Youth Empowerment: A Panacea To Sustainable Democracy In Nigeria

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Abstract: *Democratic governance in any country of the world is always accomplished with some values of freedom such as freedom of choosing who will govern the country, religion or freedom of worship, ownership of property and education of children, freedom of speech and freedom to enjoy the benefits of their labour. All these values of freedom are right and privileges that are true for every citizen in the society. When citizens experience these values of freedom, it will in turn sustain democratic governance. In Nigeria democratic context, these values of freedom are only well printed and documented but not fully in operation which adversely affected the youths who are the future of the nation and the survival of the democratic government. This therefore poses a lot of threat to Nigeria nascent democracy. Hence, to have a sustainable democracy in Nigeria where all these values of freedom would be in operation and well protected, there is need for the youth empowerment. In this piece, historical background of Nigeria democracy and problem associated with it are traced. Also, concept of youth, processes of empowering youth and its relevance to the sustainable democracy are equally discussed.*
Keywords: *Sustainable Democracy, Youth and Empowerment*

I. Introduction

Nigeria is one of the African countries that had both bitter and sweet taste of the British colonial administration many years ever before her independence in 1960. The independence that marked the beginning of self government had faced many challenges on how to establish a stable democratic government. These challenges among others are; youth restiveness, unemployment, thuggery, political and religious violence, unequal distribution of wealth, corruption, instability,electoral abnormalities, politics of god fatherism, insecurity and insincerity on the part of the political gladiators,(Mohammed, 2013).Most of these challenges had been capitalised upon by the military junta to truncate the democratic government in Nigeria since the First republic. Presently, Nigeria has been experiencing certain level of stability having consolidated the fourth republic for more than 15years.

Nigeria is presently experiencing its fourth republic, the first was from 1960- 1966, the second from 1979- 1983, the third 1989 which was aborted mid way- the fourth commenced from 1999- till date (Egweni, 2010). The intervention of Military in democracy in between these years has no doubt caused Nigeria some steps backward and this has painfully affected all round development that could have been a benefit of democratic governance. Chief among these benefits could have been human empowerment throughvarious means of which the constitution is cardinal.At each time the militarytook over, the constitution which encompasses human rights,democratic values and principles suffers suspension.

The rule of law guarantees personal liberty, freedom and the gamut of fundamental human right. It provides the conditions in which government functions including the qualification of people who can hold public offices. Nigeria operates a written constitution which is the organic law from which other laws in Nigeria derive their legitimacy.Once the constitution is suspended the right, privileges and freedom of citizens are affected they are either curtailed or absolutely suspended (Charlie, 2013).

Good governance sustains democracy and there cannot be good governance without rule of law where fundamental human rights including freedom of press are guaranteed.Where the rule of law is not accorded its rightful position in governance the result is a fall back in the level of democratic stability. The population that bear the brunt of democratic instability are the youth because of the end product of unemployment, underemployment, political violence, thuggery and the rest. To avert this, youth empowerment is regarded as the suitable tool to solve these problems and challenges that are confronting democratic governance in Nigeria

II. Conceptualisation Of Democracy,Youth And Empowerment

Democracy:
Democracy has a remote origin from the word demokratia demo- the people plus kratia (from kratos) - authority to rule by the people. It is a political system in which the supreme power is vested in the people and

exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system (Boumo and Chanfwak, 2013).

Democracy became an established political system after the rebellion against monarch in the western world such as Europe and United State of America. This action was inspired by people like Montesquieu and Jean Jacques Rousseau (French philosophers) Thomas Jefferson and James Madison (the America statement). This system of government limits the power of the crown and gives a considerable share of political power to the people.

Essien (2013) sees democracy in a traditionally way as the government by elected representative of the people or government in which citizens participate in policy making through elected representatives. He explained further that, it is a system of government where every adult has equal chances of voting and being voted for without being intimated or dissuaded by the pecuniary power of his opponents. Therefore democracy is based on the principle of government by the people, people govern themselves, participate in making the crucial decisions that structure their lives and determine the fate of their society. Though this participation takes a number of forms but the most common form of democratic participation is the act of voting. This is the central feature of what is usually called representative democracy.

The true nature of democracy was spelt out by Abraham Lincoln as cited in Andress (2007) as government of the people, by the people and for the people. This informed us that democracy links government to the people and this link can be forged in a number of ways; governmentof, by and for the people. In this case, democracy could mean the strict application of the principle of majority rule.

