areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice among other priorities. The goals of the two agenda are interconnected and the key to success on a single goal will involve tackling issues more commonly associated with other goals. As a result of the African positioning and input into the SDGs process, there is great convergence between Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030. Therefore, African countries are currently domesticating both agenda into National Development plans. The goals of the two agenda are interconnected and the key to success on a single goal will involve

tackling issues more commonly associated with other goals. In Nigeria and indeed Africa, the engagement and actions of youth, in all their diversity will be critical to the achievement of Agenda 2063 and SDGs 2030. Accordingly, understanding, engaging and investing in youth are critical to a peaceful and prosperous future for the people of Nigeria, African continent, and the world at large.

6. YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND ATTAINMENT OF AGENDA 2063 AND SDGS 2030

The role of youth in enhancing the attainment sustainable development in any given nation can never be over emphasized. Youth could be a source of labour inputs as well as human capital in production, which would improve total productivity in a society where capital formation is limited. When employed, youth could be a reliable source of demand for the economy through their consumption activities. The following are specific areas in which youth can contribute to the attainment of Agenda 2063 and SDGs 2030:

- (i) **Mobilization of people to participate in development policies/programmes of government:** Trained and motivated young people can themselves play a sustainable role of garnering support for government policies and programmes through peer education initiatives, especially at the grassroots. Peers can reach out either in an organized manner or informally to other youth, imparting information and knowledge on issues such as health and well-being. Peer education can happen in small groups or through individual context, and can take place in a variety of settings such as in schools and universities, clubs, workshops, on the street or in a shelter. In Nigeria for example, peer education has been used successfully for raising HIV/AIDS awareness and developing life-skills amongst vulnerable youth.
- (ii) **Community Development:** There also exist various types of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in most rural areas, many of which are formed by youths. The essence of the formation of Youth Community-Based Organizations (YCBOs) is to supplement government efforts in community development projects. Udoh, et-al (2014) classified these self-help projects into two: Government Aided Projects (GAP) and Non-Government Aided Projects (NGAP). GAPs are those executed with assistance of government in either finance or material resources while NGAP are those executed solely with collective effort of community members. These organizations are the closet to the people at the grassroots, because the organizations are formed by members of the community themselves. These organizations enhance community development through development, promotion and implementation of development projects; strengthening community resources management; improving the general skills of youth to be productive; promoting sustainable human development; encouraging the participation of the marginalized in the promotion of rural development that affects them; and ensuring proper accountability of community resources. In Nigeria youth undertake self-help projects in various local governments especially projects that involve trade, commerce, home economics, small and medium term enterprises and agriculture. Contributions have also been made by Youth in such areas as educating the rural communities on use of improved seeds or farming techniques through the Young Farmers Club; clearing and draining of drainages and culverts; sinking of ordinary dug-out wells; renovation of clinics, health centres and dispensaries in the rural areas; construction of rural feeder roads; and assistance to less privileged in the society.
- (iii) **Protection of Environment and Promotion of Sustainable Livelihoods:** As heirs of the environmental risks and hazards the world is producing today, the youth could take a leading role in protecting the environment and promote sustainable livelihoods. Africa faces a number of environmental risks and hazards that disproportionately affect young people, not only because they result in deteriorating physical conditions for rural and urban dwellers. Erosion, pollution in all its forms, reduced bio-diversity; and over-exploitation of natural resources such as water and forests, and desertification among many others but also severely compromise economic development and prosperity. In Nigeria for example, migration of cattle herders from the Northern part of the country to other areas especially the south is largely due to increasing wave of desertification which is already fast becoming a reason for conflict. Recent farmers/herders crises in Benue, Taraba, Ekiti, etc are signposts of the dangers of environmental degradation in Nigeria. Similarly, the rate of urbanization in Nigeria poses environmental challenge in waste management, access to water and sanitation facilities. With only an estimated one-third of the total municipal waste in the country formally disposed of, the amount of waste generated in Nigerian cities far exceeds the capacity of most municipalities. The best prospect for environment in Nigeria is an empowered youth. The involvement of youth in environment and development decision making is key in implementing sustainable development policies. Many youth organizations are already taking leading role in the area of environmental protection by carrying out education campaigns, tree planting and waste management exercises in their respective communities especially during the commemoration of the World Environment Day.
- (iv) **Peace Building:** As the most active segment of any society, youth are the major determiners of peace and stability of a nation (Ozohu-Suleiman, 2006). Conversely, the degree of disorderliness and instability in society is also determined in part by youth. Peace is a precursor of development. The absence of peace means that no meaningful development can take place. As observed by Campbell (2007) young people in national youth service

