

The Power of Youth and Women in Democracy

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Young people are often excluded or overlooked as political candidates. Politics is typically regarded as a space for politically experienced men, and while women are often disadvantaged in accumulating experience to run for office, young people are systematically marginalized because of their young age, limited opportunities, and projected lack of experience. As the increased political participation of women benefits society as a whole, the presence of young people in decision-making positions benefits all citizens and not just youth. The Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) reports that people between the ages of 20 and 44 make up 57% of the world's voting age population but only 26% of the world's Members of Parliament (MPs). Young people under 30 represent 1.9% of the world's MPs and more than 80% of the world's upper houses of Parliament have no MPs aged under 30. While young people often play central and catalyzing roles in movements for democracy around the world, they are less engaged than older generations in voting and party activism. Together, these trends have inspired many international organizations to study the lack of youth political participation and train youth activists to become political leaders.

Recognizing the potential of youth, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) developed its first-ever Youth Strategy (2014–2017) ([link is external](#)), called “Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future”, in line with the UN System-Wide Action Plan on Youth ([link is external](#)) (2013) which calls on young generations to become more involved and more committed in development processes. 2013 also saw the publication of the “Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle: A Good Practice Guide ([link is external](#))”, UNDP's first review of programming strategies for youth political participation beyond the ballot box. In 2016, to further boost the implementation of UNDP's Youth Strategy and respond to both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security ([link is external](#)), UNDP launched a Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace – Youth-GPS (2016–2020) ([link is external](#)). The Youth-GPS focuses on civic

engagement and political participation, among other areas, and responds to the concerns young people have expressed in global, regional and national forums and the growing demand at all levels for cutting-edge and strategic support in youth programming in all development contexts. In 2016, as a joint initiative of a number of partners including UNDP and IPU, the “Not Too Young To Run ([link is external](#))” global campaign was launched to elevate the promotion of young people’s right to run for public office and address the wide-spread issue of age discrimination.

In 2010, IPU adopted the resolution “Youth participation in the democratic process ([link is external](#))” at its 122nd Assembly and in 2013, established the Forum of Young Parliamentarians. Since then, IPU published two studies, one in 2014 ([link is external](#)) and another in 2016 ([link is external](#)), using a questionnaire to gather data from its Member Parliaments around the world on youth participation in national parliaments. Through these studies, IPU provides a number of recommendations for action which, if acted on, will ensure young people are fully engaged in politics. These include designing strategies by national parliaments and political parties that target the inclusion of young MPs and ensure diversity among youth, addressing the disparities between the number of young men and young women entering parliament. IPU also recommends to align the minimum age for parliamentary candidacies with the minimum voting age and to establish youth quotas (e.g. reserved seats, legislated quotas, party quotas) as a means of increasing the number of young MPs. In 2016 the IPU membership endorsed the document “Rejuvenating democracy, giving voice to youth ([link is external](#))”, based on the principles promoted by the young parliamentarians of the IPU: “No decisions about us without us”, that outlines how parliaments and parliamentarians could help rejuvenate democracy and give the world’s young people a voice in political decision-making.

In addition, UN Women established the Youth Forum at the CSW in March 2016, allowing global youth representatives to discuss the issues they face and to reflect on ways to help deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals ([link is external](#)), especially Goal 5 on gender equality. UN Women also published CEDAW for Youth ([link is external](#)) in 2016, a youth-friendly

version of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) elaborated by young people. International IDEA published in 2016 a report entitled “Increasing youth participation throughout the electoral cycle: entry points for electoral management bodies” (link is external) documenting the challenges and practices directed at youth inclusion in politics and within different electoral processes.

I was carefully x-raying the political climes in Nigeria since the advent of democracy, and I intentionally omitted the pre-1999 for obvious reasons. We are all aware that it has always been the same cabals since the independence and the military juntas. Nigeria is endowed with young talented people who are doing great in their various fields, name it, Engineering, Science, Arts, Education, Trading, Agriculture, Entertainment, Fashion, Banking, Entrepreneurship, E-commerce, Divinity, among others, except in Politics.