Gioranmi (1968) posits that democracy is not just system of government, but system of control and limitation of government`s striving to be absolute. He stresses further to highlight some of the features of democracy. Democracy in essence "says no to inequality, injustice, coercion, dictatorship and above all, all practices that reduce the happiness and well-being of the masses of the populace. Other major features of modern democracy include individual freedom which entitled citizen to the liberty and responsibility of shaping their own careers and conducting their own affairs and education.

Democracy as noted by Ayodele (1999) is not a static entity; this implies that democracy in the 19th century cannot be assessed like democracy in the 20th century. The focus as well as the ideal have all changed completely from what it used to be among the Greek originators such as Plato and Aristotle, often thought as the cradle of the democratic idea and received it in negative terms as a " system of rule by the masses at the expense of wisdom and property. Today the flame of democracy appeared to burn more strongly. Democracy emerged as the only stable and enduring principle in the modern political landscape with the faded value of socialism and the merit of capitalism that have been called into question. Democracy has also attained what social scientists refer to as the low, the average, the standard and the ideal level. However, Nigerians appreciate also that most people of the world has acknowledged democracy as the most suitable way of obtaining authoritative and binding love. Today, the sound of democracy seems to denote very high level of development in the political domain. Nigerians have adopted the capitalist democracy only. Hence the growth of democracy requires a number of indispensable factors as posited by Ayodele (1999), like patriotic,enlightened and efficient leadership, patriotic followership, and institutionalization of plural parties, free and fair elections, responsive and accountable governance and respect for human dignity, justice and freedom.

Therefore Nigeria should not only strive to enthrone democracy on permanent basis but also to ensure the sustainability of democracy. Charles(2005) summarized sustainable democracy has one that stands the test and effusion of time; grows in basic legitimacy and acceptability irrespective of the political party in power; and yields dynamic dividends of justice and equality, good governance, peace and basic freedoms, rapid economic development; and promotes, protects private enterprise and property rights. This follows that for Nigeria to ascend the democratic ladder of this height there is need for youth empowerment.

Youth

The youth are the young and energetic people who mostly refer to the engine room of any society. However, the definition of youth varies from one nation to the other. TheUnited Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs define youth as those people aged between 18 and 24 year. In Nigeria, the age classification of youth is between eighteen and thirty years as stipulated in the National Youth Development Policy (Fanl, 2001). These groups of people are the able-bodied male and female who are intelligent and independently minded and can make an impact on every society by their will and independence of mind (Michael, 102). Some other attributes of the youths as posited by Onwunah (2011) are; creativity, exuberance, hard work, courage, altruism and adventure; youth are very daring and willing to test and confirm new ideas. Corroborating this view, proverb 20:29 says''the glory of young men is their strength and the beauty of old men is their grey hair'' Youth are pragmatic in pursing any act they believe in unlike the old people who takes time to study, reflect and then act.

In Nigeria, according to the 2006 population census, youth constitute the largest percentage of the population. Hence the popular saying in the society and in the country generally, that "the youths of today are the leaders of tomorrow" Also related this is: if the youths of today do not die, they will become elders of tomorrow" looking at the situation of the Nigerian youth today one will not hesitate to re-define these sayings.

Nigeria has a youthful population of about 80million which is about 60 per cent of her population, more than 70 per cent are said to be unemployed (Rita, retrieved 25/6/2014). The danger of unemployment and idleness are very prominent as majority of them are roaming about the streets in search of jobs in order to survive and where there is no job, some of the youth out of frustration take to vices like engaging in criminality and drug abuse.

The position of the youth in any society cannot be under estimated in that the category of the population remains the most despised, neglected and under-utilised in the country, despite their potentials and capacity for positive information (Nweke, 2005). In most cases this makes them willing and readily available instruments of instability in the country. According to Abe (2010) some of the youth that are involved in political violence voluntarily submit themselves to this situation as a means of registering their discontent and dissatisfaction

There are some challenges that are more peculiar to Nigerian youth which must be solved before they can adequately respond to their mission and be alert to their societal values. Among these problems are: inadequacy or lack of access to quality education, high rate of unemployment, extreme poverty, political and economic marginalization, exposure to conflict and food insecurity (Duro, 2011)

It is not just a gain saying that it is only when education liberates and, develops one socially, physically, economically, politically and psychologically that one can be relevant to one`s environment, society, state and country at large.Many Nigerian youth are dropping out of the school system as a result of huge amount of money they are paying as school fees in most of Nigeria tertiary institutionsof learning. To worsen the situation is the incessant strike action by the lecturers in the tertiary institutions on the fact that the democratically elected government in the country refuse to fulfill their promises as regards welfare of the workers and the infrastructural development in the Nigerian higher institutions of learning. In addition to this, many youth seeking admission into higher institutions such as universities, polytechnics, and college of education couldnot be admitted. According to Onwumah (2011:66) less than 20% of eligible applicants are offered admission into public tertiary institutions by Joint Admission and Matriculation Board, this shuts off a good percentage of youth from the educational system.