organizations can play a vital role in post war community reconstruction, in maintaining peace in tense situations, and perhaps in preventing post-conflict squealed. Nigeria presents a good example of the utility of youthful participation in effecting post-conflict reconciliation. In an effort to foster peace and unity in Nigeria after the failed attempt by Biafra to secede (1967 to 1970), the then Military government of General Yakubu Gowon issued a decree in 1973 creating the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to develop ‘‘common ties among the youth of the country and promote national unity (Udoh et-al, 2014). The NYSC requires all University and Polytechnic graduates to serve for one year in a part of the country different from where they grew up. Following a quasi-military orientation period, corps members are posted to their places of primary assignment where they are expected not only to work for eleven months in a regular job, but also to initiate community development projects in the areas they serve. The corps members serve in their professional areas and the government provides stipends for them. After service, corps members are brought together again to discuss their experiences, participate in a parade, and receive Certificates of National Service that entitles them to be employed in Nigeria. Although neither entering members nor their families like postings to distant parts of Nigeria. A study of ex-corps members posted away from home showed that in retrospect, only one in ten viewed the experience as negative, with the rest judging it positive (Enegwea, 1993).

7. OVERVIEW OF GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES TO ATTAIN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Different policy measures have been adopted by successive governments in Nigeria since independence (1960) to achieve sustainable economic growth and development. Some of these policies are as follows:

- (a) **Establishment of the Directorate of Food Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI)** in 1986 to execute rural development programmes. The directorate was involved in the construction of feeder roads, rural water supply, rural electrification projects; and offering specified agricultural production support services
- (b) **Environmental protection:** Although a number of natural resources conservation policies have been in existence for very many years, their implementation has been in kicks and starts and highly uncoordinated. Furthermore, the specified recognition of the need for environmental protection in Nigeria as a means of sustainable development is of more recent origin. Thus, while such programmes as those on soil conservation, soil reclamation, soil erosion control, food control, afforestation, desertification control etc, had been in existence for many years, such measures as air pollution control have until recently been poorly coordinated. An indication of government concern for the environment is the establishment of Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) and a Ministry of Environment.
- (c) **Anchor Borrowers Programme (ABP):** ABP was introduced in 2015. It was officially launched in Kebbi State on November 17, 2015 by President Muhammadu Buhari. The programme was designed to create economic linkages between farmers and processors, not only to ensure increased agricultural output of rice and wheat, but also to close the gap between production and consumption. Under the scheme, Small Holder Farmers (SHF) are entitled to loans ranging from N150, 000 to N250, 000 to assist them in procuring necessary agricultural inputs such as seedlings, fertilizers and pesticides, to help boost agricultural outputs and productivity. The CBN had set aside N40bn out of the N220bn Micro Small and Medium Enterprises Development Fund to be given to farmers at a single, digit interest rate of 9 per cent per annum. Loans granted to the SHFs shall be repaid with the harvested produce that shall be mandatorily delivered to the Anchor at designated collection center in line with the provisions of the Agreement signed. The produce to be delivered must cover the loan principal and interest (Proshare, 2017; Onuoba, 2015). While it is touted as one of the most successful Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) development finance interventions to date, and also deemed to have so far achieved reasonable success, especially in the areas of outreach and coverage, the failure of most farmers in some states to repay their loans running into billions of naira, appears to have effectively signaled the commencement of the collapse of the initiative.
- (d) **National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP):** Launched in 2016, the national HGSF programme was designed to provide school children with a free nutritionally-balanced and locally-sourced hot meal every school day. The objective of the programme is to improve school enrolment and completion, stimulate agricultural production and create employment opportunities for the community. The federal government is currently implementing the programme as a pilot scheme in partnership with the governments of 18 Nigerian states to provide sustainable school meals to 5.5 million children in public primary schools (The Nation, 2016). The HGSF programme is experiencing serious challenges across the states where implementation has since got underway. Complaints are rife about the lack of involvement of critical stakeholders to ascertain the methods of identification and confirmation of identities of the beneficiaries of the schemes. There are also allegations that beneficiaries in several states have to be connected to political heavyweights and other partisan interests, which defeat the essence of the programmes (The Guardian, 2017). These challenges have led to the halting of the programme in some states in order to clarify funding and implementation issues. This is the case in Kaduna State, for instance, where Governor Nasir el-Rufai decided to stop the programme in order to stock take (The Guardian, 2017). What this shows is that

good intentions alone are not enough; those altruistic intentions have to be backed up with hard-nosed strategies for implementation, accountability and to ensure the programmes meet citizens' high expectations.