I said except politics and I mean it. Most of the few young people who are on the corridors of powers are certainly not in powers because they don't even know what goes on in there. Many of them are not too different from being house Boys and Girls. The old men will not allow or listen to them but a command, obey relationship and nothing more. The argument has always been that young people are not matured nor experienced enough to handle a complex country as Nigeria, you know, this sort of assumption is a calculated attempt to blackmail the young people into accepting that they are incapable by those who gained powers at their very young age but never plan to relinquish or quit the stage for others to come in, they rather prefer to fill in their own children and relatives. Nigerian youths are brilliant in all aspect of life, they are resourceful, genuinely skillful and can handle any task given to them, but here, the political dealers are thinking otherwise, they see youths as mere objects of voting, instruments and the roles the old people have confined these young people to are to continue to use them as political thugs, errands boys and girls in the names of Personal Assistants, Senior Special Assistant on this and that.

Looking at what is obtainable in other country like the US, UK, Canada, other advanced country and even some African countries, you will be hearing that a

boy or a girl of 21 years is a member of parliament, but in Nigeria, the old politicians don't want the young people to near the real political leadership, they have invented and set all manners of barriers to stop them from being competitors. It is only in Nigeria you are eligible to vote when you are 18 years but you cannot aspire to contest for leadership unless you are 30 or 35 years old, even at 30 or 35 there are offices you cannot aspire for, is this not ridiculous? In the same Nigeria, we have seen toddlers, children become kings, Ezes, Emirs and took over traditional leadership to lead a lot of people.

Why is Politics so different, I am asking. If that is the case, the same constitution which was deviously crafted to stop the young people from aspiring for leadership should also say that, eligibility to vote is when a person turns to 30 or 35 years. To my knowledge, the old politicians who are all same and friends irrespective of which political party they belong do not only use age as barrier to prevent our young people from aspiring for leadership, they invented all kinds of tactics such as ethnicity divide, Religious divide, political violence, Money politics, rigging, diabolical means e.t.c which ordinarily will scare and put fears in our young people who have not muster enough courage to toe their line of do or die politics, I am not encouraging any young person to take after them please.

The same old politicians the young people wants to kill themselves for either in APC or the PDP in Nigeria are sensible enough and have started aligning, horse trading and forming coalitions to forge a common front ahead of 2019 just like they did in the past elections, can't the Nigerian youths also adopt this aged long strategy to unite to get powers, how long will the youths continue to be pawns in the hands of these political dealers? To the old politicians, most of them especially, it is about power grabbing and not a venture or quest to transform the country, they are aware that the more transformation and education to the mind and soul of Nigerians the less the power for them but the youths are thinking otherwise, the youths wants to make their marks known, they want to make names that will last for decades through serious development and transformation of the country. The old politicians have now devised a new method of division, they have resorted into shopping for young people who are influential on new media, fill their pockets with some cash,

gifts, foreign education/trips or positions so that they can serve as their mouthpiece to spread falsehood and propaganda on social media, in doing this for them, other young people will naturally attack them to repel their falsehood, then the fight, emotional distress and division amongst the youths goes on and on.

In all, its a calculated attempt to divert the attentions of the young people from being their competitors for leadership. To an average young person who wishes to aspire for political office, the first thing your friend and family will ask you is that "hope say you don cook yourself". This is very sad and ridiculous because that has been the foundation laid by the old crooks to continue to remain and perpetuate themselves in leadership. It is in Nigeria you'll hear that two people are contesting, the next person develop strange illness and die abruptly, all kinds of scary things happens, just to discourage young and other professionals who can be their competitors.

Please, don't get me wrong that I am too youths centric, no, that is not the case, the youths of today will someday become old, but the old Nigerian politicians have not laid a good foundation that will allow a healthy competition which will benefit Nigerians, if they allow good competition irrespective of age, we can be rest assured that our best brains will start emerging and having their places on the leadership front rows. In spite of all these challenges, like the popular saying in Yoruba " Agbajo owo Lafi nso Aya" translated into "unity is the key to freedom" The young people of Nigeria can for the first time come together to forge a common front, the youths will benefit more when they come together. Let's look at it this way, if the majority of youths which constitutes about 78 percent of active electorates and voters in Nigeria decided to queue under one umbrella with serious ground work by taking ownership, shunning the old people who will ordinarily use them as political thugs to snatch ballot boxes, or for rigging elections, they will be moving closer to powers.

