

The Philosophy of Youth Inclusion in Nigerian Politics: Trend, Challenges and Prospect

Emmanuel A.C. Ibezim

Abstract

Nigeria as the giant of Africa is experiencing political instability and one sided policy making body without including the youth. At the global level, there seems to be an understanding that youth are significant dividends of the global population, such that they need to be included in every decision-making process. They are also recognized as key agents of socio-economic and political movers of the society. Despite this fact, on the ground, youth are marginalized and excluded from the political and important decision making processes. This is truer in Africa than elsewhere in the world. Most politicians in Africa are failing to recognize this basic concern of the continent. The Nigerian case is a typical example where most leaders are between 60 and 80 years of age, Thus, the objective of this paper is to philosophize the youth inclusion in the Nigerian politics, which has been addressed by making a critical analysis on the trends, challenges, and prospects of youth participation in the political discourses of Nigeria. To address the objective of the study, secondary sources of data were utilized. After amassing all necessary data, qualitative methods of analysis in the forms of construction and interpretation were utilized to analyze and give a clear view of the study. Accordingly, the results of the study revealed that despite the fact that youth account the high proportion (seventy percent and more) of the Nigerian population, they are extremely excluded from socio-economic and political spheres. Though some legal protections and advocacies have been attempted by Nigerian Youths, most of

youth-related policies and programs are paper values. Hence, it is recommended that Nigeria as a country should create enabling and youth-friendly environments that pave the way for an effective and meaningful youth political participations. Likewise, facilitating youth inclusion in the national and local electoral and consultation processes is another means for upgrading the level of political participation of youth. Finally, if the Nation is not proactive towards their youth population, it may become a ticking political time bomb. Thus, young people should have a voice in their own future.

What Do We Mean by “Youth”?

“Youth” is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group.

However, age is the easiest way to define this group, particularly in relation to education and employment. Therefore “youth” is often indicated as a person between the age where he/she may leave compulsory education, and the age at which he/she finds his/her first employment. This latter age limit has been increasing, as higher levels of unemployment and the cost of setting up an independent household puts many young people into a prolonged period of dependency. When carrying out its Youth Strategy, UNESCO uses different definitions of youth depending on the context. For activities at international or at regional level, such as the African Youth Forum, UNESCO uses the United Nations’ universal definition.

The UN, for statistical consistency across regions, defines ‘youth’, as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. All UN

statistics on youth are based on this definition, as illustrated by the annual yearbooks of statistics published by the United Nations system on demography, education, employment and health. For activities at the national level, for example when implementing a local community youth program, “youth” may be understood in a more flexible manner. UNESCO will then adopt the definition of “youth” as used by a particular Member State. It can be based for instance on the definition given in the African Youth Charter where “youth” means “every person between the ages of 15 and 32 years.

What is Politics?

The simple answer to this question is that there is no single answer. Like many political concepts, politics is itself a contested concept. This section has introduced us to the idea that concepts, including the concept of politics, can be ‘essentially contested’, and has explored some of the implications this might have for the study (and practice) of politics, as well as for the nature of knowledge in the social sciences and humanities more generally. The section also introduced us to some competing definitions of politics, organizing them along a spectrum from narrower to broader conceptions of what constitutes politics. Starting from the narrower and moving towards the broader side of the spectrum, the section introduced us to the following definitions of politics:

- politics as that which concerns the state
- politics as a (non-violent) method of conflict resolution
- politics as conflict
- politics as the exercise of power
- politics as a social activity

- politics as a public activity
- politics as dependent on context and interpretation
- Politics as struggle over the meaning of political concepts.

While these definitions are distinct and in some cases contradictory, they do also overlap and they certainly don't correspond to mutually exclusive realms of political activity. Engaging in political activity in the narrower sense, for instance by voting or becoming involved in party politics, does not preclude one from engaging in political activity in the broader sense, for instance, by participating in protests or boycott campaigns. Politics is ubiquitous. Avenues for political involvement are multiple, and there is certainly nothing to prevent you from engaging in as many kinds of politics as you have the time and desire to!

As we look at these distinct definitions of politics, you were encouraged to engage critically with them and to consider whether they did actually fall squarely towards the narrow or broad side of the definitional spectrum. Indeed, while some definitions were certainly narrower (or broader) than others, you also saw that in some cases this depended on how we defined other concepts – such as power, violence or conflict – which can themselves be contested concepts.