- (e) **Conditional Cash Transfer:** Two main cash transfers are currently being implemented in Nigeria – both conditional. Other small-scale cash transfers include a child savings scheme in Bayelsa state and a disability allowance in Jigawa. In Care of the People (COPE) is a government-run conditional cash transfer (CCT) which started as a pilot in 2007 and is now in its third phase. Its objective is to break the intergenerational transfer of poverty and reduce the vulnerability of the extremely poor. It targets children of basic school age living in households that are headed by poor females or include members, who are aged, physically challenged, or fistula or HIV and AIDS patients. Beneficiary households first receive a monthly Basic Income Guarantee for one year. This ranges from \$10 to \$33, depending on the number of children in the household (a maximum of five); up to a further \$50 per month is withheld as compulsory savings, to be provided as a lump sum (up to \$560) to the head of the household at the end of the year.

Entrepreneurship and life skills training are provided for recipients in order to increase the likelihood of successful investment of the lump sum. Payments are conditional and based on enrolment and retention of children in basic education (primary one to junior secondary), where they must maintain at least 80% attendance, and participation in all free health care programmes. Three other CCTs supporting female education are being implemented in Kano, Bauchi and Katsina states, supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), UNICEF and the World Bank. These aim to reduce girls' dropout rates resulting from early marriage, specifically in the transition period from primary to secondary school. Findings from previous studies suggest that the largest impact of COPE has been to support households in meeting their daily consumption needs. To some extent the programme has increased access to health services and schooling for children (Holmes and Akinrimisi, 2011). However, the transfer is insufficient to make a sustainable difference to households' poverty. Some households have invested in small-scale productive activities, which have enabled income generation. However, many households have not received training or guidance for their lump sum payment, meaning 'sustainable graduation', from the programme within one year is unrealistic. As to the indirect benefits, while there seems to be a general assumption that COPE will lead to women's empowerment, there is no evidence to support the notion that COPE transfers have led to a change in unequal relationships or power at the household level (Holmes and Akinrimisi, 2011).

8. CHALLENGES TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 2063 AND SDGS 2030 NIGERIA

- (a) **Insufficient, Unequal and inappropriate Education:** In many parts of Nigeria youth lack access to the quality and affordable education and skills training which would help them get jobs or create livelihoods and improve their lives (Vambe, 2016). As a result, the transition from school-to-work is a major challenge such that many young people end up unemployed. Several policy options have been adopted by successive governments over the years to empower young people and improve access to education including the introduction of Universal Basic Education, the abolishment of school fees and introduction of free feeding at primary level. Even while enrolments have been increasing, the quality of education appears to be on the decline. Inadequate infrastructure and training facilities, poor and inappropriate curricula, and lack of well-trained and motivated teachers are among the main reasons explaining the decline. In addition, critical mass of secondary and tertiary education graduates is required to accelerate sustainable development. Many secondary schools in Nigeria are limited in capacity which is largely due to inadequate budgetary resources for this sector. In effect, the chances of young people proceeding to secondary school, not to mention tertiary institutions, are significantly hampered.

One Goal of the 2030 Agenda is to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015)'. Currently there exist structures and practices that discriminate against, for example, females, persons with disabilities, persons of low economic status and persons in rural and remote areas. These need to be recognized and rescinded, accompanied by the provision of facilities and procedures that promote access and inclusion. Youth access to education is further influenced by family income, language, ethnicity and religion. Despite several hundred of different ethnic groups in Nigeria, formal educational instruction occurs in only 3 languages (Hausa, Ibo; and Yoruba). Combined with discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and religion, youth (and children) whose mother tongue is not recognized in the formal education system are thus relatively disadvantaged, with negative implications for educational outcome.