Young people can change Nigeria easily in my own opinion because of their prowesses and power of innovations, they are in tunes with what is happening in and around our world. Nigeria has remained the same for long

because they prefer to keep electing uninspiring, non innovative leaders that lacks the new ideas that can take the country out of poverty and economy doldrums but only parades big names and wealth and are of the old ideas, many young people flock with them because of the little crumbs but the real change Nigeria needs lies in the hands of the youths. If the Nigerian youths can put aside all their differences for the first time and form a majority power bloc, a new and prosperous Nigeria can spring up, a Nigeria where innovative ways of acquiring education, healthcare, Agriculture, polity, policy, politics and wealth for for all can be made possible. The youths should not just come together for coming together sake but choose a think tank that will be responsible for drawing up policies, programmes, development map, campaign manifestos, charters and how to scale all the barriers the old men have set for them, the Nigerians youths should as a matter of fact convoke a National Youth Conference where the movement can start and send a big signal to the whole world that the Nigerians youths have resolved to come together to take the future now. I sincerely hope that the youths will seize the 2019 elections to make a remarkable difference since the invention of our democracy.

At the end of this talk, youths are to comprehend the potentials in them, the power in their unity, how they can correct the obnoxious notion about politics, how to involve themselves and participate in politics and how effective they can use their abilities and numerical advantage to dominate the political space, remain relevant and make the needed difference in the society.

It is an indisputable fact that the Nigerian political system and civil service are in dare need of leaders who are academically, morally, medically and most importantly spiritually sound, people with proven integrity, good track records and antecedents who will transform the fortunes of the nation positively.

Politics is indisputably a powerful instrument for astronomical growth, development, national integration, unity, peace and societal advancement through sound economic, fiscal and social welfare policies and programmes not the monumental retardation, retrogression, social injustices and

backwardness obtainable and obvious in Nigeria, Africa and other developing as well as underdeveloped nations.

In Nigeria, the youths, particularly in the Pre-independence era and shortly thereafter, played formidable roles leading to monumental gains in politics economy, technology, commerce and industry just to mention a few which shaped Nigeria. Youths play critical and cardinal roles in the cultural, technological and socio-economic development of any nation.

No reasonable society and government should ever jettison the critical roles played by the youths in any nation as they are the engine room and forces behind most societal developments whether social, economic or political.

Youth contributes immensely to National interest, integration, unity, peace, harmony, progress, prosperity, growth and development. Their potentials when properly harnessed, have immeasurable and unimaginable impacts to any given society, nation and world at large.

Though not all youths must be politicians or contest elective positions; some are destined to be career civil servants, business moguls, great entrepreneurs, head of corporate organizations and multi-national corporations; political participation and involvement must not be overemphasized.

YOUTH:

Youth in Nigeria includes all members of the Federal Republic of Nigeria aged 18-35.

African Youth Charter says youth or young people shall refer to every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years.

POLITICS:

Politics (from Greek: Politiká: Politika, definition “affairs of the cities”) is the process of making decisions applying to all members of each group.

Aggregate of activities, actions, and policies that are used to gain and hold power in a government or to influence a government.

Politics are activities aimed at improving someone's status, status of the society or increasing power within an organization.

“Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it whether it exists or not, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedy.”-Ernest Benn

POLITICAL SYSTEM: This is a framework which defines acceptable political methods within a given society.

POLITICAL PARTY: A political party is a group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government. The party agrees on some proposed policies and programmes, with a view to promoting the collective good or furthering their supporters' interests.

POLITICAL MANIFESTO: A manifesto is a written statement that describes the policies, goals and opinions of a person, group, political party or government. It is a published verbal political declaration of the intentions, motives, or views of the issuer, be it an individual, group, political party or government. All political parties and prospective aspirants are expected to have manifestoes which they use to woo the electorates.

Manifesto refers to the vision and mission statements (statement of intentions) of an individual or political party backed by the core values needed for their actualization.

YOUTH AND THE FUTURE

Youths in Nigeria are socially, economically, financially and politically emasculated in so many ways by the devious objectives of a clandestine government who has no plan for the growing population. At another end, they creates some of their problems as they channel their energies, talents, abilities and potentials to unproductive ventures like restiveness, drunkenness, hooliganism, cultism, stealing and other ungodly/irresponsible lifestyles.

