

# YOUTH FORMATION AND ITS IMPACT ON NATION- BUILDING

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## **Abstract**

*The role of youth has continued to be a major concern for the Church, government, and other stakeholders, particularly their inability to contribute immensely to nation-building. Although the Youth play a crucial role in the prospect for the development of any society, the reality shows that attention to the youth has not been sufficient. This is expedient considering the practical implications of this trend on the overall interest of the young and the role they can play in society now and in the future. Take for instance during the 2020 EndSars protest across various parts of Nigeria which ended in a sour state, it showed two perspectives of Nigerian youths. On the one hand, those who were ready to bring about change and national development, on the other hand, those who were satisfied with the difficulties and hardship and the corrupt system in which is to their advantage and thus became avenues for vandalism and hazardous crimes. Hence, the silver-lining became evident that for a harmonization of the character of youths in Nigeria, there is a need for the formation of youths. This paper aims at enriching the current discourse on how the youth can undergo integrated formation towards participation in national development. The paper recommends solutions to overcome the challenges that are sensitive to national development in social, economic, cultural, and political contexts of life. It establishes that the best*

*investment that any society or nation can embark upon is in its human capital and youth formation. It also advocates value and virtue formation coupled with an intellectual formation that must be in tandem with the needs of modern scientific and technological advancement.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The potential of every nation lies in the quality of its youths. An erstwhile secretary of the United Nations Organization Ban Ki-moon once enthused in his speech at the 2007 International Youth Day thus: “we must fulfill our obligations to youths. The World program of action for youths asks governments to consider the contributions of young persons on all policies affecting them. Governments must honour this commitment. They must also increase the financial education and technical support made available to young people...it is high time we stopped viewing the young people as part of the problem and started cultivating their promise and potential.”

The above statement by Ban Ki-moon summarizes the preoccupation of this work. The importance of youth formation and growth cannot be overemphasized as such is integral to growth and development in every nation. The steady increase in the youth population all over the world further buttresses the fact that the youth are the life wires of every nation that desires continuity and sustainability in all-inclusive growth and development. The words of the former president of World Bank, James D. Wolfensohn become instrumental here when he noted in the year 2003 that: “by the year 2015, there will be three billion people under the age of 25. They are the future; they are also the now.”

In the face of the diverse challenges and distractions facing the youth population in the world today, and how much hindrance this and other factors have played in limiting youths, this paper reiterates the need for the formation of youths and re-echoes how this translates to national development. This paper adds that rather than viewing youths as part of the problem, they should be seen as a gold mine of untapped treasures and potentials that when explored and harnessed would be of immense benefit to nationhood and nation-building.

### The Philosophical Concept Of Development

In discussing the implications of youth formation on national development, it is pertinent to explore the concept of development. Etymologically, the word “development” is from the Latin word “*dis*” which means apart, and “*voloper*” which means “unwrap.” The Oxford English Dictionary gives its third meaning “to unfold more fully, bring out all that is potentially contained in.”<sup>1</sup> Thus from the above meaning, development can be defined as “unfolding the potential.”<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, over the years, mankind acting through local municipal, regional and international legislation, declarations, and co-operations, has recognized the right to self-advancement both at the individual and collective levels as a basic right inherent in man and worthy of preservation by authorities be they national or international.<sup>3</sup> Different philosophers have made their contributions as to what the term means. The word “development” is taken from the French word “*developeur*” meaning “to lay open.” Denis Diderot and Jean d’Alembert led in the dissemination of the point of view that the idea of development includes special and moral progress. This implies that there would be a cumulative improvement in human knowledge and the power which had been brought about in the organization of human society and the character of human conduct can be obvious... if only the barriers that existed against the employment of the rational methods in morals, religion, and politics could be removed.<sup>4</sup> Marquis de Condorcet at the end of the eighteenth century asserted that human resourcefulness is the reason for inexorable progress.<sup>5</sup>

According to Herder, a pupil of Kant opined that human development is an unfolding of human potentials. And this can be achieved through education and formation.<sup>6</sup> In answer to the question of what order we can expect progress toward the better, Kant held that:

To expect not simply to train good citizens but good men who can improve and take care of themselves, to expect that this will eventually happen by means of education of youths in the home, then in the schools on both the lowest and highest level, in the intellectual and moral culture fortified by a religious doctrine that is desirable but its success is hardly to be hoped for.<sup>7</sup>

Here Kant emphasized the role of education of youths. During the enlightenment, when the romantic philosophers brought the idea of development to the limelight, it was the era of reason, where the progress in the arts and the sciences determined the development in history. For Kant, it is the development of reason. For Hegel, it is the progress of freedom; reason governs the world and history. In Marxism, it is the materialistic economic approach found in the conflict between the oppressed and the oppressor<sup>7</sup>. With regards to society, development for Wiredu refers to all those processes adapted to improving the conditions of the society in the direction of what might be called the good society... not just packages of a technical recipe but also interconnected assemblages of value-laden preconceptions.<sup>8</sup> From this definition, value-laden preconceptions imply moral integrity or nature as well as every component of the ideal society. Ogbenika further considers development as the realization and utilization of the human quest for a better Spiritual, Moral, Economic, and Material equilibrium for his own good and the welfare of his society with due regard for the environment and circumstances under which he lives.<sup>9</sup> Roche M. P Douglas also gives his own understanding of development, when he notes, that: “development in its fullest sense means liberation of the human spirit made possible by securing an essential economic base. True development does not pit the spirit of man against economic progress in some kind of context. Rather, it encompasses the wholeness of man.”<sup>10</sup>

Development, therefore, is concerned with improving how a person lives, or with increasing the standard of living broadly interpreted, of members of the community, and without freedom, there is no development and without development, freedom cannot last.

According to Njoku and Isigwe, development has to do with the progressive reduction of poverty, inequality, and unemployment.<sup>11</sup> It involves a sustainable and comprehensive change or transformation in cultural, educational, economic, social, and political fields to enhance the living condition of the greater majority.<sup>12</sup>

For Ibodje, “development becomes meaningful when it serves to increase the access of people to basic necessities of life, allows people to participate in defining their priority needs, proffer

solutions to their problems and make tangible investments in their solutions.”<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, Njoku submits that in a developed society, all meaningful development programs must embrace the following sectors,<sup>14</sup> namely: economic, social, political, educational, and health sectors. Thus, we shall explain these sectors further below.

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

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

**Political Indicators:** This is very vital in measuring development in any society. The prevalence of a well-organized political system is a consequence as well as a cause of development. Here we shall be thinking of the stability of the political process, the existence of political institutions and the efficiency of their operations, the operations of democracy and majority participation in the political process, the existence of the rule of law, and the respect of the freedom of the individual.

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

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

### **The Concept of Youth**

Youth as a concept varies from culture to culture and from society to society. In most societies, the progression from childhood to youth involves some systematic rites of passage. However, the boundaries defining the transition from childhood to youth and from youth to adulthood have shifted. Defining youth globally according to some age range can be a very difficult task. The age range 15-24 is often used by the United Nations Organization, but in many cases, this distinction is too narrow for countries like Nigeria. Apart from the statistical definition of the term "Youth", the meaning of the term "Youth" has continued to change in response to fluctuating political, economic, and socio-cultural circumstances. In many countries in Africa for instance, the male transition to adulthood in terms of achieving the economic and social stability that comes with steady employment may extend into the late twenties and mid-thirties.

In line with the above conditions and realities on the ground, the National Youth Policy execution includes the fact the youth in Nigeria shall comprise of all young males and females aged 18-35

years who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Young people in this age group require social, economic, and political support to realize their full potential. This is because that age group represents a group of people who are in a time in life when people go through dramatic changes in their life circumstances. Young people as defined by the National Youth Policy are characterized by energy, enthusiasm, ambition, creativity, and promise. They are also faced with high levels of socio-economic uncertainty and volatility thereby becoming the more vulnerable segment of the population.

In Hamlyn's Encyclopedia word dictionary, Youth means the condition of being young. Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary refers to youths as young men and women. The African Youth Charter states that youth refers to people between the ages of 15-35 years.