- (b) **Unemployment and Limited livelihood opportunities:** Youth in Nigeria are disproportionately unemployed. Between 2006 and 2011, there were 1.8million new entrants into the active labour market per year (NBS, 2011). Even some of the states recorded high composite unemployment rates that are above national average of 23.9 per cent as at 2013. In Bayelsa it was 38.4%; Katsina 37.3%; Bauchi 37.2%; Akwa-Ibom 34.1%; Gombe 32.1%; Adamwa 29.4%; Borno 27.7%; Kano 27.6%; Yobe 27.3%; Taraba 26.8%; and Jigawa 26.5%. The pervasive state of youth unemployment in the country came to full public glare in 2014 during the aptitude test conducted by the

Nigerian Immigration Service on 15th March, 2014 to recruit graduates of tertiary institutions to fill 4,500 vacancies that existed in the service. The exercised claimed the lives of 20 applicants and left thousand others injured following stampedes in 5 of the 6 different stadia used across the country for the aptitude test (Vanguard, 2014).

At the Abuja National stadium over 125, 0000 applicants came for the test occupying a 60,000 capacity stadium, chasing only 4,500 vacancies (Thisday, 2014). Anxious 125,000 applicants sat in a 60,000 capacity stadium without much crowd control strategy in place: the result was a deadly stampede. The situation was not different in Akure and Port-Harcourt, the Ondo State and Rivers State capital respectively. In Port-Harcour for instance, 23,000 applicants turned out for the test which was to be conducted in Liberation Stadium with a sitting capacity of 16,000 people. It was also reported that applicants were charged an application fee of N1000.00 each turning the organizers of the test to sudden millionaires while the unemployed left impoverished and disillusioned (Thisday, 2014).

For youth that do find work, there is a distinct shortage of decent work opportunities. Today, the working poverty rate for youth at the USD 2 a day threshold in Nigeria ranges from 20-50 per cent (BBC News, 2017), attesting to the lack of productive employment opportunities. This is also reflected by high shares of workers in vulnerable employment – that is the own-account workers and unpaid family workers – who typically do not benefit from securities enjoyed by regular-salaried employees. All of these translate into more youth working in the informal sector, characterized by decent work deficits and relatively risks of exploitation. In seeking productive employment opportunities and decent work, one option selected by female and male youth is migration from rural to urban area or from their home to another country (ILO, 2015). Migration can be a positive experience for youth themselves and for both the “origin” and “destination” countries. However, migrating youth can be at risk of exploitation, abuse, social exploitation, adverse (physical and mental) health issues, human trafficking and death, with variability in risk between genders. Female youth, for example, are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking for sexual exploitation, while male youth may be susceptible to forced labour, such as in the agricultural industry.

(c) Armed Conflicts: Under Goal 16 of the Agenda for Sustainable Development, governments globally will “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (ILO, 2010). Promoting peace will entail, inter alia, reducing and resolving the incidence and prevalence of armed conflict, a patent obstacle to sustainable development. In recent years (1999-2018), youth in Nigeria have endured, and continue to participate in and be affected by, armed conflicts in Nigeria including Boko Haram insurgency in the North-east states of Adamawa, Yobe and Borno; Niger Delta Militancy in the South-South states of Rivers, Delta and Bayelsa; “indigenes versus settlers” crisis in Plateau and Kaduna states; Farmers versus Herders crisis in Benue, Taraba, Adamawa, Nasarawa and Ekiti etc. There has also been a rising trend in the level of kidnappings across the country. Within these, and other deadly conflicts, youth are victims, survivors and perpetrators. Thousands of boys and girls have been recruited especially by Boko Haram as combatants. Historically, civilian casualties mostly affected by war are women and children. For instance, worldwide, two million children died as a result of armed conflict and six million were injured or permanently disabled due to landmine exploitations and mutilation between 1986 and 1996 (UNICEF, 2009). The upscale of social discord, killings and bombings in the Northern part of Nigeria; and kidnappings in Southern Nigeria have ultimately reversed the gains of so many years of investments in SDGs in Nigeria, especially in affected communities. There are several hundreds of internally displaced persons who are current victims of communicable diseases, malnutrition, poverty and other social problems. This figure was estimated to be 1,538,982 as of April, 2015 by the Internally Displaced Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2015). As these people live on charity, have limited access to healthcare services, school enrolment and healthy shelter, their health and emotional conditions are far from ideal.