Without mincing words, I stand bold to say for long, there has been grand conspiracies against the Nigerian youths by the political class and other elites in the society which has been planned and being gradually executed overtime which if not urgently checked and stopped by the youths would make them

economically, financially, socially and politically handicapped over a long time period. This is obvious in the non-inclusion of the youths in key governance process and their participation therein. If not, how could youths of 23-35 years of age occupy sensitive positions such as Ministers, Commissioners, Heads of government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), Governors, Heads of States and the list go on but today, persons of such ages are being deprived the opportunities to contest and occupy such positions by the Constitution drafted by the key conspirators? One can see how old people who are expected to have retired to pave way for young energetic and credible youths to be gainfully engaged being recycled thereby relegating the youths to the background even when they end up spending most of their years in office attending to one health challenge or the other.

One of the burdens of the youths of this present generation is the passive attention they pay to the workings of governance, economic theories, national income and budget system. The Nigerian youth is buried in sports and entertainments (indecent and ungodly music most especially). They know everything about the football clubs in the world and what they are worth financially but doesn't understand or are completely blind to the importance of the nation's GDP, inflation rate, poverty rate, unemployment rate and other key performance indicators. They are usually lost when they listen to the Minister of Finance reeling out tools for economic analysis. It is difficult for the average Nigerian youth to question their leaders because their knowledge of the working of government is shallow. Ask many youth the causes of inflation, how inflation could be addressed, recession, effects of exchange rates to the economy, to name five (5) serving Ministers and their portfolios, Names of 10 State Governors and the State they are governing you will be shocked at their responses, but at the unpleasant introductory sound of ungodly songs, they can tell you the artistes, their ages and what even Google cannot tell you about them.

Such failing has made the youth easy tools for the political class to use at any given time and opportunity. They use them for political thuggery, as hired assassins, electoral violence and the females are constantly dragged in for sexual expeditions. It is truly a society that works against itself. The leaders

whose responsibility is to protect the citizens have turned against the very ones they should care for. It is so because the youths have failed to question their leaders; they don't have the courage to demand for justice. The youths will remain subservient to their leaders as long as they remain dormant in the face of extreme social injustices.

It is an undisputable fact from available records that about 65-70% of the registered voters in Nigeria comprises of youth and such numerical strengths are mostly used for political campaigns, ballot snatching, electoral violence and other forms of electoral frauds/malpractices all for some selfish and greedy politicians instead of being put in use to bring young people into the governance process and better their lives thereby reducing restiveness, cases of kidnap and other crimes.

This generation of youths wants instant wealth and it really doesn't matter how they get it. They had gone to school with the belief that life will show them the side of fortune. Now they are out of school only to discover that there are 18 generations of unemployed graduates in Nigeria struggling for job placement.

The Nigerian political leaders have long hijacked the political terrain and locked it against the youths but the youths are still told they are the leaders of tomorrow. It is this deceit and delusional practice that has made the youths to lose hope in the system. The desperate ones take to crime; like taking a sword against a sea of trouble. The very contented ones find themselves deluded, gasping for breath under the weight of poverty. Government at all levels, political actors, elites, NGOs and well-spirited individuals must collaborate to curb this social malady before it gets out of hand. Employment is the critical issue that must be tackled first. The youths must be gainfully employed, empowered and their capacities built to enable them get busy doing things that will enhance the image of the country.

The youths must resort to self-development, read to expand their intellectual horizon, develop sound strategies, techniques and ideas. The energy channeled towards football information should be spread across bigger economic and national concerns for the purposes of getting a grasp of the

workings and distribution of economic resources. If their knowledge is sharpened on the proper functioning of government and the dynamics of policy making, they can raise requisitions and criticize government intelligently when government policies contravene the laws of the land. We must develop the strategies to achieve economic justice and expand the aspiration of nationhood.

YOUTHS AS FUTURE LEADERS

All over the world, youths are regarded as the future leaders of the society. This is not a misplaced or wistful thinking as this class of energetic citizens possess enormous and multi-dimensional talents, powers and creative abilities which if moulded and harnessed in a fit and proper atmosphere, can translate to generational wellbeing in the social, political and economic life of the society.

