

A Report on Youth Inclusion in the Political, Economic, Peace and Security Development of Nigeria

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Introduction

Youth in Nigeria includes citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria aged 18–29 years according to the new national youth policy.

The youths of any nation represent the major human capital asset which the nation can harness for economic and development purposes. Young people are key actors and a driving force for global development and peace. They are critical partners in the development of nations and their contribution to society must be measured in terms of productive pursuits of service to humanity. The Youths are Nigeria's foremost social capital and require proper monitoring.

In Nigeria, the seventh most populous country in the world, the total population is currently estimated at 195 million. This is further projected to reach 236 million by 2030 and 410 million by 2050 to become the third most populous country in the world. Yet, Nigeria has a median age of 18.4 years of age. This represents nearly 70% of its population under 30 years.

Unfortunately, this demographic statistics does not translate into a development variable because Nigeria's development policy does not deliberately and successfully factor the youths into its economic policies yet. Presently, Nigerian youths are severely hampered by a number of challenges and are unable to attain their full potential.

Hence this report reveals considerable insights into the inclusion of youth in the political, social and economic growth and development of Nigeria. In this report, users will find statistical information related to youth participation in politics, economic development, and peace and conflict prevention. It is expected that subsequent surveys and reports will build on these aspects in order to adequately understand changes and developments over time.

Youth and Political Participation in Nigeria

Despite making up more than half of the population in Nigeria, young people (ages 18-30) often find themselves marginalized from mainstream politics and decision making. They struggle to gain the respect of public officials and are seen as lacking the skills and experience to engage in political activity and lead positive change in their communities.

Youth inclusion in the political aspects of Nigeria is very critical in a sense that it is a great machinery to reinvent the governance structure of Nigeria. Therefore, creating an enabling and equitable environment for youth in Nigeria is unquestionable. Today's youth need real opportunities to participate in political processes and contribute to practical solutions that advance development.

When given an opportunity to organize, voice their opinions and play a meaningful role in political decision making, young people consistently demonstrate their willingness and ability to foster positive, lasting change. They also become more likely to demand and defend democracy, and gain a greater sense of belonging.

In May 2018, the 'Not Too Young to Run' bill which was signed into law by President Mohammed Buhari reduced the minimum ages required to run for public office from 40 to 35 for presidential aspirants. This has created a flicker of hope for inclusion of youth in the Nigeria political system. However, despite the landmark legislation aimed at increasing the political participation of youth, early indications regarding youth political empowerment are not very encouraging.

Despite growing evidence of youth activism and mobilization for political inclusion, Nigerian youth have yet to achieve the level of organization required to gain inclusion into mainstream democratic politics. While some progress has been recorded in articulating their demands and making their voices heard, the youth constituency is weak, fragmented, short of resources, and it suffers from a leadership deficit.

Youth Engagement in Nigeria's Economic Development

It is a known fact across the globe that for a country to attain growth and development, the socio-economic structure of the state has to be properly driven by the right forces. With a booming population consisting of 70% youth, this quantum of the population is a great asset for the Nigerian state if they are properly harnessed and utilized because they provide the required labour to sustain productivity in goods and services.

The wheel of socio-economic growth in Nigeria lays on the shoulder of how productive and creative the youthful population are. Hence, the first step in empowering youth should start from the employment creation and integrating them into entrepreneurial activities through which they can contribute immensely in sustaining and promoting the socio-economic growth of Nigeria.

With the current ongoing Covid -19 Pandemic, and global recession there is no doubt that the Nigerian youth will be most affected by the looming economic crisis. The most recent official data on Youth Unemployment in Nigeria states that 29.7% of youth in Nigeria were unemployed, and a further 25.7% underemployed. This worrisome data of increasing youth unemployment represent both widespread personal misfortune for Nigerian youth and a lost opportunity in their contribution to critical national socio-economic development.

Therefore, creating a robust framework to empower youth in the post Covid-19 era is the way to go. Supporting youth entrepreneurship, skills acquisition and creating an enabling environment for micro and small business enterprises to thrive would be of tremendous benefit to Nigeria and help Nigeria make progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 8 - No Poverty and Decent Work and Economic Growth.

Youth, Peace and Development

Youth can contribute in no small measure when their orientation is guided by peace and tolerance which are the prime value of socio-economic growth and development. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250, highlighted the great potential of youth to contribute to the achievement of sustainable peace and development. In the last few years, Nigeria has been characterized by many conflicts with negative impacts on Nigeria socio-economic growth.

As the most populous segment of the population, youth are major determiners of peace and security in Nigeria. With the growing rate of unemployment, it has become easier to lure idle youth into violent extremist groups. The inability of the government to productively engage and cater for her teeming youth populations continually threaten internal security and automatically provides the pool for mobilisation by armed groups.

In addition, lack of educational opportunities for young people also poses a threat to peace, stability and economic development in Nigeria. However, there has also been an increase in the number of youth groups leading advocacy and sensitization programmes through strategic communication on conflict prevention, peace building and rejection of all forms of violent ideologies.

Looking at the demographic data, there is no doubt that the youth are a major stakeholder in Nigeria quest towards achieving sustainable peace and development. Therefore it will be to the detriment of Nigeria authorities to hold on to the belief that youth are mere victims or perpetrators of violent conflicts. Nigerian youth must henceforth be seen as a necessary stakeholder to be brought to the table if sustainable peace and development would be achieved.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Through the creation and implementation of appropriate policies, the challenges currently facing young people in Nigeria can be addressed making it easier for the Nigerian youth bulge to yield economic dividends. Looking at current realities of the ongoing global economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, Nigeria must look within and address the neglect of areas which have affected her economic growth. It is recommended that more support be given to youth led enterprises in the manufacturing and agricultural sector. Also, investments in education, health, and job creation are so vital. Sectors such as ICT, sports, entertainment, hospitality also possess the potential to provide significant economic opportunities for young people while infrastructural development, provision of credit facilities and removal of institutional and regulatory constraints and a host of other factors that could enhance youth entrepreneurship are crucial for young people to thrive.

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