Although it might at first appear that debates over the meaning of concepts are quite far removed from our everyday lives, people all over the world and throughout history have sacrificed their lives and livelihoods for concepts such as democracy, equality and freedom. Although wars have not been fought exclusively over the definition of politics, different understandings of who counts as a political being (in other words, as 'doing politics') are in no small way related to different understandings of politics. In turn, who counts as a political being

has significant implications for whose voices are heard, whose concerns matter and which actions are valued or considered legitimate and which disparaged, trivialized or even criminalized. David, Easton (1953) said that politics is the authoritative allocation of values

Scholars once said that Politics could as well be seen as a methodology and activities associated with running a government, an organization or a movement. *Politics* refers to a set of activities associated with the governance of a country, or an area. It involves making decisions that apply to members of a group. It refers to achieving and exercising positions of governance - organized control over a human community, particularly a state. *Politics* is a multifaceted word. Nigeria as a nation operates as a democratic nation. This paper is to carry out a study on Nigerian Youth inclusion in politics.

The global, regional, national and state efforts to involve youth in the political system. At the global level: This stage include: first, second and third world countries. The Americans and some parts of European countries are ahead of Nigeria in including youths in the political structure of their nations. Example is Austria who elected Sebastian Kurz 31 years as the youngest president in the world in Dec. 18, 2017. Before that day election, he was the country's foreign minister. While our youths are contented with being used, as praise singers and special assistants on social media in Nigeria, youths elsewhere are disrupting the status quo, pushing for innovation, changing the narrative and pushing for the new frontier. From Face book to Snap chat and Taxify, these tech giants were founded by millennia's who are youths. Mark Zuckerberg is just 32 years old and the youngest billionaire in the world. A 31 years old man in Nigeria is probably in his parents' house unemployed and broke, eating free food and

not bothered. The 31 years old man in Nigeria are feeling big supporting politicians (who directly or indirectly put them in the mess they are in) on face book without seeing the nexus between the failed leadership and present unemployment predicament. There is the need to push for true change by including the youths in Nigerian politics.

At the Regional Level

In these days, at the regional level, there are some initiatives to inculcate the youth' issues into developmental agendas. For example, the African Union has stepped forward in addressing the youth issues. Its progress has been manifested in the NEPAD's program of action that underpins the youth to have been given with youth desk such that young people will participate during policy adoptions and articulations. The adoption of the African Youth charter, which is currently ratified by 23 African countries and signed by 37 nations, is also another legal step taken up by the AU. Furthermore, the AU is praised for its second education plan of action (2006-2015), which underpins the promotion of education throughout Africa.

Finally, the espousal of 2009-2018 ten-year AU plan of action for youth empowerment and development, the celebration of the African youth day and the implementation of the AU youth volunteer corps program are the notable achievements of AU to enhance the level of youth in Africa.

At the National Level

At the national level, most countries of Africa have started to recognize the role and importance of youth that they have a big plus towards the sustainable development of these countries. The world program of action for youth had impacted Africa positively.

If we see most African nations, they have adopted the national youth policies and institute a national youth representative body. Moreover, there seem resemblances of the African governments to involve young people as partners in various developmental aspects. Practically, however, youth are passive and reactive to decisions affecting them due to the lack of implementation of the policies and programs developed by respective governments. Similarly, many of the youth policies of these countries have numbers of pitfalls and challenges. One among others is while these policies were framed, youth were not consulted adequately. Therefore, national youth policies should be re-developed by approaching the youth. Complementarities between these policies and the legislations of every country are very essential to involve young peoples to the decision-making processes.

In general, the context of youth inclusion in various domains in Nigeria widely varies. Some had good experiences, but others not. For instance, States such as Kaduna and Middle Belt have understood that unemployment is one of the biggest hurdles for the active involvements of youth in the political forays. As a result, they are developing young peoples' entrepreneurship programs and employing youth to reduce the rampant unemployment rate and killings in their respective States. The West African countries are also trying to engage their youth into productive roles through extending Public works programs for them.

At the State and Local Government Level

At the State and local government level in Nigeria, we can see mass killings of innocent citizens in almost all the States of the nation, as a result of over reaction of the youths of a particular tribe. For instance, the *Ariwa* youths of Northern part of Nigeria

asked the Igbo's to leave the North that may be because they are not deeply involved in the nation's politics and they felt that they can create their own government. The Bokoharam are killing people in Nigeria because they want to be included in the nation's polity. The Fulani herdsmen, though many of them are not educated yet they wanted to be included in the nations politics. They kill and destroy people's property so that they as well will be recognized. The militants across Bayelsa State wants to be involved in the polity of the nation, the *Ijaws* are the same. The IPOB and MASOB found mostly around South Eastern part of Nigeria agitate because they are not included in the nation's politics. For instance, from 1970 till date, the Igbo youths felt that they were not included in the nations politics. Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, in his book "because I was involved" speaks about the youth's inclusion in Nigeria politics and the level of massacre done on the Igbo youths.