It is against this backdrop that nations, particularly those subscribing to democratic norms and values, evolve deliberate policy measures aimed at prioritizing genuine issues geared towards giving eloquent expression to youth development, self-actualization and repositioning for future leadership.

For instance, apart from Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe who was 42 years, most of the key players in the struggle for independence as well as subsequent actors in Nigerian statecraft were in their mid-30s when they assumed the mantle of leadership at various levels of governance.

Indeed, prominent leaders of the 60s, including Chief Obafemi Awolowo aged 37, Samuel Ladoke Akintola 36, Ahmadu Bello 36, Alh. Tafawa Balewa 34, Chief Festus Okotie-eboh 27, Chief Anthony Enahoro 27 among others who found the mantle of leadership entrusted to them at these youthful periods of their lives and that of the nation played remarkable roles in laying solid foundation for the nation before they were sent packing by the military junta.

Similarly, the key figures in the then military that ousted civil rule in the First Republic as well as military actors in subsequent governance of Nigeria were even of younger age brackets. Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu who led the first coup in 1966 was just 29, Theophilus Danjuma 28, Gen. Murtala

Muhammed 28, Gen. Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida 25, Joseph Haven Garba 23, Musa Yar'Adua 23, Maj. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari 24, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo 29, Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu 33 while Yakubu Gowon became Military head of state following the military counter coup at the age of 32.

Added to this, undergraduates had jobs waiting for them while they were still pursuing their studies in the higher institutions and vacation jobs were also at the beck and call of the youthful and energetic Nigerians. Today, the story is unfortunately no longer the same as the youths, unlike their counter parts in the days of yore, have come under severe encumbrances which if not tackled would continue to make the concept of youths as future leaders nothing but a nightmarish and wishful thinking.

Today, high level unemployment, excruciating poverty, inflation, homelessness, hunger, poor standard of living, and disease, involvement in cultism and cult-related violence, political thuggery, sectarian extremism, get rich-quick syndrome, insurgency and terrorism as well as lack of patriotism constitute veritable catastrophic cataclysm taking the shine out of the time-honored role and desire for the Nigerian youths to step into the shoes as future leaders.

YOUNG WORLD LEADERS:

Youths need to show high sense of responsibility, integrity, patriotism, commitment and unity. Youths need to sit up; enough of complains, hold your destiny in your hands, be aware that power is not given freely, but you need to go for it. The trend globally is young leadership and I believe the case of Nigeria will not be different in the nearest future. Young people must know they are the hope of any nation and must wake up to assume leadership responsibilities.

Below mentioned young world leaders are enough reasons for Nigerian and other African Youths to stop fighting one another but rather be positioned strategically towards political leadership and be ready to support the political aspirations of credible youths.

French President Emmanuel Macron age 39, Luxembourg Prime Minister

Xavier Bettel age 44 (Became Prime Minister at age 40 since 4th December 2013 after succeeding Jean-Claude Juncker), Belgium Prime Minister Charles Yves Jean Ghislaine Michel age 41 (Became Prime Minister on 11th October, 2014 at age 39 and is the youngest Belgian Prime Minister since 1845), Canadian Prime Minister Justin Pierre James Trudeau age 45 (became Canadian Prime Minister at age 43 on 4th November, 2015), and Kim Jong-Un is 35 years old according to North Korean Records and the Supreme Leader of North Korea since 2011. Last week in Kenya, a 23-Year-Old undergraduate (300Level) student, Mohammed Mhairi Black won to become the youngest Member of Parliament in Kenya

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH NON-INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION OF YOUTHS IN POLITICS

It is crystal clear that certain factors are militating against the participation and involvement of youths in politics. They include;

*Corruption in the political system.

*Poor governance.

Poor and nearly absence of youth-oriented policies and programmes.

*Poor political, moral and spiritual mentorship.

*Emasculation of the youths in the political system by selfish and greedy politicians.

*Impunity, imposition, nepotism and lack of internal democracy among political parties.

*Negative attitudes by youths towards political, electoral and governance processes. Most youths see politics as dirty game for liars, indecent, dishonest and people with questionable integrity therefore stand aloof.

