



# Re-conjure the youths constitution in approach making at the state government level in Nigeria

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## Abstract

*“Sovereignty not only originates in the people, it continues to stay with the people in the civil society ....Sovereignty cannot be represented ....government shall be constantly accountable to the people for fulfilling the instructions of the general will” (Jean-Jaques Rousseau, 1762).*

The central focus of this paper is the domestication of the African Youth Charter, which reflects a tradition of social contract between the governor and the governed. In a long run, some afflictions of some global acceptable and agreed norms may be introduced on fundamental human rights, millennium development goals and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) were necessary in order to justify the reason why African Youth Charter should be ratified. First, African Youth Charter (AYC) is simply a policy document adopted by the summits of head of state and government adopted in Banjul Gambia 2006. It has 31 articles which will be reflected in this paper. First, it has an objective of the provision of continental framework on the rights, duties and freedom of the youths which will lead to the development of national programmes on youths. Second, the charter provides a legal basis for ensuring youth presence and participation in government structures and forums at national, regional and continental levels. Third, the charter provides guidelines for member states on the empowerment of the youths in strategic areas like health, education and skill development, poverty eradication, socio economic integration of the youths, peace and security, youth employment, sustainable development and environmental protection and finally the charter takes a look at the responsibility of the youths.

**Keywords:** Youth restiveness, African youth charter, NEPAD.

## YOUTHS IN NIGERIAN POLITY

Comfort (2009a, b) in her paper titled “Poverty and Youth Restiveness in Nigeria: Implications for National Development” recalls that in the past, youths were perceived as heroes of the nationalist movement. As students they were the militant wing of the anti-colonial struggle. As founders of the Nigeria Youth Movement, the Zikist Movement, the West African Students’ Union, (WASU) etc, they popularized the anti-imperialist consciousness theorized by the elder nationalist . They were thrown out of school, often detained and jailed by the colonizer who regarded them as dangerous nuisance; but they persisted. As workers in the coal mines of Iva Valley, Enugu, some of them were murdered by colonial police; yet they persisted. They even fought the slightest manifestation of colour bar, thereby arresting the introduction of any racialist schemes. It was a youth, Anthony Enahoro, who first moved the motion for self-

government. On the morning of Independence, Nigerian students from the University of Ibadan and Yaba Polytechnic demonstrated fidelity to the legacy of militant anti-colonialism, by physically disrupting parliamentary sessions in Lagos to block ratification of an Anglo-Nigerian Defense Pact, secretly imposed by the British government as conditionality for conceding independence (Comfort, 2009).

The federal government during Yakubu Gowon’s administration set up the National Youth service corps. The overall objective of that programme was for Youths to answer clarion call and build a united strong Nigeria having graduated from the tertiary institutions in and outside Nigeria. This policy concurs with the article 26 (F) of the African Youth Charter which states that “youths shall contribute to the promotion of the economic development of state parties and Africa by placing their physical and intellectual abilities at its service” unfortunately instead of providing inter group intercourse

among the youths, the programme is gradually losing its taste since they are no longer retaining most of these youths after their service year.

The political history of Africa is incomplete without the youths. Be it south, west or East Africa, relevant political parties like ANC, SWAPO, AG, NCNC, and NPC had serious active youth wing. Today, youths in politics are now categorized as the thugs irrespective of the level of academic qualifications. The ideological strands of political parties need to be questioned. For instance, the PRP of the second republic in Nigeria were the commoners party while the UPN was propounding socialist ideology, the NPP was interested in mixed economy with liberal ideology while the NPN were liberal capitalist. All these arrangements took place when the electorates count. 2011 is here will they count? If they do, what political ideology will our political parties put in place? The rise of GBESU, MEND, OPC, BAKASSI, MASSOB, OPC, AREWA is a clear manifestation of how neglected the youths feels about the ruling elites. The answer has been provided by McPherson, whose participatory theory of democracy conceptualizes democracy as the active involvement of individuals and groups in the government processes affecting their lives. There are certain principles which are implied in the different interpretations. For instance:

- (a) Government by consent.
- (b) Public accountability.
- (c) Majority rule.
- (d) Recognition of minority rights.
- (e) Constitutional government.
- (f) Freedom of association.
- (g) Existence of opposition.
- (h) The upholding of civil liberty and rights (Ifeanacho and Nwagwu, 2009).

