

Social Exclusion of the Nigerian Youth in Governance: Implications for National Development

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Abstract

For development to be sustainable, it requires good governance, social inclusion of the youths and accountable public institutions. Unfortunately, Nigeria has in the last 61 years been exposed to series of maladministration that have become multifaceted and have triggered poverty, insurgency, militancy, terrorism, armed banditry and a large army of ill-equipped and disgruntled youths who are not empowered to be nation builders. The consequence of this ugly situation is that it has facilitated the reign of national turmoil and anarchy. In the light of this, the paper conceptualized governance stating the theory adopted. Qualitative technique was employed and the findings from this paper revealed that one of the reasons for the social exclusion of the Nigerian youth from governance is that some of them lack capacity in the form of education, discipline, reading culture and expertise; their lack of knowledge being attributed to weak capacity building programmes and poor planning on the part of the leadership. Hence, these weak capacity building programmes have rendered the youths less intellectually or mentally empowered to contribute to governance. The paper therefore recommended that the government should adopt a people-oriented approach in policy making in order to ensure an all-inclusive governance. This will stem the growing tide of youth restiveness, armed banditry, organized criminality, hostage taking and herdsman invasion.

Keywords: Governance, Mal-administration, National Development, National Turmoil, Poverty, Social-Exclusion.

Introduction

The usurpation of political power by the Nigerian military paved the way for an entirely warped perspective to governance in Nigeria. From January 1966 up until May 29, 1999 when the military finally handed over power to a civilian government, the military had been in power intermittently for over three decades (34 years). Thus, the long duration negatively influenced the nature and climate of governance in Nigeria and resulted largely in not only a military democracy but a rent-seeking, monetized, violent and anarchical form of governance that systematically facilitated the exclusion of youths in governance and in the other political arenas (Ogu and Alao, 2020). However, Azeez and Opeyeoluwa (2020) have opined that the peace and stability of any nation is a function of its governance that subscribes to the principle of accountability and popular participation in governance at various levels. Hence, if government is about the people, then pursuing their goals and interest must involve them in the process of engaging the youths. Therefore, the popular participation of the youth in governance remains the most effective and efficient tool for curbing the rising tide of armed banditry (Ighodalo, 2007). This is so because good governance that is youth inclusive is a social benefit that not only ensures nationwide tranquility but also serves as a determinant for several other growth outcomes within the state including economic, political as well as technological development (Ogu, Eti and Olukoya, 2020).

Unfortunately, the social exclusion of contemporary Nigerian youth in governance has resulted in the prevalence of youth restiveness in almost every part of Nigeria. This unpleasant trend has become a daily occurrence that has degenerated to the increase in loss of lives, businesses and properties worth millions of naira. Nonetheless, efforts put by security operatives to curtail this

problem have not yielded any reasonable result as they themselves have become susceptible to vicious attacks and arson on a consistent basis.

Be that as it may, youths in every society constitute a veritable force for socio-economic development. In Nigeria, the projected population as at the mid-year 2018 was 190 million and this population is expected to grow to 392 million by 2050 (Onyegbulem and Agwadu, 2020). By then, Nigeria would have become the world's fourth most populous country. Incidentally, despite the numerical strength, many of the Nigerian youths are faced with challenges of poverty, disease, malnutrition, hunger, illiteracy and unemployment and therefore are disempowered and are unable to actively and effectively participate fully in governance and so these factors induce their marginalization in the political economy and political processes (Onyegbulem and Agwadu, 2020). The consequence of this social exclusion is that has become one of the many factors not only militating against the socio-political and economic developments of the country, but is also one of the reasons Nigeria has turned into a theatre of war as well as one of the factors responsible for anti-social behaviours which are antithetical to the peace and stability of the country (Olojede, 2019).

Concept of Governance

Governance is the key universal phenomenon upon which most societies in the world are positively administered. This concept in operationalization possesses set of values, principles and institutions by which the economic, political and social development is underscored. Thus, without the inclusion of the youths in governance, the capacity to develop policies and laws to enable the country manage its economy and political life in such ways that facilitate development will not be feasible (Onah and Oguonu, 2010). From the foregoing, governance can be defined as the process employed to achieve the good end of the state. It implies the art of governing a people within a given territory or nation. It consists of two cardinal elements of the state: the structure of the state and the procedures of the legislative, judicial and those of the executive and administrative bodies at all tiers of government. Thus, governance is service oriented. In other words, governance is better conceived from Harold Lasswell's traditional definition of politics of who gets what, when and how and perhaps who does not get what, when and why.