Gowon,(1974) opined that four years ago when he gave 1979 as target date for returning the country to normal constitutional government, both himself and the military hierarchy honestly believed that by the date , especially after a bloody civil war which ended in 1970..... There would have developed an atmosphere of sufficient stability...1974 is unrealistic; it would indeed amount to a betrayal of trust to adhere rigidly to that target date. Also, Achebe (2006) said that one of the commonest manifestations of under- development is a tendency among the ruling elite to live in a world of make believe and unrealistic.

Prospects of Youth Inclusion in the Nigerian Politics International Recognition of the Importance of Youth Participation in Politics

The UN and its agencies, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and other multinational corporations are pressurizing member nations to take into account the youth in their policies, programs, and strategies. Despite such endeavours, the pace of individual countries in integrating the youth into their national policies is largely retarded. Just like the European Union, the Nigerian nation should also strive for the implementation of the youth related protocols and agreements. In 2013, the secretary general of the European youth forum strongly reminds Europe to consider the youth in every aspect of the continent. Though he had spoken about Europe, but it has also a message for Nigerian government.

He said that:

Young people must be at the heart of the 2014 European elections as young people's involvement in politics will increase the quality of European democracy. National political parties need to significantly change their approach in order to engage youth in the campaign. (p. 6).

Adoption and Ratification of Youth Policies at the National Level

By recognizing the importance of effective youth political participation, most countries adopt and ratify their national Youth Policy. This is a good progress for the betterment of the youth. In their policy making process and structures, the nations also take some initiatives to involve youth through establishing some youth organizations and governance structures. At the national level, Nigeria has commenced specific initiatives to create a framework for improving the active involvement of youth in its programs. Given the fact that the empowerment, development, and leadership issues of the youth are dynamic in their very nature, Nigeria is re-

thinking the means to improve the current youth mechanisms. It includes, but not only confined, the institutionalization of national youth federation.

The Challenges of Youth Inclusion in the Nigerian Politics

Opportunities could not excel due to challenges and constraints that impinge the practical implementation of Nigerian governments' and civil societies' youth-oriented action plans. Lack of understanding of the benefits of the youth engagement in the policy and program of action by Nigerian government is the first of problems that challenge youth participation in Nigerian politics. Limited capacity, skill, resource, and tools are also other hindrances for the youth.

Little Space for Youth in the Political Environment

In Nigeria, there are no wider political spaces for youth to have a chance to make their voices heard and to shape their future destinies. When youth are continually excluded from decision making processes, on their own and societal affairs by and large, they will face the psychological trauma of hopelessness and misery in their life. Nigeria is known by its repeated promises for its youth. Better education, good jobs, political room for youth is the common slogans of politicians. Sadly enough, none of them had made them true in actual contexts.

From its demographic importance, it is unquestionable that youth deserve a huge share of developmental investments. So, addressing issues concerning the youth should remain salient in Nigeria in particular and the African community in general. Therefore, as Kofi Anan, the then UN secretary general Said that:

Young people should be in the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be agents of development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of the societies (p. 11).

Youth unemployment

The youth unemployment is very rampant throughout Nigeria. Unless it has been managed early, it would be a ticking political time bomb. Most social implosions in the Northern part of Nigeria were chiefly the results of youth joblessness.

Despite the AU youth Charter, which specifies that every young person shall have the right to social, economic, political, and cultural development with due regard to their freedom and identity and in the equal enjoyment of the common heritage of mankind. The majority of the Nigerian youth are leading a worst life due to a widespread unemployment and detachment from income generating schemes. This has been reflected by Greg Nicolson, who said once upon a time that youth issues have become political issues. Each year on Youth Day, we hear of the crisis of education and unemployment. But as politicians use the "youth" to further their campaigns to elect, they fail to acknowledge many of the struggles young South Africans face. Jacob Zuma also supported this idea while he had a speech in 1976 in Newcastle about the students uprising in South Africa. He underlined that out of the total unemployment rate in South Africa, 72% occupied by those who were under the age of 34. He additionally stated that youth unemployment in South Africa triggers the potential of youth to get into drug and alcohol abuse, social instability, and xenophobia. This is also applicable to

Nigerian youths who join violent groups, like Boko Haram, Ijaw youths, Fulani Herdsmen, armed robbers and other cultic groups just to be involved in leadership. For instance, the atrocities committed by Boko Haram against Christian communities in the North east and by herdsmen militias in the Middle Belt are patently genocidal in intent and character and the culprit are always the Muslim youth.