### **Youth Formation and National Development**

The importance of a holistic formation of youths in Nigeria today cannot be overemphasized. With the proliferating rate of crime and insecurity, as well as the millipede rate of growth in Nigeria, it is glaring that the youth population in Nigeria is deficient in the necessary ingredients that would equip them for nation-building and impact. Therefore, one of the major fundamental problems facing governments globally and at all levels of governance is how to effectively mobilize the youths, harness their dynamism and potential, and meaningfully integrate them into national development engineering.

The youths in Nigeria constitute the most active and productive sub-sector of Nigeria's population. It is, therefore, axiomatic to reiterate that the growth and development of any society hinge on the quality of its youth population. In the same vein, the lethargic and nature of growth and development in any nation is symptomatic of the poverty in the quality of its youth population. Therefore, if the youths are adequately mobilized, trained, and empowered, there will be a geometric growth of the nation, as youth growth would seamlessly translate to national development. There are therefore different ways youths can be empowered in Nigeria.

With the teeming demand, for a qualitative youth population amid chaos, insecurity, and underdevelopment, the Nigerian government has like every other government of the world, put strategies in place for ensuring a better youth population. The rate of crime, ubiquitous level of ignorance, and widespread insecurity in Nigeria are pointers to the dearth of youths with a holistic human formation that translates to pragmatic impact and all-around growth. The need for youth empowerment becomes very sacrosanct in Nigeria.

One major deficiency in the youths of today in Nigeria is morality. The high rate of criminals and robbers as well as other vices perpetuated especially among the youths in Nigeria are poignant and disturbing. The major reason for this is the lack of jobs in Nigeria to accommodate the teeming youth population graduating from higher institutions of learning. Consequently, the majority of the youths are idle, and so are prone to engaging in different vices in order to forcefully make ends meet. One major way to solve this is to empower youths who would also be job creators. Empowering young people according to Olabiyi (2013) is the process of encouraging them to be active citizens in their community.<sup>15</sup> Youth mentoring is, therefore, an important way of empowering youth as it provides young people with positive role models, support, and encouragement, and thus considered one of the most effective ways of helping the youths reach their fullest potential as productive members of society. This method will also reduce the rate of criminals among the youth population as virtues of integrity, hard work, and resilience would be instilled into them during their mentorship programs and would replace vices that make youths resort to fraud and theft, and other endangering habits. Chinedu, notes that according to the Botswana Core Welfare Indicators Survey 2009 - 2010; the objectives of empowering youths are to enable them to develop a good work ethic, gain entrepreneurship experiences, attain employment readiness, develop skills and competence that will enable them to make positive contributions to the development of their communities, foster the development change and instill some level of responsibility and accountability in them; drawing on their creative energy, to improve the delivery of public services; reduce

youth unemployment and eradicate poverty among young people (Ministry of Sports and Youth Culture 2009).<sup>16</sup>

However, according to Nwankwo et al, reports that among the youth empowerment programs and poverty reduction programs set up by the Nigerian government since independence till date, there still exists a high rate of unemployment and poverty looming in the nation.<sup>17</sup> Nwankwo et al attribute this to the inappropriateness of these programs, too much focus on already established skill areas, inconsistency in the running of the programs, poor administration, poor and unstable program content that is not consistent with the employer's needs.<sup>18</sup> This is true as a sizeable number of Nigerian youths are still largely left out in the scheme of things. The limitations of these programs clearly outweigh the purpose of youth empowerment and the aim of the programs held by the government does not translate to impact practical results and productivity. The need for youth empowerment programs (YEPs) that will help youths develop the right social habits and provide them with the adequate skills to be empowered is not only necessitated but also mandated. These programs are supposed to be within the reach of youths irrespective of their social backgrounds and class. However, because of the shallow means with which these youth empowerment programs are being publicized, Chinedu proposes the need for Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET). For him, it is believed to prepare youths to develop profitable social habits required by society.<sup>19</sup> Research literature has also emphasized that it is rare to see those who are vocationally trained and gainfully employed become delinquents and the anti-socials of the society (Maji and Hassan, 2012, Nwankwo et al, 2013, Ohize and Adamu 2009; UNESCO 2004).<sup>20</sup>