*Non-inclusion, involvement and participation of youths in the formulation and implementation of key policies.

*Lack of decency (living indecent, irresponsible and immodest lifestyles),

integrity and transparency in the political system.

*Absence of decency, integrity, honesty and transparency among youths.

*Lack of purposive unity among the youths.

*Poor conduct of elections and electoral frauds (election rigging and other irregularities).

*Ethnic, religious, political and tribal chauvinisms.

Sentiments being place above credibility and competence in the political system.

*Pessimistic dispositions among youths. Youth have completely lost hope in the political system due to unhealthy practices therein.

*The get-rich-quick syndrome instead of being patience in the political system has affected the political participation of many youth.

*Unhealthy competition among the youth. This has bred rivalry and enmity which has placed the youths on disadvantaged position.

Moral decadence among the youths

WAY FORWARD

Having enumerated the problems militating against the involvement and participation of youths in politics, solutions to these problems must be provided and these include the following among many others;

*Purposive unity and integration by youths.

Discovering your purpose in life.

*Continuous self-development and improvement.

*Be ready to participate and engage in the political system and) decisions from the Polling units, Wards, Local Government, State and National levels

*Politics need people with integrity, fear of God and good moral standing and

should not be seen as a dirty game by the youths.

*Governments at all levels and others stakeholders should draw attention to youth issues.

*Be ready to sacrifice and exhibit resilience, integrity and fear of God.

*Youths must be ready to add values to the society. If you cannot add value to the society, it is catastrophic to erode existing values.

*Youths must eschew rivalry, unhealthy competition and hatred.

*Youths should leverage on the not-too-young-to-run Bill being passed by the National Assembly during the Constitution amendments to contest elective positions. They should prevail on their State Houses of Assembly and the Executive to ensure the bill is being passed and assented to successfully.

*Youths must identify with existing and prospective political parties; be involved in political decisions and the governance process.

IN CONCLUSION:

The youths are being confronted with the political system and civil service that are being hijacked by selfish and greedy elites who are not ready and willing to relinquish power or retire but hold on tight to power, falsifying their ages to stay put thereby not creating openings for the youths to be employed or gainfully engaged to fill the sensitive positions if they had retired.

The Youths have been caught in the dramatic web of the political system and have also taken to adjusting their ages in order to grasp employment opportunities or enroll in the mandatory service (NYSC) which is greatly affecting the emergence of leaders with integrity.

Former Head of State and President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo summarized my position as well as though last week when he said no old politician will leave the stage for the younger ones. The onus is now on the youths and the time is now. You must not allow people who have eaten their destiny, eat yours and that of the progenies.

Youths must therefore strategize to kick out older greedy politicians who have stolen public funds thereby becoming stupendously rich and manipulating the system to their favors at the detriment of the younger persons. This can be achieved through healthy, objective and constructive engagements.

If nothing is done, the greedy politicians will keep messing the system if not stopped and at the end pass the baton to their kids or hooligans who will continue with the process of destroying the political system. The risk the present youth stand is that the younger generation behind them will not allow them toy with their future the way the older politicians are messing with theirs.

Youth must think towards playing active and dominant roles not passive ones in politics in other to make themselves relevant and readily available to take up leadership roles at any given time and opportunity.

Youths must not refuse allegiance to politics; they must not withdraw, stand aloof or be neutral to politics but involve and participate in it fully by identifying with existing political parties as that is the way to governance. This political involvement and participation should be conscious and deliberate.

Youths must unlock their potentials, put them to effective uses and use their numerical strength to their merit.

I have always been an ardent advocate that youths must be mentored, united, empowered and their capacities built to attain their full potentials difference at appreciable levels.

Thank you so very much for listening, wish you all a successful convention, enjoy our serene weather in Jos and remain blessed.

Youths are one of the greatest assets that any nation can have. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the future leaders, they are, potentially and actually the greatest investment for a country's development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). They serve as a good measure of the extent to which a country can reproduce as well as sustain itself. The extent of their vitality, responsible conduct and roles in society is positively correlated with

the development of their country.