Furthermore, the jobless young people are vulnerable to problems of education and health. Meanwhile, most Politicians fail to recognize this great concern of the nation. Because of their economic crisis, youth are deterred from their political participation. This is argued by some scholars that it could be a strategic formula (but a failed formula in actual senses) of politicians to weaken the competitiveness and the revolution of youth towards government.

Way Forward

Establishing Legal Frameworks for the Political Participation of Youth

Adopting a youth-inclusive legal framework is an essential and primary step in mainstreaming the youth in the political aspects of a country like Nigeria. It would allow youth to participate formally and improve their political roles in their societies. The election is one of such means that political rights are exercised. In this particular case, the formalities and procedures of election should be friendly and take the conditions of youth into consideration. It could be like making the age limit for voting to be youth-inclusive and establishing favourable legal conditions to enable youth to actively involved in elections.

Establishing Age Limit for All Politicians in the Nation

Globally, it has been observed that in some West African countries, Presidents; try to stay on sit till between 80 and 90 years of age, while the youths are there unemployed. Example is Robert Muogabe of Zimbabwe and others. Since Professors and some Bishops of some denomination retire at the age of 70, it will be good if the age limit of all political sits should expire at 70 years.

Empowering Youth

Both politically and economically, Nigerian youth are not at in the orbit. They are rather observers of their older generations. So, it indicates that youth should be empowered to actively participate in the economic and political areas. The first step in empowering youth should start from the employment creation and integrating them into entrepreneurial activities whereby they would think then about how they will impact the inclusive political momentum of their country. Therefore, exposing youth into the working environments and supporting their entrepreneurship and strengthen the youth cooperatives and micro and small business enterprises has a big plus to laid a foundation for the political involvement of young peoples.

Introduction of Payment of Unemployed Nigerian Youth

Developed countries like United State of America, adopted the payment of their unemployed youth as to reduce crime. The Nigerian government can adopt the same measure for their youth to keep them going before they are gainfully employed. This will make them very inclusive in the scheme of affair of the society. Researchers, such as Milton Mutto shows that young peoples in Nigeria have an experience of being marginalized from the political and other important decision-making processes. This in turn contributes to youth to feel hopelessness and powerlessness.

This is also mentioned as one of the pushing factors for the young people to tend into illegal activities with a hope to be heard by the government and the public as well. For this reason, various forms of projects and programs should be developed to allow youth to participate in political and development agendas. Such programs may include, inter alia; the youth networks, youth-centered capacity building programs, advocacies, organizing and strengthening the youth clubs and associations and mainstreaming youth and their issues in the countries policies and programs. The nation should also frame a quota or any kind of means to enable youth to have a representative from the local assemblies to the national parliament.

Youth Political Sensitization and Civic Engagement

Media is one of the major instruments to raise the awareness level of youth thereby they can exercise their political rights and influence the decision of governments. So, sensitizing the youth and the general community is a means to greater involvement in wider-angle of socioeconomic and political aspects. On the other hand, youth participation in civic associations like community and religious groups will assist them to share information, foster leadership skills and to engage in political communities for example, Howe; P (2006) indicated that those who are considerably engaged in religious associations are more likely to participate in their country's voting contest than who are not. Similarly, the research done by McFarland and Thomas also revealed that in the United States of America, youth who participated in social (voluntary) associations are more likely to involve in the political aspects of US. From here, one can understand that youth should be exposed to Medias and civic associations to increase their future political participations.

In a nutshell, as clearly stipulated above, Nigeria should establish, promote, and encourage Media to transmit information that benefits the youth. Furthermore, education and training should also provide for young people to know and actively participate in the democratization, governance, and political fields of their countries.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The youth dividend in Nigeria is significant. Meanwhile, the attention given to it is considerably limited. If the young population in Nigeria is utilized properly, it would be a potential resource to uplift the nation and to see the Nigeria as everybody wants. Unless and otherwise, as we have seen during the 2011/12 Arab uprising and popular demonstration, the youth of Nigeria would become a threat for the governments that exclude the issues of this segment of the population. So, 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.