Violence against women and girls in Nigeria has increased as witnessed in the kidnapping of 276 Chibok schoolgirls (Government Secondary School) on 14th April, 2014 and 110 students of Government Girls Technical College (GGSTC), Dapchi on 19th February 19, 2018 in Borno and Yobe State respectively. Majority of these girls however, have regained their freedom following negotiations between the federal government and the insurgents. The cognitive, emotional and physical development of substantial numbers of youth is thus disrupted, with chronic consequences for the future of the individual women and men, and for their communities. Research suggests that youth unemployment and under-employment contribute to the engagement of primarily young men, and sometimes young women, in armed conflict as well as to their involvement in criminal activities, particularly where such activities are a source of income, as is the case with illicit drug trade (UNODC, 2013). Without access to work or source of financial support, youth’s transition from childhood to adulthood can be undermined.

(d) Poverty: Despite implementation of several poverty alleviation programmes by successive governments in the oil rich Nigeria (Poverty Alleviation Programme; National poverty Eradication programme; N-Power; Youth Enterprise With Innovation in Nigeria; Anchor Borrower’s programme; Conditional Cash Transfer etc), poverty remains a reality for millions of people in the country, to which the youth are particularly vulnerable. According to the United Nations (UN) report, 2017 nearly 60 per cent of the world’s 1 billion extremely poor people lived in just five

countries in 2011: India, Nigeria, China, Bangladesh and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (United Nations, 2017). Nigeria contributed significantly to more than 42,000 people who were forced to abandon their homes and seek protection due to armed conflicts in 2014 (United Nations, 201). The findings of a recent survey conducted by the World Poverty Clock and compiled by Brookings Institute show that extreme poverty in Nigeria is growing by six people every minute, the highest number in the world (Adebayo, 2018, Vanguard, 2018). The survey showed that at the end of May 2018, Nigeria had an estimated 86.9 million people in extreme poverty compared to India's 73 million. The World Poverty Clock report further states that of the 10 countries on this extreme poverty list, only Ethiopia is on track to meet the United Nations' SDG of ending extreme poverty by 2030 (Ewodage, 2018).

Youth poverty is experienced in multiple ways; from hunger and under-nutrition to restricted, if any, access to social services. In households living in extreme poverty, families often cannot afford to keep youth in school, thus they often forgo education for employment, and end up compromising their future opportunities. As such poverty experienced during youth can have health, educational, livelihood and participatory implications across generations.

- (e) **Poor access to primary healthcare delivery systems with high cost of healthcare:** The capacity of youth to contribute to sustainable development and become leaders in all walks of life critically depends on their health status. Today, young people in Nigeria are vulnerable to dilapidating illnesses and health problems such as malaria, tuberculosis, water-borne diseases, maternal complications and HIV/AIDS. Of the 2.1 million new HIV infections that occurred in 2013, 75 per cent occurred in just 15 countries with Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda accounting for almost half of them all (United Nations, 2015). Moreover, Nigeria has one of the lowest number of children sleeping under the mosquito nets, in a comparison of surveys among nations of the world (United Nations, 2015).

According to recent estimates, Nigeria has an infant mortality rate of 72.7 deaths/1,000 live births, a contraceptive prevalence of 15.1 per cent (2013), health expenditure of 3.9 per cent of GDP (2013), HIV prevalence of 3.17 percent (2014), a HIV burden of 3,228,600 (2013) and HIV associated deaths of 174,300 (2014), with life expectancy at birth of 53.02 years (Central Intelligence World Factbook, 2015). The young people are more vulnerable to HIV/infection than adults with young women being the highest risk of getting the virus (Social Development Direct, 2009). The vulnerability of young people in Nigeria to HIV infection stems from both physical and social aspects of their lives. Physical vulnerability results from the damaging effects of malnutrition and ailments such as bilharzias. A weakened immune system, particularly for adolescence significantly increases their susceptibility to becoming infected. HIV prevalence can also be attributed to a range of socio-economic factors such as poverty, inequality and social exclusion, low levels of education and lack of information, poor access to health services; and societal attitudes. Young women are especially vulnerable because of migration, poor living conditions in informal settlements, isolation and proneness to sexual exploitation and abuse (Social Development, 2009).

Several approaches have been adopted to tackle HIV/AIDS in Nigeria with little or no success because these approaches are essentially conventional focusing primarily on changing people's behaviour in order to reduce HIV infection rates. Such initiatives have failed to address the physical and social environments that create the conditions for high infection rates. There is also the problem of sequential health workers' industrial action in Nigeria. In a recent study conducted by UN, there were 10 different healthcare workers' strikes in Nigeria over a 36-month period between 2010 and 2015 (United Nations, 2015). These paralyzed the healthcare industry, resulting in avoidable mortality and morbidities, as well as catastrophic health expenditure and resultant outgoing medical tourism. Children and pregnant women were the worst victims of the healthcare worker industrial action. Without access to affordable healthcare services, deaths were inevitable. Claiming to have reduced mortality and morbidity in Nigeria, therefore, needs detailed and verifiable epidemiological data to the contrary.