There are other strategies and ways in which youths can be formed to ensure a better society. Njoku and Isigwe highlight that the government can adopt the following strategies for the effective integration of the Nigerian youth for national development; making effective youth entrepreneurship policies for gainful employment and self-fulfillment, provision of sound and qualitative educational opportunities for youths, consultation of the youths on major national issues and sustainable civic education programs for youth reorientation.<sup>21</sup>

For youth entrepreneurial policies to be effective, they should be approached within the context of wider employment policies programs and integrated approaches with interventions across multiple sectors and multiple levels<sup>22</sup> This, therefore, implies that the culture of entrepreneurship should be promoted. For Njoku and Isigwe, the promotion of young successful entrepreneurs as role models, business idea competitions, awards, media coverage of youth business events, and entrepreneurship education are important strategies for creating a culture of entrepreneurship.<sup>23</sup> Njoku and Isigwe further add that the introduction of entrepreneurship education at different education levels, as well as an improvement of the legal and regulatory environment on business and entrepreneurship, are also very important.<sup>24</sup> They also emphasize the need for access to affordable finance which is unarguably the biggest impediment for young people who compared to older age groups have no or fewer savings and resources. Easing the collateral and legal requirements on young entrepreneurs is important and improving access to various types of finance, micro equity venture and credit grant schemes in some countries backed by governments are important factors in improving the access to finance for young entrepreneurs.<sup>25</sup>

### **Evaluation**

It is pertinent to note that Nigeria's population as of 2019 is estimated at 180 million. The youths constitute 70% and this means that the strength of the nation lies in the strength of the youths. The development of the nation, therefore, is a major result of a viable and quality youth population that is holistically formed. However, a major area yet unmentioned in this work is the spiritual formation of youths. The greatest investment of any establishment, society, or nation is the investment in human capital. A balanced and all-encompassing formation of the youths in Nigeria would be achievable if they are also taught the need for spiritual growth, and the role of God in their lives. This aspect of youth formation is indispensable as it positions the youth to view their pursuits and aspiration from a standpoint of purpose and morality, guided by the fear of God and a desire to do their will. Njoku and Isigwe add that when youths bring the fear of God to

bear in all their actions, it will help nurture them in morality, integrity, accountability, and probity.<sup>26</sup>

This aspect of spiritual formation is even more sacrosanct, considering the level of corruption in Nigeria. When the youths are groomed in religious tenets that emphasize righteousness and virtue, then corruption is fought from another angle as morality and purity remain the bedrock of every spiritual endeavour and formation. From spiritual formation, moral formation becomes an easier and more natural endeavour. The need for youths of integrity virtue and value is important as the nation continues to battle against terrorism and insecurity which is an adverse effect of the moral decadence that has infiltrated steadily into every facet of Nigeria. The need for virtue must be emphasized and youths must be intentionally taught the dangers of crime and punishment.

The intellectual formation of the youth is also emphasized in this work in talking about the need for education of the youths. The deplorable situation of the educational sector in Nigeria is further accentuated by the poor intellectual ability of youths that graduate from higher institutions. The dearth of the right knowledge taught in schools has accounted for a lopsided formation, as the core aim of education, which is the removal of ignorance and the equipping with knowledge is defeated. The level of corruption in our higher institutions points to the urgent need for the government to take action, as schools continue to produce half-baked youths who are deficient in intellectual growth and development. There is also a need to review the curriculum in Nigeria, input more courses of study that are practical and can translate to problem-solving, to meet the multifarious need of the nation.

Also, Civil Education and National History should be imputed across the educational curriculums and properly taught across all sectors of education in Nigeria, to bring to the consciousness of the youth a vast knowledge of her nation's history and build up in them a spirit of patriotism, love of the country, sense of national identity and the responsibility of national development.

Also, the low quality of intellectual development is a pointer to the fact that the educational sector in Nigeria is still far from being a reliable source of solution to the high demands on knowledge in

this scientific world. Therefore more attention should be paid to the intellectual formation of youths.

In addition to the intellectual formation, youths should be taught more courses on technology, ICT, and the sciences to meet the jet race of jet age. Nigeria is still lagging in providing proficient computer knowledge to youths and this has brought about a good number of youths who know little or nothing about the technological world. This is also closely related to intellectual development and would be very instrumental in producing a nation that would blaze the trail in Africa and the world at large in areas of science and technology.