Recommendations

As the findings of the study revealed that the youth in Nigeria are largely excluded from the political discourses of the nation. Thus, to bring youth into the political foray of Nigeria and to utilize their immense potential, the following recommendations are provided. From the global to the national and local levels, the youth-related issues should be the priority areas. Though policy adoptions are important steps towards youth inclusions, their implementations are of paramount importance. Therefore, in every developmental agenda, youth should place in the forefront. In effect, it could be possible to utilize the full capacity of these politically and

economically active segments of the population. The nation and individual states have to involve youth in all levels and areas of policy making and developmental plans. For doing so, a national disaggregated data about the youth and their participation is highly required. If Nigerians can do that, it will be able to make informed and evidence-based decisions.

One of the findings of the study shows that young Nigerians are largely marginalized from political processes and most of them feel hopelessness about their futures and their inclusion in various decision making processes. They thought that violence could be a viable solution to get what they lost because of irresponsible governments. Therefore, it is an important message for Nigerian governments to be aware of that if they continue as usual, they will confront with the young people who are revolting and restless. The Arab revolt was a good example for this. Therefore, youth participation and representation from local to national and international level is a timely and long-lasting solution.

At the national level, a clear and implementable plan of action that sketches the youth-related programs in different time frameworks is very essential. A very potential area but highly unutilized in the implementations of youth programs in Nigeria is around the regional economic communities (RECs). In the present days, RECs are excelling in meeting various developmental agendas of the nation. However, in the case of integration of Youth programs towards such RECs is very minimal. Hence, like security and economic developments, youth agenda should also be the targets of RECs. However, the philosophy of youth inclusion in Nigerian politics is very timely and inevitable. This will make Nigeria a peaceful nation with brighter future.

References

- Achebe, C. (2000) The trouble with Nigeria, *Retrieved 17th May, 2019 from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/achebe>*
- Achebe, C. (2006) Things fall apart, *retrieved from <https://web.facebook.com>*
- Adsera (2003) Besley and Burgess. *Accessed on: December 6th, 2016.*
- Bourdieu P. (1978) The concept of youth so difficult to define sociology essay. *Accessed on: May 4th, 2019.*
- Collins (2018) English dictionary retrieved 9 from *<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/English/politics>. May 17th, 2019*
- George, W. () Washington University press retrieved from *<https://ww2.gwu.edu/ccps/etzionna312pdf> May 17th, 2019.*
- Furlong A (2013) Youth studies: An Introduction. USA: Routledge 2-3
- Howe, P. (2006) on in the Netherl Political Knowledge and Electoral Participations: Comparisons with the Canadian case. *Int Political Sci Rev 27(2): 137-66.*
- Macmillan Dictionary (2013) Youth. Macmillan Publishers Limited. *Accessed on: May 17th, 2019*
- Merriam W Retrieved from *<https://www.merriam-webster.com> 17th May, 2019*
- Milton M (2007) The youth of Africa: A Threat to Security or a Force for Peace? *Accessed on: May, 17th, 2019.*
- Oxford Dictionary (1884) *<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com> 17th May, 2019*
- Nandigiri R (2015) Standpoint: The politics of being young: is a youth category necessary for development. *Accessed on: May 17th, 2019.*
- National Youth Policy of Nigeria (2009) Federal Ministry of Youth Development, Lagos, Nigeria. *Accessed on: May 19th, 2019*

- Putnam R (1993) *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Resni Casal D (2011) *Afrobarometer, the political participation of Africa's youth: Turnout, partisanship, and protest*; Working Paper No. 136.
- UNDP (2003) *Participation in the decision-making process, world youth report, 200*. Accessed on: May 17th, 2019.
- UNDP (2012) *Enhancing youth political participation*. Accessed on: May 17th, 2019.
- UNECA (2010) *UN entities working on youth issues in Africa*. Accessed on: May 17th, 2019.
- UNDP (2014) *Regional overview: Youth in Africa, International Year of Youth August 2010-2011, Dialogue, and Mutual Understanding*.
- UNECA (2010) *The United Nations system's approach to youth in Africa*. Accessed on: May 19th, 2019.
- UNDP (2013) *Enhancing youth political participation throughout the electoral cycle: A good practice guide*. Accessed on: May 19th, 2019.
- United nations youth (2013) *Youth, political participation and decision-making*. Accessed on: May, 19th, 2019.
- USAID (2005) *youth and conflict, office of conflict management, Washington, DC. USAID*. Accessed on: May 19th, 2019.
- World Bank (2009) *Promoting Youth Employment - African Economic Outlook*. Accessed on: May 19th, 2019.
- Youth Merriam-Webster (2012). Accessed on: May, 19th, 2019.

Godwin Aturuchi Eche is a Lecturer in the Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Runucolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.