Many youths are graduating from the higher institutions of learning in Nigeria every year while majority of them are unemployed. The consequence is that there is a pool of youth who are neither gainfully employed nor in the school system. It is such youth who are prone to be involved in different types of crimeand violence. In view of this, the writer aligned to the Yoruba adage that says" An idle hand is the devil`s workshop". In Nigeria today, the rate of insecurity, political thuggery, killings and assassination, kidnapping is increasing daily. These are detrimental to the survival and sustenance of democracy in any part of the world. Therefore, there is need to put all machinery in motion by the Nigeria government and all the lovers of democracy in the country to ensure that the hands of Nigerian youth are rescued from the devil through various empowerment programmes since a busy hand is not prone to temptation.

Empowerment

Empowerment refers to increasing the economic, political, social, educational, gender, or spiritual strength of individuals and communities. The term covers a vast landscape of meanings, interpretations, definitions and discipline ranging from psychology and philosophy to the highly commercialized self-help industry and motivational sciences. The sociological empowerment often addresses members of groups that social discrimination processes have been excluded from decision-making processes through-for example discrimination based on disability race, ethnicity, religion, or gender.

Empowerment could therefore be seen as a means through which one is assisted or encouraged to be self employed or sufficient. Empowering the youth is like saving in bank that cannot be affected by any theft of any kind. The good outcome of the investment cannot all be consumed in totality.Youth empowerment is of good importance to both nations and the empowered. With youth empowerment, the future prosperity of nations is secured because these are the people that are and will take care of many offices and functions in the country. They are also those who are going to manage top offices in the future in accordance with the popular statement "the youth are the leaders of tomorrow".

Process of youth empowerment

Empowerment of the youth which forms the largest percentage of Nigeria population who are also at their productive age is crucial to economic performance. The main argument is that the durability of the new democrats will depend, not only on their institutional structure and ideology of the political forces, but to a large

extent on their economic performance. The better performance of a democratic regime in producing and broadly distributing improvement in living standards, the more likely is to endure (przeworki, A 1991 Diamond, L 1997)

Youth empowerment process must be a collective effort of all and sundry in a given society or nation. Hence this must not be left alone in the hand of government. The following processes can be employed to empower youth.

Establishment of skill acquisition centers where youth can be trained with basic skills that can make them relevant in the society. Government should embark on intensive industrialization to generate employment for the ever increasing population of unemployed youths. While the politician that enriched themselves with public fund should re-invest those money in establishing cottage industrial rather than involve in capital flight.

Farm and farm settlement should be established while necessary incentives such as soft loan or take off grant, tools and equipment's should be provided to encourage the youth. This in turn will refocus an economic base from over dependence on crude oil. Rehabilitation Centre should be established to remove the miscreant youths in the society

The education system must be refocused to meet the immediate and future needs of the youth. Entrepreneurship and vocational education must be encouraged. Financial support such as bursary and scholarship must be made available to the students while both State and Federal own institutions even the private ones should address the high school fees impose on students bearing in mind that education is a right and not privilege.

Necessary infrastructural facilities must be provided to encourage those youth that are in trade. Adequate and regular electricity supply at minimum tariff should be provided.

Nigeria democracy and Youth Empowerment

Democracy has become the most fashionable form of government in the world. What has therefore attracted the attention of every society for a genuine discourse is how a society can become democratized or fully democratic.Democracy has thus been recognised as the only moral and legitimate way through which a society can be administered because it is expected to promote good governance and enhance sanctity of life by allowing the free flow of fundamental human right.