- (f) **Bad Governance:** Participation in the formal political system in Nigeria does not provide an outlet for youth to contribute their ideas to development initiatives. There are several instances of occurrences of anti-development activities in form of disrespect for the rule of law and constitution, poor welfare package, visionless leadership; and constant feud between the executive and legislature both at federal and state levels. There is also in existence rigid conservative power structures, patronage networks and intergenerational hierarchies which exclude young people from decision making and do not value their initiatives. The youth have not relented in their effort to make their voices heard in attempt to bring about social change, often at high costs to themselves through death, disability, and loss of education and livelihood opportunities (Onuoha, 2008).

Yet, mechanisms and resources to involve the youth in meaningful ways in democratic decision-making processes remain a challenge. Key political positions or institutions such as President, Vice President, Governor, Senate, and Federal House of Representatives etc provide little opportunities for effective youth representation or participation, which limits the contribution they can make to sustainable development. Until recently, policy makers in Nigeria rarely included youth in decision making or even consulted them on their concerns (Vambe, 2016). Cultural attitudes have been the major constraint to establishing inter-generational dialogue in Nigeria. Traditional wisdom was seen as an increasing function of age, and subsequently, adult leaders and policy makers took it upon themselves to make

decisions on behalf of youth. But such policy-making largely resulted in inappropriate policies that failed to address the requisite needs and aspirations of youth.

As a direct response to the challenge of youth exclusion in political participation, President Muhammadu Buhari had on 28th May, 2018 signed into law an Act of the National Assembly that reduced the age qualification for President from 40 to 30; for Governor from 35 to 30; for Senator from 35 to 30; for Federal House of Representatives membership from 30 to 25; and for State House of Assembly membership from 30 to 25 (Premium Times, 2018). However, this law will only be something to go by if the 1999 Constitution is amended to reflect it. Section 106(b) of the 1999 Constitution, which sets the age of 30 for membership of State House of Assembly and Section 131(b) which stipulates that a Presidential candidate shall be at least 40 years contradict the 'Not Too Young To Run Act, 2018. A mere Act cannot amend the constitution. As a matter of fact any law that is inconsistent with the constitution is null and void to the extent of the inconsistency (Olumide, 2018).

(g) Degraded Agrarian and Production Environment: Poor leadership, mismanagement and pauperization of the populace and inconsistent policies have taken a toll on the environment. For instance, Nigeria's Niger Delta area has been in the news intermittently. The nation's mangrove forests are being destroyed following poor exploitation of crude oil and gas in the region. The agrarian system in the area is being destroyed. The region has to depend on other regions for food supplies. The nation has to forgo most of the rubber and oil-palm plantations. Clearly, these are fallouts from poor sectoral policies. It depicts an uncoordinated policy formulation reminiscent of poor leadership. In Northern Nigeria, desertification processes are prevalent, and coupled with heavy fuel wood harvest, poor farming techniques and annual bush burning, the land is being destroyed. In eastern Nigeria, heavy gully, erosion coupled with overpopulation prevails. The results have been falling rural and agrarian sector, mass poverty of the rural populace, heavy food importation, and indeed mass exodus of young people from the rural areas. Even in the industrial and modern sector environments the society's greed for quick and cheap money has led to abandoning of standards, especially as seen in the emission of toxic materials into the environment. Substandard goods are being produced and imported. Thus, in Nigeria it is not so much the quality of life that is at risk because of environmental degradation but life itself.

All these challenges call for bold approaches to building a more just, peaceful, and sustainable Nigeria. The alternative is a nation characterized by even more turmoil and instability than the one we know today. No one will be comfortable in such a world: the problems of one country or region – economic, social or political – do spill over into others. Young people now and in future will play a big role depending on how Nigeria adapts to these challenges.

9. CONCLUSION

Youth today are, on average, healthier, better educated, better connected and politically more engaged than any previous generation has ever been. Yet they need better opportunities to fully realize their potential and participate in societies that value their opinion and talent. Hence the onus is less on young people themselves, but on the older generations who are unwilling to let go of power and the ideals and life styles that propagate inequity and ecological degradation.