Governance has a lot to do with the allocation of values in the society which in no small extent, is political in nature (Usman and Patrick, 2020). Therefore, governance is based on the premise that government through its ministries, departments and agencies put in place policies, programmes and services that help to galvanize development at all levels, engender economic progress and increase trust and connection between the government and the governed. This suggests that the concept of governance is cardinal because bad governance is the source of all evil. In the light of this, governance is the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented and put into action (Mohammed, 2020). In other words, governance is an encapsulation of institutions and structures that facilitate service delivery to the people, responsiveness and responsibility on the part of government, respect for due process and rule of law, separation of powers as well as interference by different arms of government, press freedom and the existence of credible opposition and recognition of minority groups.

It is however necessary to understand that the fact that a system or society is democratic or claims to be democratic does not mean it obeys the democratic principles. This is because there are many un-participatory and dictatorial democracies in the African continent (Nnamani and Onuigbo, 2012) and so governance is used today in many different senses: as a term to describe regime types, or the nature of relationships between the state and society and as a set of norms to appraise governmental systems and prescribe appropriate or acceptable practice of the manner

in which power is used. Governance therefore refers to the manner in which power is exercised in the management of the country's economic and social resources for development. This includes institutional and structural arrangements, decision-making processes, policy formulation, implementation capacity, development of personnel, information flows and the nature and style of leadership within a political system (Bello, 2015). In essence, it is universally accepted that governance should facilitate the development of society. Fundamentally, governance is a concept encompassing fast changing political, social and economic milieu along with international environment and conditions of operational government. Hence, governance can be conceptualized as the exercise of constitutional authority over the populace. It implies the ability of those in leadership positions to manage a nation's affairs in a popularly acceptable manner by shaping its political, economic and social environment to meet the standards set by the society (Eneanya, 2014).

Causes of Social Exclusion of the Contemporary Nigerian Youths in Governance

Bariika, Essien, Nenbee & Kpaa 2020; Ala, 2013 and Ejinkeonye, 2019 have identified the reasons for social exclusion of youths in governance in Nigeria, some of which are highlighted below:

1. Fear of detention and violation of human rights by the government: In Nigeria many youths exclude themselves from governance as well as government's policies, programmes and political discourses because of the violent and turbulent nature of politics and the fact that some old government officials have become constituted themselves into a very formidable parasitic class whose sustenance and longevity solely depend on its ability to continue sustaining the culture of corruption and bleeding the country pale over the years and thus have become institution themselves and abhor criticisms or any forms of checks because of their desperation to tenaciously cling to power. Hence they view any form of demand for accountability from youths as a form of rebellion, attack or affront against their administration and usually resist such requests for transparency with brute force, illegal detention, extra judicial killings, kidnapping and political assassinations. In addition, electioneering period in Nigeria is always fraught with nationwide violence, cult group clashes in championing their respective political candidate's interests as well as assassinations of whoever they think is a threat to their preferred candidate. Similarly, the enactment of hate speech bill and the recent ban of a social media app (twitter) is a surreptitious and covert way of silencing the demand for transparency, accountability and responsiveness in government's dealings. Sadly, this ugly trend has caused an exclusion of competent, empowered and intellectually capable youths who have the wherewithal to participate in the governance of Nigeria and has given room for the recycling of old dictatorial mediocres and misfits who have little or nothing to offer.
2. Blackmailing and Smear Campaign: This is one of the features associated with governance in Nigeria particularly when a visionary and competent person comes on board and is ready to bring an end to impunity in governance. Slander and propaganda becomes the weapon of attack to eject him from governance and so youths who are morally and ethically upright and wish not to be defiled by the reign of wanton greed, corruption and lawlessness in governance naturally fizzle out and become marginalized because they are not ready to be part of some corrupt cabals.
3. Poor legacy by Predecessors: Social exclusion of the youths in governance became monstrous when the older generation of public officials in Nigeria left a legacy of corruption and governance, ceased to be socially inclusive but transformed the platform for meeting the interest and welfare of the people into the routes for criminal accumulation of wealth. In addition to this tragedy, the law also became increasingly weak in the face of the overwhelming sleaze. Since then, older generations of public

officers have passed through this route, looting the country mercilessly and with impunity and eventually quitting office into incredible abundance without any fear of anyone prying into the clearly unearned wealth they flaunt with revolting fanfare while the impoverished and misgoverned youths watch helplessly.