One of the best ways Nigeria has attempted to do this is by entrenching the fundamental human right in the Constitution. The constitution encompasses freedom to choose who will govern the country, freedom of religion, freedom of worship, freedom to own properties, freedom of association, freedom of speech, right to education and a host of others.Debate on democratic consolidation in Nigeria is usually couched in term of the need to guarantee fundamental human right, development and provision of democratic dividend (Nelson 2011). The entrenchment of fundamental human right in the Nigeria constitution is against the background of the Nigeria endorsement of the universal declaration of fundamental human right and several other human right instruments, treaties, convention and resolution (Idowu 2008: 27)

The violation of these rights in Nigeria has adversely affected our nascent democracy because some of the rights entrenched in the constitution are infringed and abused. The spate of violence recorded under our various democratic rules has revealed clear violations of fundamental human rights which are avoidable if the constitution has been followed to the letter to enhance betterment of life for all and sundry. Presently Nigeria is being ravaged by the activities of Boko Haram- a religious sect which has its base in the north eastern part of the country, killing and maiming people on daily basis because of their religious bias that western education is an abomination to their religion. The people that are involved are majorly youths who feel they are not empowered and that the best way to air their view is by carrying arms and ammunition to ventilate their grievances. This is definitely having its adverse effect on the country`s democratic governance. The youths are the engine room of any society and are associated with some attributes such as creativity, exuberance, hard work, courage, altruism and adventure. They are very daring and willing to test and confirm new ideas, adventurous and not dogmatic (Tony 2011)

But it is unfortunate that Nigerian youths are faced with challenges on how to usher in the new society of our dream. It is imperative that challenges facing the youths should be addressed. Chief among these problems is inadequacy or total lack of access to education, the consequences is that there are huge numbers of youths who are out of school and at the same time not gainfully employed. Such youth are prone to be involved in different types of conflicts and violence.Nigeria youths are neglected, in the sense that good education is an instrument of accelerated economic and financial upliftment but when their academic qualification is low, coupled with weak economic base, they will not be able to contribute their quota in the political process.

Another challenges faced by the Nigerian youth include: political and economic marginalization, political challenges in the sense that out of more than twenty-five political parties (INEC 2012) none of them is beinganchored by the youth.

The most important among the challenges is the issue of violence, this has been affecting the Nigerian youth. The violence among other is the political, religion, rival conflicts among professional groups and the

current Boko Haram crisis in some part of the Northern Nigeria.Critically, when we look into these, the major actors and actresses and victims are basically the youth (Tony 2011)

The relationship between youth empowerment and sustainable democracy in Nigeria is dialectic because some intrinsic values of democracy as entrenched in the constitution mean very little to the youth who has no work and other means of livelihood; who is not certain the prospect of his future.

The magnitude of violence that normally attends successive election in Nigeria has revealed that youth have formed themselves as willing collaborators. This is unconnected with the fact that the spate of unemployment across the country is at alarming rate. An idle hand, they say is the devil`s workshop. Our policy makers must have done this in order to keep at bay these youth so that they can continue to be used as thugs. The implementation of various policies by the government has been greeted with lip service.

Underlying some of the challenges to democratic governance in Nigeria is poverty. Continued poverty reinforced by mass unemployment is a barrier to the Nigeria`s quest to true and sustainable democracy. An individual is not a full fledged social individual if he or she is still restricted economically so as to disallow him from actualizing his potential in terms of political participation that may lead to sustainable democracy. An individual deprived of the basic wherewithal-employment for that matter, cannot participate effectively in a democratic political process.

Though there are programmes on youth development by the governmental and non-governmental organisations, a lot still need to be done in the area of youth employment to ensure bright future for youth towards sustainable democracy

