

THE ROLE OF NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Colonialism introduced divide and rule which emphasized our differences instead of similarities. Ethnicity became a cog in the wheel of progress in achieving nationhood. Instead of Nigerians utilizing their pluralistic nature by tapping the value of its various backgrounds for progress it became devastating factor. This accumulated in Nigerian Biafran Civil War of 1967-1970. Using descriptive and analytical approach with anecdotal evidence gleaned from a qualitative and historical relevant literature on Nigeria history from the pre-colonial colonial and post colonial times and the NYSC programme. The study revealed that the NYSC is aimed at developing common ties among the Nigerian Youths and promote national unity and integration to remove prejudice eliminates injustice and confirms at first hand the similarities among Nigerians at all ethnic groups NYSC corps members have constituted to National Development in involving themselves in election, fight against HIV/AIDS, road safety, education, community services and inter-ethnic marriages. This is because they impacted positively on their host communities during the primary assignment. . Today the NYSC looks beyond the service year by training corps members on skill acquisition and entrepreneurship to make them useful to themselves after the program. NYSC is an attestation of the Nation's will in pulling the talents and energies in rendering essential services for social, cultural, political and economic cohesion of Nigerians. Based on the findings, the study recommended amongst others that there is need for quick intervention when necessary and fulfillment of statutory objectives at all ties of government. Preferential posting and concessional deployment should be strictly enforced because some corps members have abused them.

Keywords: civil-war, colonialism, ethnicity and nation- building.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme was established in 1973 by the then Head of State General Yakubu Gowon. The National Youth Service Corps is no doubt a tool for fostering National Integration and Unity. This interventionist Strategy was designed to promote the course of National Unity in the Nigerian Society after the Nigerian Biafra Civil War of 1967 to 1970.

The orientation course that take place in batches 'A' 'B' and 'C' take place in the 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja which lasts for three weeks for Batch A and two weeks for both batches B and C. It normally comprises of physical training intellectual activities, sports and social events in a regimented environment.

The NYSC Act provides a tripartite structure of Federal State and Local Government Areas. It also specifies special roles for the different levels of Government. The Act insists that most of the purposes of the scheme are to be achieved at the Local Government level. This is why the community development services (CDS) is a very important aspect of the yearly program and done once in a week mostly in Thursdays.

The NYSC Act makes it compulsory for all Nigerian graduates' with First Degree or HND or their equivalent who are 30 years or below to participate in a one year National Service though with some exceptions when necessary. The revised 1989 edition of the National Youth Policy for Nigeria defined the youth as "any person between the age of above twelve to thirty (12-30). This is age when individuals are most active and susceptible to accelerated intellectual development, and consequently are more creative, imbued with great aspiration and high achievement motivation. According to the National Youth policy for Nigeria, 1983, the youth make up about 43% of the nation's population.

According to Dare (2023) 'NYSC' has made an invaluable impact in various aspect of national development including healthcare to rural communities and also made legendary contributions to education and rural infrastructure

Many nations have established national youth service programs for various reasons. Ajilo (2023) claims that it was founded in Mexico in 1936 in order to rebuild the nation following the Mexican Revolution to produce politically, economically, and culturally aware citizens. Kenya was founded in 1964, one year after gaining the right to self-government. It placed more of an emphasis on defense to impart skills and instill a sense of nation-building in Kenyan men and women. By military decree in 1976, Ghana launched a national youth service program with the goal of fostering a greater feeling of national cohesion and service across all social groups in the country, with tertiary graduates serving as its target population.

The Program of the NYSC includes the following:

Orientation: Corps participants are put through a regimented life, with much emphasis on paramilitary training during the orientation course for discipline and to build up the perseverance – all essential traits required for effective selfless service to the nation.

Primary Assignment: The Primary Assignment offer the corps member opportunity to live, interact and integrate themselves with the culture of their host community and to make their own contribution.

Community Development Services: Here corps members enter work with host communities or execute self/group projects aimed at enhancing the welfare of their host communities.