4. **Lack of Capacity:** One of the effective barriers to effective youth engagement in governance is that some of the youths lack capacity in the form of education, discipline, reading culture and expertise. Thus their lack of knowledge is attributed to weak capacity building programmes and poor planning on the part of the leadership. Hence, the weak capacity building programmes have made the youths ill equipped and not intellectually or mentally empowered enough to contribute to governance

Theoretical Framework

This paper employs the social exclusion theory to explain and underpin the social exclusion of the contemporary Nigerian youth in governance so as to facilitate a holistic understanding of the issues involved.

Social Exclusion Theory

The social exclusion theory was derived from the writings of Sophie Besis (1995) and the central premise of this perspective is that social exclusion is a set of processes by which individuals, households, communities or groups are pushed towards or kept to the margins of society. It encompasses not only material deprivation but also more broadly, the denial of opportunities to participate fully in social and civic life (Robin, 2001). Essentially, social exclusion is about mechanisms put in place that act as instruments to detach groups of people from the social mainstream (Hilary, 2019). Social exclusion is practiced usually on the basis of gender, religion, ethnicity, race, educational attainment and nationality. Fundamentally, social exclusion is a process which involves denial of rights and opportunities which the majority enjoy, resulting in the inability of individuals from excluded groups to participate in the basic political, economic and social functioning of the society thereby causing poverty and deprivation among them. Therefore, it is the lack of access to resources and consequent inability to utilize them.

Social exclusion is further accentuated by denial of opportunities which enhance access to resources and their utilization. This suggests that social exclusion can be experienced by anyone who is in a position of vulnerability to certain deprivations (Pradeep and Ravindia, 2014). In the light of this, Mathieson, Popay, Enoch, Escorel, Hernandez, Johnsten and Rispel (2008) revealed that such deprivations that cause social exclusion include secure permanent employment, earnings, properties, credit or land housing, minimal or prevailing consumption level, education, skills and cultural capital. Unfortunately, the lack of these essential necessities results in the exclusion from participating in the democratic process, access to loans, infrastructures, humane treatment and personal fulfillment.

Methodology

Documentary method was adopted for this study. Hence, data was sourced from national and international academic publications. These consisted of relevant text books, conference proceedings and academic journals. The data gathered from the aforementioned method was analyzed using qualitative descriptive technique.

Social Exclusion of the Nigerian Youth in Governance: Implications for National Development

For development to be sustainable, it requires good governance, social inclusion of the youths and accountable public institutions. Unfortunately, Nigeria has in the last 61 years been exposed to series of mal administration that has created a large army of unempowered, ill equipped and

disgruntled youths. Sadly, this unpleasant situation has become multifaceted and has triggered the emergence of criminal gangs who are viable tools and instruments for all kinds of criminal violence such as insurgency, armed banditry, hostage taking and genocide. Sadly, this ugly trend has facilitated the reign of national turmoil and insecurity. However, in order to tackle these menace, all forms of policies have been adopted, some of which include - regulation, deregulation, guided deregulation, structural adjustment, commercialization, privatization etc. Sadly, every one of them have been rendered ineffective because policies have been made without commitment and social inclusion directed at meeting the peculiar needs of each socio-economic groups (Olaleye 2004). In addition, many youths who could have fought against social exclusion and poor governance at the grassroot level do not know that local government is a corporate body that can sue and be sued. They also do not know that they can attend their local government council meetings particularly when the council is not meeting as a committee. They are also ignorant of the fact that as citizens of Nigeria, they have the right to ask the management of the local government questions about its revenue and expenditure.

