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## **The Role of Nigerian Youths in Effective Implementation of Security and Social Development Intervention**

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### **Abstract**

This paper investigated the role of youths in effective implementation of security and social development intervention in Nigeria. The Evolutionary Theory of Social Development and Human Development Theory were used to explain the role of youths in effective implementation of security and social development intervention in Nigeria, but the latter was adopted in the study due to its adequacy in addressing the problem and linking the variables under study (youths, security development and social development intervention). The study found that the role of youths in effective implementation of security and social development intervention in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. This is because youths have been deeply involved in various self-help projects in various Local and State Governments in Nigeria. Their areas of interventions cover projects involving trade, commerce, security, Home Economics, small and medium term enterprises and agriculture, anti-corruption, counter-terrorism, community policing and drug-free clubs among others. The paper concluded that youths have many means of contributing to the development of their societies. Many local and international NGOs are either initiated by the Nigerian youths or co-opt our youths to intervene in the above mentioned areas. Some of them are backed by the government to execute their activities or pressurise the government to be responsive to the citizens in the area of security and social development. This is conditioned by the youths' social and psychological disposition and level of productivity. However, the productivity of the youths and their role in the security and social development of Nigeria depends on the government's willingness to empower the youths in social, economic and political terms.

**Key Words:** Development, Security, Role of Youths in Nigeria, Social Development Intervention, Youths

### **Introduction**

Security is the concern of every human society, irrespective of its level of civilization. It is a pivotal condition for national development. Recognizing this crucial role of security to human

social development, Radda (2008) argued that the fundamental obligation of any state is to ensure the security of lives and properties of the citizens. Drawing from the contract theorists, Radda (2008) boldly states that failure to fulfil this role makes the state an illegitimate one; thus citizens have no obligation to obey the state's commands. Reflection from the Nigeria's civil war (1967-1970) to date, the country has witnessed stagnation of development due to insecurity posed by that conflict; thereby confirming the indispensability of security in any social developmental intervention.

Since 1960s, militia groups began to be formed in different parts of Nigeria, mostly on ethnic sentiment, but disguised to provide security (e.g. Bakassi Boys), self-determination (e.g. Movement for the Actualizations of Sovereign States of Biafra), and to gain advantage for their own ethnic group (e.g. Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People). Maitatsine uprising of the 1980s was on religious radicalism. Also, kidnappings, vandalizations, and hostage-takings by members of Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) were because of environmental injustice on the people of the region by the government. Some of these have taken place for some decades back, but story of Nigeria's present security challenge is not complete without mentioning *Boko Haram* (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017).

These violent groups and other organized criminal syndicates have ravaged the Nigeria's national security. However, since youths are at the forefront of the rebellion and perpetration of many crimes; they equally constitute an important structure for bringing positive change in the country. When young men and women understand their rights, they can become empowered to engage in civil society, public service and political processes, at all levels. They need to know the channels through which they may exercise their civil and political rights and contribute to decision-making processes that impact their lives (UNDP, 2014).

Channels for youths' engagement include formal political processes such as youth advisory boards at local level, youth parliaments or shadow councils at national level, and engagement with United Nations processes at the global level, for example (UNDP, 2014). Other entry points, according to UNDP (2014), include volunteerism, access to civil service positions and decision-making processes in the public administration, initiatives for transparency and accountability, promotion of human rights, legal reform, and support for youth organizations, policy review and use of media, including social media, to increase access to information and collect and report on relevant data.

In view of this background, the paper is designed to investigate the role of youths in effective implementation of security and social development intervention in Nigeria. The fact that national security and social development has been threatened due to the activities of the insurgent groups (mentioned above) and the opportunist criminal activities by some youths, this paper argued that security and social development interventions are inter-dependent variables. Intervention in one will be ineffective without the other and vice versa. While development is not achievable without security, youths are the agents of any nation's developmental project. This implies that the role of youths in enhancing security, and by implication, social development in Nigeria shall be the foremost consideration of policy makers.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

*Youth* is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence. That is why, as a category, youth is more fluid than other fixed age-groups. Yet, age is the easiest way to define this group, particularly in relation to

education and employment, because ‘youth’ is often referred to a person between the ages of leaving compulsory education, and finding their first job (United Nations, 2013). Sociology of youth development further distinguished between “youth” and “youthful age”. Youthful age is a period of one’s life that involves energy and commitment to the development of his/her society. This is important because not all youths are committed to changing their societies for the better. Thus, playing an important role in the effective implementation of security and social development intervention in one’s own society or nation signifies that he/she is in his/her youthful age.