Passing out programme: Those who fulfilled the essential spirit of the service are issued certificate of National Service.

It has equally kept faith with its mission of mobilizing and grooming graduate youths for the promotion of national unity, sustainable development, self-reliance and preparing them for the challenges of leadership. NYSC yearbook 2018.

The purpose of study:

The mission of NYSC 2015 is to foster in Nigerian youth a sense of selfless devotion to the country, highlight the brotherhood and togetherness of all Nigerians, regardless of their cultural or social backgrounds, and advance national development.

Objectives of the NYSC Scheme

The Objectives according to NYSC Year Book 2018 include:

- i. To foster in Nigerian youth a tradition of hard labor at work and patriotic and devoted commitment to their country in any circumstance that may arise
- ii. To strengthen the moral standards of Nigerian youth by providing them with knowledge about higher values, national accomplishments, and social and cultural advancement.
- iii. To instill in Nigerian youth the mentalities that, when combined with appropriate training and shared experiences, will make them more receptive to mobilization for the good of the country.
- iv. To support the development of self-development skills in Nigerian youth, so enabling them to acquire the spirit of self-reliance.
- v. To assist in the faster expansion of the national economy.
- vi. To foster national unity and integration by creating bonds among young people in Nigeria,
- vii. To dispel misconceptions and biases, as well as to personally verify the numerous commonalities that Nigerians of various ethnic backgrounds have.
- viii. To foster a sense of unity and shared destiny among Nigerians.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Presently, the geographical area called Nigeria was originally inhabited by people living in kingdoms, empires, state and they were independent in their different areas before the advent of the Europeans. The coming of the Europeans and the amalgamation of 1914 by Lord Frederick Lugard brought the different kingdoms, empires and states together under the name “Nigeria” Nigeria, as a heterogeneous nation, is made up of many people’s or ethnic groups.

The ethnic factor has played a decisive but negative role on national integration and development. Ethnicity has continued to color the political climate in Nigeria since the amalgamation of 1914 and it has remained so hitherto. It has therefore obstructed the building of a strong, dynamic and progressive nation. Loyalty to political parties and the regions, based on ethnic factor was dominant in Nigeria while loyalty to the nation at large was secondary and this adversely affects nation-building.

Colonialism introduced ‘divide and rule’ policy, which emphasized differences rather than similarities of the various cultural groups. Moreover, religious intolerance has become a volatile issue in Nigeria and it is currently serving as a cog in the wheel of progress in achieving effective nation-building. Instead of Nigerians utilizing their pluralistic nature by tapping the values of its various groups for social and economic development, it has become a devastating force. A by-product of this situation is ethnic politics and election rigging, unhealthy rivalries among ethnic groups, oppression of opposition parties, tribal sentiment,

personality clashes and disagreement among political parties, serious protests, rebellions and the civil war of 1967 to 1970.

After the Nigerian Biafran War of 1967 to 1970. The then Head of state of Nigeria General Yakubu Gowon introduced the idea of NYSC as a means of achieving National integration (According to Gowon 1973)

I have always held the view that young people are a powerful force for national mobilization and development, and as such, they are essential to the vital mission of establishing a nation. However, under our present peculiar circumstance, when Nigeria is being increasingly looked upon to play a major role in matters relating to the destiny of Africa, the responsibility of our youths in this direction becomes even greater. We think that the National Youth Services Corps gives Nigerian youths a much-needed platform for self-realization and allows them to play a crucial part in achieving our country's goals of becoming a strong, cohesive, and independent nation. I wish to remind you, however, that as you go the respective areas to which you have been deployed, you should regard yourselves as good emissaries of your states of origin and your particular universities. Above all, you must be the brand of new Nigerians that Nigeria is looking for.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The general objective of the study is to examine the role of national youth corps (NYSC) in national development. The specific objectives include:

- a. To examine whether NYSC programme has contributed to national integration
- b. To examine whether NYSC programme has contributed to youth development in Nigeria
- c. To examine whether NYSC programme has contributed in making the youths who pass out self-reliant

1.3 Research questions

- (a) Has NYSC programme contributed to national integration?
- (b) Has NYSC programme contributed to youth development in Nigeria ?
- (c) Has NYSC programme contributed in making those who pass out self-reliant?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study Design

The study design is largely descriptive and analytical with anecdotal evidence gleaned from a qualitative analysis and review of relevant literature on Nigeria history from pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial Nigeria

2.2 Data

Data for the study were gathered from textbooks and mainly NYSC materials, journals and internet materials. These were complemented by interviews group discussions, participant observation since the author has passed through the programme. Interview of key informants and some state holders in some selected communities. Some serving corps members and those who have passed out were also interviewed

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Findings / Result

The study revealed that the NYSC is aimed at developing common ties among the Nigerian Youths and promote national unity and integration to remove prejudice eliminates injustice and confirms at first hand the similarities among Nigerians at all ethnic groups NYSC corps members have constituted to National Development in involving themselves in election, fight against HIV/AIDS, road safety, education, community services and inter-ethnic marriages. This is because they impacted positively on their host communities during the primary assignment. . Today the NYSC looks beyond the service year by training corps members on skill acquisition and entrepreneurship to make them useful to themselves after the program. NYSC is an attestation of the Nation's will in pulling the talents and energies in rendering essential services for social, cultural, political and economic cohesion of Nigerians

Colonialism introduced 'divide and rule' policy, which emphasized differences rather than similarities of the various cultural groups. The present geographical area called Nigeria was originally inhabited by people living in kingdoms, empires, state and they were independent in their different areas before the advent of the European. The Youth Services Corps gives Nigerian youths a much-needed platform for self-realization and allows them to fulfill their vital role in achieving our country's goals of becoming a strong, independent, and United Nations. In order to provide the inhabitants of newly independent territories, who differ greatly in language, religion, and values, a new sense of shared identity and belonging, national-building entails the psychological reconstruction of individual people.

Peace is one of the main elements that fosters social, political, economic, and industrial development. Thus, national integration is necessary to advance peace. Healthy political growth will be facilitated by national integration, allowing Nigerians to pool their resources and become more productive. Through socialization, NYSC programmes have been able to bridge the parochial world view of different ethnic groups against one another towards National Unity.

3.2 Discussions

a NYSC and national development

The core of national development efforts involves adequate involvement in human capital development. Inadequate attention to the needs of the youths will have negative impact. The unemployment level among Nigerian graduates has begun to diminish the needs for education in the perception of parents and their children. This is why NYSC added skill acquisition and entrepreneurship into the program.

It is a pity that some of our best educated are most dynamic people are not contributing to economic and social development. Our tertiary education did not equip graduate with the skills required for self-employment after graduation. They are busy training people who will rely on white color jobs in (NYSC/SAED October, 2019) noted that:

The NYSC launched skill development and entrepreneurship in 2012 (SAED).The aim was to allow participant to explore the options of self-employment or starting their own business through training during and after their orientation camp.

The programme is implemented both as national and state levels. The national implementation basically has to do with management and coordination including policy, guidelines and resources mobilization. State level effort focuses more on mobilizing corps members for participation in

the capacity building component. They have skills acquisition and entrepreneurship development programmes.

Participation of Corps member in election

In an attempt to remove partiality in elections, the INEC authorities met with the management of NYSC and mapped out the modalities of engaging corps members in elections areas of Nigeria. This collaboration has worked very well. This has made it possible for all the corps members who indicate interest during elections are taken as temporary staff after training. The fact that majority of the corps members come from different state reduces the problem of bias to minimal point.

Road Safety Campaign

NYSC members engage in traffic control mostly during their Thursday's community development services. Corps members visit primary and secondary schools to sensitize them on the safety ways making use of our roads. They also engage in public enlightenment about the activities of road safety officials. They help the public to understand the use of road signs and necessary precautions needed to stay safe on our road.