Relevance of Youth Empowerment
Reduction in Poverty level: Youth empowerment can help reduce the poverty level of any nation. It has been observed by National Empowerment and development strategy (NEEDS) in Nigeria that one of the ways through which people moves to poverty is lack of access to credit facilities. If youth is therefore empowered financially, he will use the profit he makes from the business to sustain himself and his household? He may set-up business for his relations who were poor before and if this continues to grow to some extent, poverty will be reduced from that vicinity. Also when a youth learns skills and empowered financially to build on this, he can use the skills learnt to feed, assist others and even invest for future use. This in turn makes him to be meaningful and contribute positively to democratic rule rather than be a disruptive vessel in the hand of Politicians.
Crime Reduction: Crime is an offensive act against individuals or State. A lot of people indulge in "dirty" business because they lack empowerment when they were youths. Although the Government may have spent a lot in the name of fighting crime without understanding that the formula or solution is youth empowerment. Any nation that wants to fight crime should start with youth empowerment morally, academically as well as financially. When youth are taught well on the danger and punishments behind arm robbery or dealing in drugs, there is every possibility that they will not take part in them. In a nut shell, youth empowerment in any nation reduces social crime.
Security: The security departments of many nations have the youth as the larger number. As earlier said, the youth are full of energy and ability. They are always ready to confront challenges. The truth of the matter is that the youths were empowered before they picked security functions. Youth empowerment results to national protection and the spirit of patriotism will increase in them especially when they are trained on security skills.
Good Education Standard: One of the problems that many nations are facing in their education sector is because the youth are not empowered. But when the youths are empowered, they will support the educational facilities to primary, secondary and even to tertiary institutions. The challenges many tertiary institutions in Africa are having today is lack of practical background. The machines and other equipment needed for this practical can be provided by youths who were empowered by the government. They do this in appreciation to what the government did for them. Empowering the youths academically accelerates the spirit of patriotism in education.
Good Governance: Also governance is attainable with youth empowerment. An empowered youth stands to empower the masses. Any youth who was empowered in his time of hardship will lead his people through the right path. He does anything possible to see that he meets up with the demand of the society. This is because he has been trained on how to lead people. He applies what he learnt who do not know their left from their right, a well empowered youth on leadership skill gives "first class" rule to his nation. With youth empowerment on leadership, embezzlement of public fund by top governing officers becomes a history.
National Growth: Biologically, growth is the irreversible increase in body size and weight of organism. Based on this paper, growth is the increase and improvement in many areas of the country. The infrastructures of many nations are built with the tax paid by the citizens. Workers who earn much because they were empoweredcontribute more of their money through tax payment. When the taxes are gathered, they are used for national development. The banking, educational agricultural and industrial sectors are developed with the money generated from these empowered youths.

Technological development: Youth empowerment increases and improves technological standards. Development in machines and other important discoveries could be made possible if the youth are empowered. Many inventions today are because the youth were empowered to take time to study science and make them real. They are encouraged to use their initiatives to bring out what will help the society.

III. Recommendation

From the above, one can see democracy as a form of government which is fast growing and well embraced in all the nations of the world Nigeria inclusive, Therefore the position of youth to make it stable cannot be over emphasized. To sustain democracy in our nation the plan for youth empowerment should be implemented primarily at national level, relying heavily on main streaming of youth issues into national development agenda.

Also youth ministry and department must be strengthened as part of their process to ensure that they act as lead agencies in research, planning, target setting, monitoring and evaluation of youth issues. It is also recommended that effort should be made to strengthen youth networks at the national and state levels to integrate them with global youth network by building young people's decision making capacities through voluntary programmes.

For more stable democracy, the Government should engage the youth, especially the graduates that are jobless giving them job and introduce entrepreneurship to them so that they can use their power for the task of nation building.

Also the governmental and non- governmental organizations at various stages should try to empower the youths by involving them in projects and make them to understand the projects` importance to the society, monitor and guide them to get the project accomplished.It is necessary to call on the Federal Ministry of Youth Development to be proactive in its responsibilities and consider the following possibleoptions:

- A soft loan should be guaranteed by government for youth corps members who wish to be self-employed after providing business plan and acquiring basic skills for the venture
- The mandate of the ministry of youth should also be to protect their right and the enhancement of their welfare for self actualization through job creation and skill acquisition
- Government should at all levels ensure that more funds are provided in their annual budget for youth development programmes that can lead to job opportunity for them
- Also more skill acquisition centres should be established to encourage youth to develop their talents and reduce the search for white-collar job

IV. Conclusion

No nation can enjoying peace and stable government without empowering her youth. This is so because the youth of today are leaders of tomorrow. Youth empowerment and its importance have been discussed. Nigeria as a nationshould empower her youths while the youths in turnare to empower their fellow youths.Youth's empowerment in other way round could be simply put as the means through which the youths of any country are assisted to succeed in life. This shows in essence that every youth has to be encouraged and considered in all areas of life endeavors. In this regard, every country of the world that hopes for glorious future has to invest heavily in education, skill development, health, infrastructural and leadership education.These will in turn reduce the rate of illiteracy, unemployment, criminality, insecurity and violence which could affect peace of the nation.

Also in order to sustain democracy in Nigeria, youth empowerment is very important in that the youth of now days seem idle and as we know that an idle hand is the devil workshop. It is obvious that many of them are hired as political thugs, armed robbers, ritual killers, kidnappers andthe most recent insurgency,Boko Haram.

When youth are empowered with skills, education and jobs, the rate of poverty in our country will be reduced. It will likewise reducethe level of criminality. Expectedly, some of the challenges we are facing now that are threatening the stability of the democracy will be reduced to the barest minimum.

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