According to Nigeria's National Youth Development Policy (2001), the youth comprises all young persons of ages 18 to 35, who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This category represents the most active, the most volatile and yet the most vulnerable segment of the population. People in this age bracket definitely constitute a sizeable chunk of a nation's population on which the burden of nation building falls. The youths also constitute the major resource base for any country that wants to embark on any meaningful development project. Young people must be trained and as quickly as possible, to provide leadership in Agriculture, Industry, Government and Economic Development Projects. They must be developed intellectually, morally, socially and with relevant skills to face a rapidly advancing technological world.

Taking a critical look at this topic, I made several attempts to clearly define Economic Rebirth, I thought, researched and browsed but I never really got a satisfactory definition hence it behoves me to make a quick understudy of the state of the Nigerian Economy; what it was before and its present state as this understanding will make it easier for us to appreciate 'Economic Rebirth.'

Immediately after our 1960 independence, Nigeria embarked on a six-year plan, 1962-1968, consisting of a federal development program and development programs for the three regions. The federal program calls for expenditure of \$1.16 billion and the regional programs for expenditures of \$304.9 million (Eastern), \$672.2 million (Western), and \$822.6 million (Northern).

The federal program calls for expenditures of \$835.5 million on economic projects, including \$274.7 million on electricity, \$123.2 million on trade and industry, \$291.2 million on transport, and \$84 million on communications; \$189.6 million on social development, including \$81.8 million on education; \$123.7 million on general administration; and \$6.2 million on international financial obligations[1].

In 1972, Nigeria's economic progress continued to be dominated by the

remarkable oil boom. Oil revenues rose from £4.4 million in 1960 to £489 million in 1971, which accounted for 73 percent of export earnings. Income from oil was expected to contribute £500 million to Nigeria's total estimated federal revenues of £650 million in 1972-1973. The economy as a whole registered a highly satisfactory growth rate of 9.6 percent during 1971-1972, double the rate projected in the current four-year plan. A growth rate of 12 percent was projected for 1972-1973, but not long after that a military regime adopted a new economic stance along with its sharp authoritarian tilt. The program of economic liberalization launched in 1986 by President Ibrahim Babangida was abruptly rescinded in the January 1994 budget. A new system of restricted trade, administered exchange rates, and foreign currency rationing was imposed. The turn toward renewed state intervention had a chilling effect on the economy as manufacturers, farmers, and investors were discouraged by the cutoff of foreign exchange. Growing corruption and political uncertainty compounded the economic malaise, as businesses and capital markets were idled for much of the year. Levels of fiscal insolvency and malfeasance had been growing in recent years, and in October the Okigbo panel investigating the operations of the Central Bank revealed that \$12.2 billion had been diverted to off-budget accounts between 1988 and mid-1994[2].

Today, Nigeria still faces serious social and economic challenges. Although Nigeria's oil and natural gas revenues are estimated at over \$40 billion per year, its human development indicators are among the world's lowest, and a majority of Nigerians suffer from extreme poverty. Despite having the second largest economy in Africa and generating over \$47 billion a year in oil and gas revenue, many of our people are among the continent's poorest. According to USAID, 70% of Nigerians live on less than \$1 per day, and the average life expectancy is only 47 years. Nigeria has the world's third largest HIV/AIDS population (after South Africa and India), and in 2004 was home to two-thirds of the world's polio cases. The country ranks 158 of 177 countries on U.N. Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Index[3].

Drawing from these statistical hardballs; Economic Rebirth is imperative.

Rebirth is the regeneration of something that is destroyed, regeneration of something that has died or has been destroyed. It also means the revival of important ideas or forces usually as part of broad and significant change. It typifies renaissance, reawakening, return or resurgence. Hence economic rebirth can simply be defined as the regeneration of a battered economy to improving the standard of living of the nation.