NYSC HIV/AIDS Project

Youth leadership in HIV/AIDS programme embedded in National Youth Services Corps Scheme has been very useful in creating awareness on how dangerous HIV/AIDS are. They bring right knowledge about HIV/AIDS during seminars on orientation camps. They also engage in creating awareness to secondary school students. They teach children about the dangers of pre-marital sex.

b NYSC and rural development

Agricultural development

Some of the recent achievements of the Scheme in the area of agriculture are as follows: (NYSC yearbook 2018)

- i. The cultivation of about 100 hectares of maize in Kwali (FCT), Dungulbi (Bauchi State), Iseyin (Oyo State).
- ii. The Cultivation of 50 hectares of cassava in FCT and Oyo.
- iii. Cultivation of cowpea, groundnut and soya beans.
- iv. The raising of poultry birds which are used to feed Corps Member during Orientation Programmes in the FCT, Nasarawa, Kogi, Kaduna, Benue, Plateau and Bauchi States.
- v. NYSC rice mill in Ezillo, Ebonyi State, which produced over 10 metric tons of de-stoned rice, used in feeding Corps Members and camp officials during Orientation programme.
- vi. 340 bags of garri produced at NYSC Garri Factory Afon, Kwara State and 700bags of de-stoned rice produced at NYSC Rice Mill, Ezillo, Ebonyi State, formed the bulk of the relief items donated by the Scheme to the Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) Camp in Adamawa State in 2015.
- vii. NYSC collaborated with the Institute of International Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Ibadan in 2013 for the multiplication and distribution of improved cassava stem variety, which has been of immense benefit to farmers.

Quite a number of Corps Members, who served on NYSC farms, nationwide, have taken up farming as a profession, due to practical experiences gained.

Health Initiative for rural Dwellers

Each NYSC state secretariat mobilizes the corps medical team to visit disadvantaged communities' health wise to give them medical services free. Though they have coordinated health initiative for rural dwellers at the national level but each state services the interest of medically disadvantaged rural dwellers.

Education: It is on record that NYSC has contributed significantly to the educational development of the nation. This is because over 70 percent of corps members are posted to teach in secondary schools mostly in the rural areas.

The NYSC teachers are saving grace for most school in remote areas. This is because in urban and semi urban schools there are over population of teachers making some teachers to redundant because they have no class to teach. While in the village schools those who are unfortunate to be posted their in remote areas go to school two or three times a week worst still some make arrangement and visit whenever they have chance from what is keeping them busy. However, they receive salary at the end of every month.

In most cases it is only corps members who accept posting in such places and even reside there throughout their services year.

Legal Aid: NYSC has made tremendous contributions in the area of legal aid, through the establishment of Legal Aid Groups. Corps Lawyers have been rendering free legal services to the under-privileged members of the society. They have also been educating people on their rights as provided in the constitution. They also engage in settlement of dispute with negotiation thereby achieving peace in their host communities.

c NYSC and nation building

One way to define nation-building would be as an endeavor to ensure a nation's survival while constructing a vibrant and dynamic nation. Moreover, it is an endeavor to fully utilize the nation's resources, both human and material, for the good of its people. Contributions from people, groups, and organizations in the fields of politics, economics, religion, social work, and culture are equally essential to nation building. In order to provide the inhabitants of newly independent territories, who differ greatly in language, religion, and values a new sense of shared identity and belonging, national-building entails the psychological reconstruction of individual people. In order to promote loyalty to the nation, the Federal Government embarks on public enlightenment by using MAMSER (Mass Mobilization for Economy Recovery, Self-Reliance and Social Justice), National Orientation Agency (NOA). It also introduced the N.Y.S.C. scheme, sporting activities, cultural festival, provision of employment opportunities through the National Directorate of Employment (NDE); sitting of Federal Unity Schools in different parts of the country etc.