## CAUSES OF YOUTH RESTIVENESS

Youth restiveness is a despicable act being perpetrated by a significant proportion of the youth in various communities that can no longer be ignored. As the name implies, it is a combination of any action or conduct that constitutes unwholesome socially unacceptable and unworthwhile activities engaged in by the youths in any community. It is a phenomenon which in practice has led to a near breakdown of law and order, low productivity due to disruption of production activities, increasing crime rate, intra-ethnic hostilities, and harassment of prospective developers and other criminal tendencies. The communities in the oil producing areas in Nigeria still lack basic social infrastructures culminating largely into high level of poverty, mass unemployment, environmental degradation and other social vices. The result today is that we have a near dicey situation in our hands as far as youth are concerned. We now have a predominantly idle

young population. There is now a national crisis on the youth front. Youth are now perceived largely as a problem popularly described as youth restiveness.

## RE INVOKING AFRICAN YOUTH CHARTER

The African Youth Charter has been ratified by many national governments. On December 2008 in Johannesburg, witnessed the sixtieth anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Union (AU), Speak Africa and UNICEF launched a public service announcement calling on member countries to expedite ratification of the African Youth Charter. Its goal is to increase awareness of the charter's existence and to stimulate youth and civil society to lobby governments and civic leaders to take immediate action. Since 2008, designated the Year of African Youth, Speak Africa has been working in close partnership with the African Union and UNICEF to amplify the voices of young people in discussions about the continent's development. Although the charter was formally adopted in 2008, it has been so far ratified by only 11 countries. Legalization of the document will formally enshrine the basic human rights of young Africans and provide the framework for an accelerated youth development agenda in Africa (Countdown to Ratification of the African Youth Charter, 2008). Other relevant agencies like NEPAD have been working tirelessly to ensure the success of the African Youth Charter. In 2009, efforts were made for the success of the African Youth Charter through African Peer Review Mechanism (The New partnership for African Development, 2009).

The NEPAD's primary objectives are to eradicate poverty; to place African countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development; to halt the marginalization of Africa in the globalization process and enhance its full and beneficial integration into the global economy; to accelerate the empowerment of women (About NEPAD, 2004). NEPAD had put programme to build a cadre of youth who will serve as active participants in building an inclusive information society in their countries and on the African continent (NEPAD drafts YOUTH Into ICT Development agenda, 2008). In spite of these laudable achievements the African Youth Charter is still not a feature in state policy of member states.

The overall articles of the African Youth Charter include the following: Obligation of state parties, non discrimination, freedom of movement, freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, protection of private life, protection of the family, property, development, youth participation, national youth policy, education and skills development, poverty eradication and socio-economic integration of youth, sustainable livelihoods and youth employment, health, peace, law enforcement, sustainable development

and protection of the environment, youth and culture, youth in the diaspora, leisure, recreation, sportive and cultural activities, girls and young women, mentally and physically challenged youths, elimination of harmful social and cultural practices, responsibilities of the youth, popularization of the charter, duties of the African union commission, savings clause, signature, ratification, or adherence, and amendment and revision of the charter.

In this age of globalization, it is rather unfortunate that many of our infrastructures depict us as people living in the medieval period. Our educational system even up to the tertiary level is yet to embrace ICT (Information Communication and Technology) in its operation. Our university and state libraries is not bigger than individual libraries of prominent men abroad talk less of digitalizing it. This development is seriously telling on our youths. It contradicts Article 13(i) of the African Youth Charter which states that the education of the young people shall be directed to allocate resources to upgrade the quality of education delivered and ensure that it is relevant to the needs of contemporary society and engenders critical thinking as well as adopt pedagogy that promotes information and communication technology. The funding of our educational sector is another area of great importance to the African Youth Charter as it advocates bursary for outstanding youths from post primary to the tertiary level. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) must be re strengthened in line with the objectives of the millennium development goals.