*Security* is a multifaceted concept as to involve the assurance of the complex human needs and prevention of anything that can constitute a threat or nuisance to some or all members of the society. Thus, the typology of security includes; political security, regional and international security, national security, state security, community security, and domestic security (Mukhtar, Abdullahi, Ishaq, & Muhammed, 2017). Thus, security is a state of contentment, feeling of being safe, and fortification from harm outside and exposure to danger within an environment.

*Development* is a contested concept. Depending on the professional inclination and perception of each definer, development is conceived differently. According to Mukhtar, Mukhtar & Abdullahi (2014), development is an evolutionary concept; it can take the form of biological, social, physical and even structural changes or transformation. Development in this context is the national development in terms of political, economic, and other aspects related to social existence like the peace and security. This is because the political economy of any nation owes much to the peace and security. Without the peace, it will be difficult for a country to achieve progress or development.

Development, according to Odoh & Eme (2014), is a comprehensive process that is underlined by values both in terms of its goals, process and sustenance. Indeed, at the centre of development is human agency with both individual and social dimensions. Also very critical is the implicit assumption that the state system provides the essential framework for the development of peoples in our contemporary world. Accordingly, efforts have been made to identify the key elements of the state system that engender development. These elements can be teased of the elaborate debate around the idea of the developmental state. This helps to generate consensus and create stability in the political system. On the other hand is clientelistic politics, which is based on the award of personal favours; and at times coercion.

*Social Development*: social development is any significant transformation within the social context. According to Foa (2011), social development is a means of distinguishing measures as a component within the broader paradigm of human development, as well as a means of distinguishing it from related concepts such as political development, social cohesion, or social capital. However, this study does not seek to make any distinction between social development and political or economic development. This is because the term “social” in sociological perspective covers all social; societal structures or institutions-politics, economy, education, religion, family or even media and medicine. Development in each social institution is for the benefit of the entire societal members, hence a social development.

### **Theoretical Explanation**

The Evolutionary Theory of Social Development and Human Development Theory will be used to explain the role of youths in effective implementation of security and social development intervention in Nigeria. *The evolutionary theory* of social development is

grounded on the understanding that progress is the outcome of a three stage process: 1) identifying the community's values; 2) creating goals to enhance these values in the community; and 3) forming strategies to implement these goals. Values in an evolutionary framework are neither "set in stones" (absolute) nor determined by the whim of an individual (relativistic). Instead, true values must meet the test of instrumentalism-meaning their existence must promote a going society. A going society is one that can support the continuation of the human life process. Once members agree on the set of shared values, they next create goals to advance these values. The community then finds strategies to achieve the proposed goals. Strategies must be evaluated for their practicality, however. Unpractical strategies render proposed goals to be unfeasible (Pham, 2010).

Strategies are evaluated on three criteria of institutional adjustment: 1) the community has the technological capability of realizing the goals (principle of instrumental primacy or technological determination); 2) community members recognizes how the proposed change may affect them and other members and, hence, group interaction is necessary (principle of recognized interdependence); and 3) the community must be able to integrate the implemented change back into the existing social fabric (principle of minimal dislocation). In addition, the community must deliberate on where it is "at" and where it would like "to be" (ends); how it plans to "get there" (means); and the consequences of choosing certain means over others. Means-ends-consequences and deliberation are thus the two corollaries of the theory of institutional adjustment (Pham, 2010).

Since evolutionary social theory takes the view that not all goals are feasible, we need a criterion to evaluate their practicality. This is where strategies enter in the social development process. Strategies are the means that must be implemented in order to achieve desired ends. Strategy formation is not the residual outcome of the two previous stages. Evolutionary theorists have long understood the close connection between goals and strategies, and they have developed a theory called institutional adjustment to explain this linkage. At its core, the theory of institutional adjustment is a test to evaluate the practicality of proposed strategies, and, hence, the feasibility of goals. If there are no practical strategies, the society (Nigeria in this case) must change its goals.

Human Development Approach is also instrumental in understanding the role of youths in security and social development intervention in Nigeria. During the 1990s, the concept of human development was promoted as a complement to existing income-based approaches to international development. Rooted in the capabilities literature of Amartya Sen and adopted by the Human Development Reports of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the primary aim of the human development paradigm was to focus development thinking more upon the enhancement of people's freedoms, capabilities, and wellbeing. Specifically, the human development approach sought to achieve three goals: i) to make people the ends and not the means of development; ii) to refocus attention on what people can be or do rather than what they can produce; and iii) to ensure that development policies are aimed at improving people's quality of life, including their health, security, and overall flourishing (Sen 1989; Foa, 2011).