Peace is one of the main elements that fosters social, political, economic, and industrial development. Thus, national integration is necessary to advance peace. Healthy political growth will be facilitated by national integration, allowing Nigerians to pool their resources and become more productive.

The 1989 youth development policy itemized the function of youth development as:

- i. Participation of the youth in National Development;
- ii. Involvement of the youth in decision-making at all levels;
- iii. Remodeling of the youth activities to conform with Nigerian circumstances;
- iv. Inculcating National Consciousness and the need for National Unity;

- v. Inculcating the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian Society;
- vi. Training the minds of the youth in the understanding of the world around them; and
- vii. Providing opportunities for the youth to acquire the appropriate skills, abilities and competence both mentally and physically”.

Through socialization, NYSC programmes have been able to bridge the parochial world view of different ethnic groups against one another towards National Unity. NYSC Year Book 2018 noted that:

Through their interaction that have continued to produce long-lasting bonds of friendship, it can be unequivocally deduced that unfounded negative notions about other tribes and walls of ethnic suspicious have continued to be pulled down Gratifyingly, in place of such obnoxious walls, bridges of unity have been consistently built in the 45 years of the scheme’s trajectory, an existence that has witnessed so many inter – tribal marriages, arising from social exposure, occasioned by the Scheme.

The impact of the scheme is unquantifiable especially when we look at it as contribution towards national building. According to Amasun 2016;

The National youth services corps typifies what should be our guiding principles that we should talk more on those things that bind and unity us as speak less on things that divide us. I do not know of any other scheme or program that binds us together as a nation, like the NYSC does.

d Viability of the programme

The remarkable achievement of the NYSC scheme has attracted the attention of the Gambian and Sierra – Leonean governments for the establishment of similar schemes in their home countries.

According to Dalung 2018 former minister Youth and Sports noted that:

The highly inspirational achievements of the Nigerian NYSC made the Government of the Gambian Republic to seek technical assistance for Nigeria to establish a similar youth organization known as the Gambian National Youth Service Scheme (GYSS), which came into being in 1995. I am also aware that the Sierra-Leonean Government approached Nigeria in May, 2017 for similar technical assistance.

Indeed, Nigerians celebrate this noble Scheme for its remarkable achievements since inception. Apart from its much publicized role in the promotion of unity and integration, the Scheme deserves accolades for its contributions to the development of education, healthcare delivery, as well as social and infrastructural development, through its primary assignment deployment and its community development service. Also worthy of commendation is the positive role of the NYSC in the credible conduct of elections in the country, and the participation of Corps Members in other programmes, such as population census, immunization exercise, as well as HIV/AIDS prevention and care amongst others.

The Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme, which commenced in 2012, is geared towards contributing to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The programme is designed for implementation through the in-camp and post-camp training components.

The Scheme has demonstrated, in many fronts, that the youth can make meaningful contributions to national unity and development, if their talents and skills are well-harnessed. The drama presentations are meant to reflect the culture of the host states, new policies of government, as well as burning national issues.

e Welfare of corps members

The welfare of the Corps members are not neglected at all, recently, their transport allowance was increased to ₦1,800, bicycle allowance to ₦1,200 and monthly stipend to ₦33,300. Apart from skill acquisition the governments at various levels have done much to protect them security wise. Today, the NYSC looks beyond the service year by training corps members on skill acquisition and entrepreneurship to make them useful to themselves after the program.

According to NYSC yearbook 2018 noted that the SAED programme comprises In-camp and Post-camp trainings. In fact, the success story of the programme cannot be overemphasized, as over seven thousand ex-Corps Members have been able to establish thriving businesses that contribute to the nation's GDP.

The managers of the programme have good relationship with security agents and the response of the security have been encouraging in this regard. Distress call was established in 2012 manned 24 hours for quick response whenever they need arises. The managers of the program also provide security tips booklet which takes note of prevailing security needs.