As said earlier, improving already established youth empowerment schools like N- power, youth training like the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and other systems put in place, would be beneficial provided they are reviewed and updated to meet the present needs of the nation and translate to productivity, growth, and development of the nation.

### **Conclusion**

The future of every nation lies on the shoulder of its youths. Youths are the leaders of tomorrow, and they constitute the major energetic manpower of a nation. Therefore national growth and development would be fast-tracked if the youths are duly formed and equipped with the necessary tools to meet the huge demands of this fast-moving age and time.

### **Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup>"Development" in Oxford English Dictionary, London: Clarendon Press, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> C.F.A ABRAM, 'The Philosophy Moral Development,' in *Forum Philosophicum*, 12, 1, (Spring 2007), 73.

<sup>3</sup>R.A Wokocha, (ed) "Development Right Concerns in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria" in R.A Wokocha (ed) *Development Right Issues in Niger Delta*, Schalesworths Centre for Democracy and Development, Port Harcourt, 2002, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Frankel "Progress the idea of" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol 6, 484.

<sup>5</sup>Cfr. M. De Condorcet. Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind, London: June Barraclough Transweidenfeld and Nicolson, 1935, 4-175.

<sup>6</sup> Ogbenika, Gregory, "Democracy and Development in the Socio-Political Philosophy of Kwasi Wiredu, *Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, Facultas Philosophae*, 2008, 95.

<sup>7</sup> Ogbenika, "Democracy and Development in the Socio-Political Philosophy of Kwasi Wiredu, 98.

<sup>8</sup> K. Wiredu, Reflections on some Political Aspects of the Language of Development A Presentation at the Social Science Research Workshop on Languages of Development, Berkeley, California, Oct 28-30,1994, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ogbenika, Gregory, "Democracy and Development in the Socio-Political Philosophy of Kwasi Wiredu, *Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, Facultas Philosophae*, 2008, 99

<sup>10</sup> D.M. Roche, *What is Development about?*, Toronto:New Canada Publications,, 1979, 12.

<sup>11</sup> Njoku R. and Isigwe P.O "The Nigerian Youth and National Development: A Perspective Exploration". *Journal of Public Administration and Social Welfare Research*, Vol.4, No 1, 2019, 3

<sup>12</sup> Tatyana, P.S. *Beyond Economic Growth. An Introduction to Sustainable Development*, Washington, World Bank Institute, 2008, 24

<sup>13</sup> Ibodje S.W.E, *Administration of Development*, Warri, Eregha Publishers, 2009., 45

<sup>14</sup> Njoku R. *Social and Economic Development: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*. Aba: Cheedal Global Print, 2005, pp 10-12.

<sup>15</sup> Chinedu, C. "Empowering Nigerian Youths Through Technical Vocational Education and Training for Enhancing National Security." *Journal of Technical Education and Training (JTET)*, Vol. 7, No 1,12.

<sup>16</sup>Chinedu, C. "Empowering Nigerian Youths Through Technical Vocational Education and Training for Enhancing National Security.", 12.

<sup>17</sup> Nwankwo F.C Obeta I.C and Nwaogbe V.N, "Integrating Technical and Vocational Education in Youth Empowerment Programs: An Approach to Nation Building and Job Creation in Nigeria." *Journal of Education and Practice* 4 (16), 2013, 87-90.

<sup>18</sup> Nwankwo F.C Obeta I.C and Nwaogbe V.N, "Integrating Technical and Vocational Education in Youth Empowerment Programs, 87-90.

<sup>19</sup> Chinedu, C. "Empowering Nigerian Youths Through Technical Vocational Education and Training for Enhancing National Security". *Journal of Technical Education and Training (JTET)*, Vol. 7, No 1,13.

<sup>20</sup> Chinedu, C. "Empowering Nigerian Youths Through Technical Vocational Education and Training for Enhancing National Security', 13.

<sup>21</sup> Njoku R. and Isigwe P. O "The Nigerian Youth and National Development: A Perspective Exploration". *Journal of Public Administration and Social Welfare Research*, Vol. 4, No 1, 2019, 4-6

<sup>22</sup> Njoku R. and Isigwe P.O "The Nigerian Youth and National Development: A Perspective Exploration", 4.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 6.