While the theory of human development has been successful in refining the objectives of development intervention, however, there has been a running tension between its conceptualization and its measurement. As a concept, the theory of human development proposes a series of general objectives that can encompass all development aims: ensuring that people are empowered, that people are able to achieve their goals, and that people can

live well. As a measurement, however, human development is typically monitored using the Human Development Index (HDI), which accounts only for levels of income, health and education. Consequently, 'human development' is often misconceived narrowly in terms of human capital, that is, the physical and mental properties that people can translate into economic rewards in the marketplace, rather than their overall wellbeing and empowerment (Sen 1999, as cited in Foa, 2011).

Sen (1999) offered a more comprehensive approach to development by conceiving it as the process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. In order to operationalize these "freedoms", Sen used the concept of human capability, which relates to the ability of human beings to lead lives they have reason to value and to enhance their substantive choices. The basic assumption here is that the expansion of human capabilities adds to the quality of people's lives. Sen's capabilities approach contrasts with narrower views of development that are largely, if not uniquely, restricted to income indicators (for example, gross national product per head) and material growth. His understanding of development includes elements such as social well-being, poverty alleviation, income inequality, gender equality and universal access to primary education, health care and meaningful employment (De Haas, 2007).

Sen (1999) argued that income growth itself should not be the litmus test for development theorists, but instead the question of whether the capabilities of people to control their own lives have expanded. While acknowledging that incomes can have a high potential to contribute to the expansion of the real freedoms people enjoy, Sen maintained that the relationship between income and human development is by no means direct or automatic, making income indicators alone an inadequate indicator of the quality of people's lives. He argued that *freedom* is central to the process of development for two reasons.

The theory of human development is also important in understanding the role of youths in enhancing security and social development. However, the theory makes it clear that the government has to carry the youths along to ensure that the social, economic and political freedom of the people are effectively provided to achieve security and social development in Nigeria. Both theories of social evolution and human development are relevant, but for the fact that latter (human development theory) provided for convincing explanation and it was able to adequately relate the variables under study ("youths", "security intervention" and "social development intervention") it therefore adopted in the study.

### **Security and Social Developmental Challenges in Nigeria**

Africa in general and Nigeria in particular are bedevilled with various security and social developmental challenges. As observed by Odoh & Eme (2014), one of the greatest challenges facing governments and policymakers in Africa today is how to provide opportunities for the continent's more than 200 million youths so that they can have decent lives and contribute to the economic development of their countries. Yet, like other developing countries of Africa, Nigeria is bedevilled with various social problems. Poverty is widespread in the African states, Nigeria inclusive. Poverty and unemployment are twin evils that Nigeria the most. In the post-colonial periods, Nigeria began to experience high incidences of poverty and unemployment due to fall in crude oil price since 1982 and accompanying reduction in foreign exchange earnings, shortage of raw materials for manufacturing industries and corresponding depression in business firms altogether led to subsequent economic downturn, poverty and unemployment (Ada & Chigozie, 2010).

USAID (2006, as cited in Mukhtar *et al.* 2017) reported that close to 60% of the Nigerians live in extreme poverty. In 2014, World Bank Director for Nigeria, Marie-Nelly said, 100million Nigerians were living in poverty. In the same year, the Bank's President, Dr. Kim rated the country among the world's extremely poor countries (Mukhtar *et al.* 2017). The most disturbing thing is that the poverty and unemployment affect the youths the most. Odeh & Okoye (2014, Mukhtar, Muhammed & Sani, 2016) confirmed that, the increasing rate of crime such as armed robbery, advance fee fraud (419), corruption, prostitution, nepotism, drug trafficking, cultism and other social vices are definitely the product of persistent poverty due to youth unemployment in the country.

Security and social development challenges are also impinged by the political activities due to political actors' struggle directly or indirectly. The consequences of the political struggle in Nigeria may include the manner in which the political opposition and vested in the ruling parties are sabotaging the efforts of the government. There are also deliberate attempt to cause conflict between ethnics as a tactic for domination and diverting the attention of the masses from the authority's mismanagement. Crises are also invented to take some political advantage, especially during election. Under such a democratic dispensation, citizens make their choices on the basis of primordial factors such as religion, ethnicity, race and personality, rather than alternative developmental programmes. The youths have a role to play in this process as social strata with its own organisaions and other resources (Odoh & Eme, 2014).