According to Security Awareness hand book October 2019. The following provide very safe options when things go wrong:

- a. Military Bases and Barracks
- b. Police Bases, Station and Barracks
- c. NYSC orientation Camp when in Progress
- d. Hospitals and Health Centers

f Challenges of NYSC as an organization

Despite, the contributions of the NYSC directorate to national development there are some minor challenges facing the organization which include the following:

1. Preferential posting: Some corps members are born, school and do their primary assignment in their home state. This makes mockery of the original intension of one serving in the different culture for the purposes of cultivating friendship or even intermarriage.
2. Some corps members are "visitors" in their primary assignment. This is because they stay outside the town or sate where they are supposed to be doing their primary assignment. Yet at the end of the day, some of them get clearance and pass out.
3. Absences of strictly enforced rules and regulation governing NYSC Corps members. Many corps members have lost their lives while travelling without due permission from the authority show such laws are poorly implemented.
4. Concessional deployment: Some corps members have abused this concessional deployment when it is not necessary. One them wonders are there no checks and balances in the organization.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

Omotoyinbo (2019) states that NYSC symbolizes and represents what Awolowo (1981) observed: wherever the spirit of forgiveness, peace, and unity are closely and individually related, we see this unity as our guiding light, our progress is certain, and our prosperity and well-being can no more than be diminished. We must realize that the way language affects our unity is closely related to how our leaders behave politically. Political leaders should be aware that their words have a significant impact on maintaining national unity. This is one of the main reasons they should avoid making divisive speeches or utterances, particularly in a multicultural environment like Nigeria. The public should also be aware of the idea that those who struggle to control their language should not be in positions of authority. This need to serve as one of our guiding concepts when we use our right to vote. Instead of individuals who render people or the nation uninhabitable for their opponents, we need people who will exhibit practical magnanimity in our society and whose way of life is admirable.

NYSC 50 years of existence is an attestation of the nation's will in pooling youth talents and energies in rendering essential services for social, cultural, political and economic cohesion of the country. The National Services Corps (NYSC), since inception and through its mandate, has contributed to the development of the physical, moral and intellectual growth of thousands of Nigerian Youth, thereby giving them the opportunity to contribute their quota to the overall national development.

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), through its programmes, has also helped thousands of Nigerian Youths to achieve their dreams by developing the latent potentials of Corps Members, honing their skills and thereby reducing unemployment, instilling societal norms and values in them as well as preparing them to become self-reliant after service year. The scheme, which birthed in 1973, has been a remarkable success. It demonstrates the fact that the youth can make meaningful contributes to national unity and development, if their talents and skills are well harnessed. It is fit and proper to say that the Scheme has been discharging its mandate within the nation's larger development objectives.

4.2 Recommendations

Every youngster in the nation, including NYSC members, should be encouraged to develop the habit of speaking in a major indigenous language that is native to a major cultural zone in the nation rather than his own indigenous language as much as possible for the sake of maintaining national unity. Nonetheless, minority groups would maintain their unique language history while also viewing themselves as part of the greater community (Adegbija 2004). There is need for quick intervention when necessary and fulfillment of statutory obligations at all tiers of government. There is need to intensify the cultivation of the spirit of hard work and selfless service because some Corps Members see the NYSC as only opportunity to collect their monthly allowances.

The responsibility of funding it should not be left to government alone, but should involve the private sector. On this premise, it will be most appropriate to advocate that a certain percentage of profit earned by the multinationals, bank and other corporate bodies be dedicated to funding the Scheme. No amount of money deployed towards sustaining the scheme is a waste, chiefly because of its many benefits in a nation-building process.

The managers of the scheme should intensify more effect in house mechanism to address the pressure mounted on them for preferential deployment. This is to find out those with genuine need for re deployment.

Dare on 50th years anniversary on May 15, 2023 challenged the leadership of the scheme to see the 50th anniversary as an opportunity to evolve strategies to strengthen the scheme, making it more sustainable and broaden its scope of operations to enhance its contributions to national development. The Cable News May 15, 2023.

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