In this context, to successfully implement the 2063 and 2030 Agenda for sustainable Development in Nigeria every effort must be made to have young people at the forefront of each and every step to transform the country. Currently, existing systems are generally not delivering with regard to addressing inequality, protecting rights and preventing further damage to the environment. Youth should have a choice to alter that. Greater efforts by government at all levels, the private sector. Civil society and other stakeholders are needed to address shortcomings in education, health care and employment, along with risks associated with disasters, diseases, maltreatment, exploitation and abuse.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

To promote overarching policy direction in order to support youth development in Nigeria and indeed Africa, the following actions are proposed:

- (i) **Enhance institutional capacity and engender good governance:** For youth to be effective future and actively participate in development processes, their distrust of politics, business operations and civic institutions should be countered. Governments, the private sector and other stakeholders need to address corruption and the inequitable distribution of resources. Transparency and accountability, and related mechanisms should be promoted, along with an independent judiciary. Learning processes should build the capacity of youth to operate in contexts where sustainable development is not compromised.
- (ii) **Encourage actions to increase productivity in agricultural sector:** addressing the common nutrition shortage, hunger and food security for large number of youth in Nigeria necessitates that government promote sustainable and more productive agricultural sector. Between 2015 and 2018 the agricultural sector has no doubt experienced a boost due to huge investments in the sector by the Muhammadu Buhari's administration in order to

diversify the economy and make agriculture the mainstay of Nigeria's economy aside oil. The renewed efforts notwithstanding, there is sensitize farmers particularly in rural areas to adopt modernize farming practices including the use of improved seeds, farm implements, fertilizers and pesticides which are seen by many peasant farmers as an exception rather than the rule of contemporary developmental strategies. The preference by many farmers to uphold traditional values and practices conflict with sustainable development. Superstition still plays a key role in many economic sectors, so that successes in business or agriculture are thought to depend heavily on spirits. These spirits are invoked to ensure success and this works against development as people are discouraged from hard work and innovation. Voodooism, crystal-ball gazing, sorcery, astrology, metaphysics, etc rather than Research and Development are still prevalent in some rural areas and they work against sustainable development.

- (iii) **Expand access to water, sanitation and hygiene, especially in rural areas:** A good number of Nigerians lack access to clean water and sanitation. This hampers socio-economic development and puts many youth, especially female youth, at risk. Investments and training on water, sanitation and hygiene need be expanded, which requires the engagement of diverse stakeholders, in particular specialist organizations.
- (iv) **Improve access to quality education:** Access to quality education varies depending on, among others, household income, urban-rural location, ethnicity, gender ability, and social and cultural norms. Investments are needed in infrastructure, such as school buildings and transport, along with ensuring appropriate training of teachers and providing environments which are safe, inclusive and non-discriminatory. Education curricular also need to correspond to modern and future labour market demands, while adhering to the principles of sustainable development and noting the importance of technical and vocational training.
- (v) **Address exclusion and unrest:** Socio-economic structures and political systems that exclude youth from effective participation in civic and political processes can increase involvement in criminal activities, social unrest and armed conflicts, as well as terrorist activities. Thus, there is a need to counter corruption and engage young people in the creation of systems that promote dialogue, inclusion and peace building. Such approaches can support the development of cohesive societies, economic stability and responsive and accountable political institutions in line with the 2063 and 2030 Agenda.
- (vi) **Promote Integrated Urban and Rural Development:** There is an untapped potential for partnerships in integrated urban and rural development – inland management, human capital development, agriculture, sustainable industries and human settlements development. Understanding and leveraging urban-rural linkages and creating partnerships of government at multiple levels and the private sector can create opportunities for rural youth livelihoods while relieving pressure caused by rural-to-urban migration. Youth need to be involved as critical partners to this effect, and, in doing so, can help enhance collaboration between generations and communities.
- (vii) **End violence and discrimination against women and girls:** the social and economic costs of violence against women and girls bear direct threats to stability of Nigeria and attainment of Agenda 2063 and SDGs 2030. Promoting more peaceful and prosperous development would require comprehensive and responsive policies and legislation, along with multi-sectoral and evidence-based interventions that address the concerns of women and girls. There is also the need to raise awareness among all parties, especially male youth, and transform gender relations in favour of the equal distribution of power in all its manifestations.

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