In a nutshell, Nigeria is confronted with multiple security and social developmental challenges, such as terrorism and insurgency, poverty and unemployment, political and bureaucratic corruption, ethno-religious conflict or national disunity and deviant and criminal activities of many kinds.

### **The Role of Youths in Effective Implementation of Security and Social Development**

The role of youths in effective implementation of security and social development intervention in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. This is because youths have been deeply involved in self-help projects in various local governments in Nigeria. Their areas of interventions cover projects involving trade, commerce, Home Economics, small and medium term enterprises and agriculture, anti-corruption, counter-terrorism, community policing and drug-free clubs among others. These youths' self-help projects are classified into two by Odoh & Eme (2014): government aided projects (GAP) and non-government aided projects (NGAP). Government aid projects are those executed with the assistance of the government in either finance or material resources while non-government aid projects are those executed solely with collective effort of community members.

The non-governmental organizations existing in Nigeria are too many to be exhausted, but Saulawa (2016) made specific reference to four non-governmental organizations in Nigeria that contributed to the Nigerian security and social development. These are: Civil Liberty Organisation (CLO), Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), Human Rights Monitor, and Institute for the Human Rights and Humanitarian law. These four largely deal with issues pertaining to human rights, but they play significant role in enhancing security and social development in the process. For example, the CLO divided its projects into areas like; litigation, police and prison, women's rights and national expansion, environmental actions (in oil producing areas), documentation and research, resource centre, African monitoring group and ethics in government.

The CDHR's objectives include: promoting, defending and sustaining fundamental human rights; establishing a system of prompt and efficient assistance for the needy persons; collaborate with other NGOs committed for participatory democracy and social justice. Other International NGOs that incorporate Nigerian youths as individuals and as self-help groups include the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), the United Kingdom Agency for International Development (UKAID), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), OXFARM, ACTION-AID, etc.

Also, Nigerian youths are found to be involved in anti-terrorism. The *Boko Haram* insurgency was successfully contained through the decisive role of the youth vigilante groups (Yan Kato da Gora). As witnessed in Nigeria also, youths are positive agents of change in their communities in time of conflict and disaster. As noted by Alexander (2008), everyone benefits when young people are actively engaged in the decisions that directly affect their lives! Youth, families, adults, organizations, policymakers, and communities as a whole benefit when young people have a voice that is listened to, respected, and utilized. Alexander (2008) adds that engaging youth in decision making is essential to their overall development. This is true for all youth, even youth with behavioural issues. Gender variation, political inclination, religious affiliation ethnic background and socio-economic status of the youths are also immaterial in the participation of youths in promoting security and social development.

Early action to stabilize their livelihoods builds resilience and supports social cohesion; it also provides alternative as conflict prevention for at-risk youth. Strategic entry points focus on mobilizing and empowering youth as positive agents of change in their communities, including emergency employment and entrepreneurship and recovery of critical livelihoods assets such as skills development and access to finance. Youth also can be mobilized in disaster preparedness, education and post-disaster efforts-e.g. managing natural resources, mobilizing communities via new technologies, acquiring peace-building skills, or supporting efforts to reduce gender-based violence (UNDP, 2014).

From the foregoing, it is easy to understand that successful developmental projects in the area of security or overall social system depend on the state's commitment to empowering the citizens, youths in particular to achieving this goal. Odoh & Eme (2014) acknowledged this when they concluded that states that have succeeded in achieving the security and social developments around the world are have clearly set development objectives and establish the institutional structures to achieve those objectives. Such states are able to form alliances with key social groups in society that helps it to achieve its developmental goals. This usually involves establishing a programmatic relationship between citizens and policy makers. Programmatic politics are based on collective deliberation on public issues and are characterised by dense networks of civic associations.

### Conclusion

The crux of the paper is to examine the role of youths in effective implementation of security and social development intervention. Involvement of youths is crucial in ensuring national security and fighting many social, economic and political problems bedeviling Nigeria. The security and social development challenges of Nigeria include corruption, poverty, unemployment, youth radicalization, ethno-religious conflict, terrorism and insurgency. The paper came up with some important insights into some of these crucial roles by the youths in Nigeria. In conclusion, youths have many media to contribute to the development and level of their societies. This is conditioned by their social and psychological disposition and level of

productivity. However, the productivity of the youths and their role in the security and social development of Nigeria depends on the government's willingness to empower the youths in social, economic and political terms.

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