With this pedigree, one wonders if the youth can play any significant role in economic resurgence but after some explorative studies of some developed countries like United States, United Kingdom, France including the evolving Asian Tiger nations, I discovered that youths are the drivers of the economy. All those who affected their nations positively were youths. It was a defining moment for them whether in politics, economy or industry. In my search, I also discovered an association for Global Young Leaders, an honour bestowed each year by the World Economic Forum to recognize and acknowledge the top 200-300 young leaders from around the world for their professional accomplishments, commitment to society and contributions to shaping the future of the world. They must be forty years of age or less. What attracted me to the forum was that since its inception in 1994, Nigerians have made that highly competitive list. Nigerian Youths like Adewale Tinubu of Oando Plc, Abiola Hafsat, Daughter of late MKO Abiola and Director, Kudirat Initiative for Democracy Nigeria, Oruene Osayi Alile, Executive Director of FATE Foundation, Nwuneli Ndidi Okonkwo of Leadership Effectiveness, Accountability and Professionalism, LEAP Africa, Debo Adesina, Editor, The Guardian Newspaper and others. As I read about their profiles and economic achievements, I am stirred to motivating the same spirit into other Nigerian youths as we take up our position on the Economic Rebirth landscape; this is the crux of this paper.

ROLES OF YOUTHS

Human Capital Development

Human Capital Development is one of the most vital keys to bringing economic rebirth; it is the level of applied knowledge of the youth that helps in tackling the economic problems facing the nation. Placing values on

education and skill acquisition is the way out of our present economic doldrums. The youth needs to develop an acute appetite for learning and knowledge without which civilisation crumbles. Nigerian youths need to hunger for relevant facts and skills, thereby seeking solutions to the challenges facing us through enhanced mental capacity. This is the foundation to any true renaissance.

National Integration

The youths are often called the potential leaders of the nation hence their role in building a sustainable economic development is essential by integrating them into the national policies and decision making. The youth needs an active involvement in participating with the current political and economic leaders to foster inter-generational dialogue hereby enhancing adequate transitional shift.

Youth should be actively involved in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) agenda as reflected by their participation and articulation of ideas at various international fora including the World Youth Summits. For instance, in 2005 a group of international youth leaders representing a range of non-governmental organizations, including representatives from Africa, prepared a report, "Youth and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Challenges and Opportunities for Implementation". This report outlines how young people can be included and empowered as part of strategies for achieving the MDGs. Active participation of the youth will enable the government in better reaching her goals.

Youth Entrepreneurs

Nigeria has a youthful population of close to 70 to 80 million, about 55 to 60 per cent of her population. Of this youthful population, more than 80 per cent are unemployed while about 10 per cent are under-employed. The estimated 10 per cent in employment are burdened and depressed with near total dependence of relative and family members. Given the right combination of motivation, ideas and opportunities, youth are more than able to establish productive and creative businesses. Engaging in entrepreneurship lifts young

people from being “job seekers” to “job creators,” and also from social dependence to self sufficiency. Many self-employed youth also contribute to the upkeep of their family. Entrepreneurship in Nigeria is a major avenue to increasing the rate of economic growth, create job opportunities, reduce import of manufactured goods and decrease the trade deficits that result from such imports. The influx and encouragement of youth into ventures will definitely help salvage our wasting economy.

Proactive/Independent Lifestyle

I recently came across a book that gave extensive reasons why the so called third world countries are poor. It highlighted what is called ‘Horizontal Attachment’ as the key reason why the nations are poor. Where after one person in the family is well placed, other people in the family now wait for his largesse to survive. The same attitude is what paralyzes our graduates from breaking out to pioneer great things. It stops the youth from acting proactively hence he leaves his destiny to chance forgetting that he is the master of his fate and can be a source of inspiration and livelihood to the generations coming after him. Our economy will be positively affected when the youths begin to act with the future in mind and having a visionary packaging.

Gender Egalitarianism

Gender disparity has been one subtle disease that has hitherto limited our economic boom. It is quite painful that in many areas our female youths still face some marginalization. When women and men are equally empowered, it produces a powerful combination for economic turnaround. In education; the gender situation has greatly improved in recent years in some African countries, such as Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, are in fact on track to achieve the goal of eliminating gender disparities in primary education. Other countries have turned to a range of measures to reduce the gender disparity in access to education – one illustration is the provision of free uniforms and books to girls in Kenya. Female youth needs to take their place in the ongoing economic reforms/rebirth. The consortium of Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Oby Ezekwesili, Professor Ndi Oyiuke Okereke, Professor Dora Akunyuli and others have

proven that given the right opportunities, motivation and environment, women can also turn situations around thereby leading economic change.