Another factor that has contributed to the social exclusion of the youths in governance is apathy which most Nigerians have developed. Even though a lot of youths are aware and conscious of massive corruption and consistent plundering of the national resources at the federal, state and local levels, they have been socialized and culturally conditioned to accept the negative notion that corruption, irresponsibility and mal administration are a way of life that is institutionalized for people who hold public office. For example, in the Yoruba culture, it is traditionally believed that it is an aberration or an affront to check or criticize elders or leaders in positions of authority (Aluko, 2006). Beyond that, given the dreadful cult of looters growing in impunity and influence, maintaining effective command at virtually all of Nigeria's public institutions particularly in the finance, political, judiciary and security system, it becomes more difficult demanding for accountability and social inclusion in governance because members of this cabal have so much money to throw around and so have easily enthroned themselves as formidable godfathers and king makers who deploy the billions at their disposal to manipulate the electoral system to install and remove government officials at will. For instance, many of the old crop of corrupt politicians can single handedly establish and fund political parties without the slightest impact on their bottomless pockets. They also have all it takes to sabotage and frustrate any attempt to pry into their hideous past. The very negligible few among them who insist on good governance and social inclusion get themselves into some really complicated situation that it would be difficult to extricate them without a serious backlash capable of posing a dangerous threat to the peace and stability of the entire cabal. Hence, they are cleverly sacrificed to preserve the whole house and used in the process to launder a dubious commitment to an anti-graft campaign (Ejinkeonye, 2019).

Conclusion

Social exclusion creates governance crisis and stifles socio-economic development because the marginalization and suppression of youths in governance will ultimately result in making people unfriendly policies without the youths put into consideration. Unfortunately, this often results in rebellion of youths, manifesting as farmer-herder clashes, youth restiveness, volatile polity and agitations because the youths are stripped of the power to participate in governance especially as it pertains to their welfare and development particularly in ways that they are unable to contribute to national development. Therefore, as long as 70% of the Nigerian population are not effectively engaged, they are capable of shutting down the structures and institutions of governance. Hence, terrorism, genocide, insurgency, militancy and youth restiveness are all byproducts of years of mindless and obsessive plunder that has facilitated the consistent social exclusion of youths in governance and this anomaly, over time, has created a large army of youths who are un-empowered to be nation builders. In the light of this, Nigeria has reached a

critical stage where it is in dire need of a regeneration because there are fundamental issues that have been left unattended to that has now spiraled into youth agitations, extra-judicial killings and nationwide brutish and violent crimes due to the fact that a lot of youths have been suppressed, silenced and alienated. Unfortunately, these constant state of anarchy that has been created by the marginalization of youths has led to socio-political and economic deterioration and inevitably made Nigerians become poorer and less secured.

Recommendations

The government through the Ministry of Labor and Employment, Ministry of Law and Justice, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Youth and Social Development as well as traditional institutions and local governments need to adopt a people oriented and indigenous approach in policy making and socio-economic empowerment programmes in order to ensure an all-inclusive governance and also shows genuine interest in the welfare of the people and earn their trust. This will stem the growing tide of civil unrest, poverty and anarchy. Secondly, the Ministry of Education and Health need to adopt policies that will facilitate a regeneration in the educational and health care reforms that involves the youths in such ways that there will be a decisive and conclusive end to constant bickering and strike actions. This will ensure that all youths irrespective of social and economic backgrounds, will have access to quality education and health that will empower them to be more patriotic and become nation builders.

The youths through local government institutions, community leaders, educational stakeholders, religious institutions and Youth NGOs must be groomed for leadership at the grassroots level so that they can be problem solvers at a young age and gain experience in pragmatic leadership at their formative years. This will ensure that leadership is not only theoretical or exploitative but rock structured in approach.

It is expedient that educational and professional leaders and stakeholders make policies that ensure that conflict resolution courses are incorporated into the syllabuses and curriculums from the elementary school in order that youths be educated about peaceful and civil ways of expressing their dissatisfaction with the government and they must also be enlightened that violence is not an effective and sustainable way of showcasing their displeasure about poor governance and social exclusion.

Lastly, the electorate need to be politically educated through town hall meetings by local government institutions at each constituent wards before choosing their leaders by ensuring the electorate are groomed by their local, community and traditional leaders about decisions that should influence their choice of candidate and ensure that the electorate are not making ignorant and myopic decisions influenced by ethnic or religious affiliations. They should be enlightened by encouraging the grassroots people to check the track record of prospective leaders before elections. This will give an idea of the quality of governance they will experience and enable them choose wisely.

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