The African Youth Charter advocates for a healthy society. The menace of drug abuse and alcohol is a strong indication that we lack national policy especially on alcohol. There's no restriction on who sells and buy alcohol especially its adverts. This is sad as most of our youths drinks to stupor. There's need to enact and implement laws that will make physical presence of alcohol minimal. The HIV pandemic is seriously dealing with our youths; while the government should be commended for various awareness campaigns, emphasis should shift from protect yourself...use condom to imbibe on morality. The distribution of condom during youth gathering like sporting events and camps does not appear to me to be sane enough. There's need for a stop on female gender mutilation and other harmful health cum cultural practices. The primary health care ought to have grown to secondary health care; otherwise the outbreak of cholera in the north is a strong conviction that its primary concern is no longer intact. Since it is not a question of nomenclature efforts to strengthen this sector should be put in place to strengthen this body to be more productive.

The building of more youth acquisition and job centers may not be a bad way of repositioning our youths. There should be partnership between the government through ministry of youths and sports and private sector on talent hunt in order to professionalize most of our gifted youths. The Ajengunle area of Lagos is a clear testimony that

great stars in music and football comes from the ghetto.

## **CREATING JOB OPPORTUNITIES FROM YOUTH'S NEGATIVITY**

In December 2009, 23 years old Nigerian studying in the USA attempted to bomb a U.S plane carrying more than 260 passengers on board including himself. Farouk Muttalab no doubt was acting on the principles of religious ideology without little or no question on the humanitarian or even ecclesiastical implications of his actions. One thing that is certain about Farouk's action is that we have not seen any ingenuity in Farouk's actions. If he can seriously beat two international secured airports without them detecting weapons of mass destruction he attached to himself. Does this not prove to us that this young man is a genius even thou it appears in the realm of negativity? Of course, Nigeria was blacklisted as terrorist state and a threat to the United States of America. An action that took us time, resources, diplomacy and energy to convince USA of Nigeria's stand in the comity of nations. The simple truth is that Nigerian government should be apportioned blames for failing to inculcate Article 17 Section 2 of the African Youth Charter which states that:

*"State parties shall ensure the protection of the youth against the ideology of genocide"* (African Youth Charter,2010).

If Farouk's father took time to report the anti west attitude and suspicion of the son to the American embassy in Nigeria, then we should blame the government for failing to provide surveillance security. Nevertheless, after years of detention, Farouk can be mentally re armed and use by the American State security in International Surveillances against terrorism.

The study wants to give another relevant example of a known heavy weight champion Mike Tyson. He was a hooligan fighting in the street like ghetto champion until Cus D'Amato saw him fight in the street. He quickly approached him, gave him necessary training and converted a tout to an international heavy weight champion. According to a report: some will no doubt remember the early days of the Mike Tyson story. Legend has it that when Cus D'Amato first saw Mike Tyson he immediately said:

*"There is the next heavyweight champion of the world".*

There were others present that said although raw and lacking technique (not to mention discipline), Mike Tyson never wanted to outpoint you, he wanted to hurt you and knock you unconscious. Cus D'Amato, convinced he saw the future of boxing in Mike, decided he would take the young man under his wing and guide him toward his

eventual destiny. Together they stayed up countless nights pondering what the future would hold. Cus telling the young Mike motivating, inspirational stories in which the young man could draw upon during his future moments of adversity. He was told little known but fantastic and interesting things concerning the lives of some of the greatest warriors in and out of the ring. It would eventually be said of Mike Tyson, that he possesses an equal degree of boxing knowledge to that of a learned historian of the sport. Not simply discussing boxing, Cus taught Mike about such things as fear, courage, cowardice, and what it meant to be a professional. Cus was grooming the boy into not only a man, but also a warrior. Not into an athlete like a football, basketball, or hockey player.... that is not the proper comparison. The proper comparison is to a gladiator in the vain of ancient Rome and the Coliseum. That was the attitude of Mike Tyson when he was going into the ring (Legends never die: The story of Mike Tyson, 2004).

The simple truth is that the social vice known as armed robbery is characterized with a lot of ingenuity untapped. I have not stolen before, neither do I hail from the clan of any historical known gang but an essential characteristic of an armed robber is bravery. In any case, the robber possess some ingenuity in athletics like jumping, running and other sporting characteristics, yet Nigeria is looking for sporting contingents in Olympics and other international sporting events. Bravery and strength as I mentioned is also a characteristics of successful farmers. Then if the strength channeled into robbery is deposited in agriculture by some of our youths, then Nigeria will be making history as the food basket of sub-Saharan Africa. Our government I suggest should start thinking of measures to be put in place in order to ensure mental rearmament. The experience of our navy at the Niger Delta during the hit of the youth restiveness in that area simply suggests to the ministry of Defence that there are more to swimming by the boys of the creeks. Unfortunately, each time there's need to enroll people in the navy, this competent but negative minded youths are not remembered. What type of amnesty do we think will exceed gainful and sustainable employment?

In this paper, am not an advocate of moral hopelessness but I will make few historical excursions to justify my claim. The pirates and Marco polo are relevant examples of thieves who diverted loots from the high sea in order to sustain the British economy during the reign of Queen Victoria. Yet history recorded them as great men and even the pirates who helped American economy during the great depression are treated as relevant personalities in American history. You do not need to possess a PhD in history to know that Lord Luggard, Richard Lander and Mungo Park all came to stealing mission, to the Niger, for I do not know how a man can discover the Niger when people were already fishing and farming in the Niger. These examples are attributes of negativity which yielded much result and the personalities involved have given

accolade in history.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Since youth restiveness in Nigeria revolves around poverty, bad governance, insincerity, ineffective corporate community relationship, underdevelopment, environmental degradation among others, ameliorating it would have to entail capacity building for the youth. This will include implementation of community orientated developmental projects and participatory approach in resolving issues and problems among stakeholders in the region. The federal government needs to go beyond putting in place palliative measures and constituting agencies or commissions. The development needs of the region can be met through planned intervention policies, programmes and projects which are true reflections of the desires and needs of the people. Particularly the restive youth should be empowered so as to make a decent living from their environment.

Our development as a nation does in deed lie in our ability to develop our human capital. Development of human capital represents a sustainable strategy for transforming Nigeria into a viable economy. Without education Nigeria would not attain global relevance neither would we be able to create a good society with informed citizens. Government should consider education as a social service which it must provide to all Nigerians. Dignity of labour upon which the Nigerian was known has been replaced by the craze for easy money. At the same time Nigerians have lost their sense of freedom and the symbol of achievement became defined by the extent of thievery that an individual exhibited. Despite the seeming gloom we can take another chance to make right the colossal mistakes of the past. This can only be done through an understanding of the many growth opportunities that stare at us daily. Global economy trends present significant opportunities for Nigeria to grow out of the mono-culture economy that has arrested the development of the nation. To strategically take advantage of these growth opportunities we must begin to look beyond natural resources as the major drivers of growth. Nigeria's ability to emerge as a global economic force lies in its capacity to take advantage of the growth opportunities in such areas as: business enterprises, services, entertainment, leadership, entrepreneurship, management, sports, economics and finance, and brand exports (Comfort, 2009b: 100).

According to Samuel (2005), the generations of today are faced with the syndrome of youth restiveness, drug abuse, and child labour. These are connected to the economy, political/social problems of our country. Youth restiveness and other social vices can be curbed when our leaders lead by good example, when there are Jobs, when there is food on the table, and when our youth have a hope for better tomorrow" we sincerely hope that the

leaders of today should not only talk and talk, but also talk and follow it up with action and reality when it comes to setting good examples for our youths. Our leaders should be transparent and have open policy from the top to the bottom. However, Job creation and training scheme for youth will reduce youth restiveness. The government and private sector should make it as a policy to train youth in their locality in different vocation, to enable them to be industrious and self employed, for example an industrious economy is a rich economy, hence Japan without oil is better and a wealthy nation. Also, if a youth is trained in a particular vocation, such youth may need the services of another youth and thereby reducing the burden of unemployment syndrome and youth restiveness in the society (Samuel, 2005). Some significant issues have been x-rayed on youth development and how the government can serve as panacea of building a more egalitarian and safe society. Indeed, the Nigerian youths seems to be at the cross road of unemployment, food insecurity and several other environmental challenges. As a matter of urgency, efforts must be put in place to ensure that the objective of the African Youth Charter is actualized. In any case, the efforts of various international donors and agencies must also be a pleasurable offer that should be properly utilized.

It is important that various programmes such as the ICT and sporting equipments are established in youth development and recreational areas. It is always said that an idle mind is the devils workshop.

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