GOOD GOVERNANCE AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT: A RECIPE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT.

This study sought to examine the nexus between good governance, youth empowerment and sustainable development, as the best option to address the worrisome issues of underdevelopment. The scholarly work was a desktop research found within the ambit of the 'Social Contract Theory' as its theoretical model of analysis. The study found that young people continue to face structural and societal barriers to full and effective participation in political, economic and community life; exposing them to increased risk of marginalization, poverty, violence, criminality and displacement, unemployment, violence, rising criminality and insurgency in Nigeria. The study argued that the misplaced priority of the Nigerian government and its middle-of-the-road cash handouts as youth empowerment programmes is not sustainability-sensitive enough or heterogeneously suitable to push the nation out of its unemployment trouble and socioeconomic ills. Hence there's no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria needs a thorough reformation in governance. We need governance that is receptive to the youths, participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and follows the rule of law. To remedy the plights of the youths, the Nigerian government needs to review its current empowerment programmes targeted at reducing unemployment among youths. The government should involve the youth in redesigning the programmes, prioritizing areas of interventions based on needs assessment, developing measurable indicators and putting in place mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of the programmes.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Good governance has been identified as one of the numerous challenges facing Nigeria in battling developmental problems. Scholars regard good governance as the processes and interrelated procedures through which government institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal (Olajide, Adaja and Ojogun, 2022). Thus to understand a nation's level of sustainable development, we simply have to take a closer look at the level of good governance at play and the leadership driving it. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Mensah, 2019); and what better way can this be achieved if not through the youths who are the leaders of and for the future? Histories of nations are essentially stories of men and women who have led them, how they led them, how the masses responded to them and the indelible positive and negative marks and imprints that they left as legacies.

The Nigerian public spheres are awash with visible and hidden hints of governance failures; however, it's more worrisome that leadership seems worse in contemporary Nigeria, because leadership in historical Nigeria has not always been all doom and gloom (Ayami, 2023). A critical consideration of the life history of the nationalism pioneers reveals that youths were the ones who wore the armored gloves and fought for an independent and better Nigeria, with the likes of Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Chief Anthony Enahoro and others who till date are recognized as people who made the difference in Nigeria's leadership trajectory (Abayomi, 2021). Even before them, the British colonial government had met organised entities and youths who had major influence in the state of affairs. Lynch (2021) affirmed that this had certainly been the case with the three largest ethnic groups, the Hausa's, the Yoruba's, and the Igbo's which dominated respectively, the north, the southwest, and the southeast of Nigeria.

Historical research is replete with facts that Nigeria had resourceful youths who were rational thinkers with huge leadership prowess, and it was their ambitious efforts/elbow grease that not only contributed to the attainment of political independence in 1960, but also the push for Republicanism in 1963. Afolayan (2018) avers that Anthony Enahoro was just a 21 year old youth when he moved the motion for Nigeria's independence; likewise Yakubu Gowon was only 29 when he became the Head of State in Nigeria. Worthy of mention is the Late Isaac Adaka Boro who was a fresh graduate from the University of Nigeria Nsukka and was in his early 30's when he formed the Niger Delta Volunteer Force and later fought for the emancipation of his people. Therefore, it ought to be clearly stated that the youths form the fulcrum trustees and occupy core center of the politico-economy of any nation.

It is rather worrisome that the Youth Engagement Report of the United Nations in 2022 revealed that young people in Nigeria continue to face structural and societal barriers to full and effective participation in political, economic and community life; exposing them to increased risk of marginalization, overt unemployment, poverty, violence, criminality and displacement (UN, 2022).The onus of youth empowerment in a country lies with the government, and the fact that our government still seem farfetched from meaningfully empowering the Nigerian youth (educated or uneducated) is the crux of the social problems steering and tearing the nation apart.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Nigeria, the issue of governance has become a hot-button issue prompting scholarly research interest around the world. It appears that since its attainment of political independence in 1960, Nigeria has gotten more trapped in bad governance and lingering underdevelopment, attributed to the crop of leadership subterfuge and the idiosyncrasies of various regimes in power that seem to have completely left out the youths in governance. The argument is that the problem of and solution to the Nigerian circumstance is a leadership challenge bridled in the plight of gerontocracy.

The predicament is perceived as isolation of the youths in an independent country governed by old people, since Nigeria has mostly had septuagenarian leaders heading the country till date. Thus, the central thesis of this paper is that the prevalent gerontocracy in the Nigerian government is the marginalization of the youths who consequently resort to restiveness, insurgency, banditry, militancy, violence and electoral dereliction, kidnapping, assassination, examination malpractices, sexual promiscuity, moral depravity and the growing "Japa" (forced migration) trend of youths leaving Nigeria in their thousands as escape routes to other countries that seem to offer better environment for youths to thrive.

Rising concerns are that the series of youth empowerment programmes initiated thus far by the Nigerian leadership are not based off the values of good governance in terms of actual needs assessment, achieving the common good in selecting principal beneficiaries with transparency and accountability in ensuring these programmes actually empower youths and reduces youth unemployment. Worst still is the non-involvement of the youths in the planning stage of such programmes/interventions. The thrust of this paper is that allowing the youths their fundamental rights to leadership that is merit driven, just, equitable and exerted with ultimate regard to the rule of law, is regarded as the recipe to sustainable development.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL DISCOURSE

Sustainable development is simply about addressing the needs of the present moment without compromising current and future generations to meet their own sustainable lifestyles (Ekka et al., 2022). The Brundtland report from where sustainable development got its name delineated sustainable development in terms of extreme poverty reduction, global gender equity, and wealth redistribution. In contemporary times, more emphases have been drawn on the link between sustainable development and youth empowerment. Mensah (2019) aver that sustainable development requires encouraging youths to do great things for themselves and also for society.

Youth empowerment is defined as the process of making young people gain the ability and authority to make decisions and implement changes in their own lives and the lives of others (Chang et al., 2022). Youth in Nigeria includes citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria aged 18-29 years (Akandi, 2014); while the African Youth Charter recognizes youth as people between 15-35 years (UNPF, 2021). Youth is therefore the stage of constructing the self-concept; a time in a person's life when he makes crucial choices and takes decisions/actions on things which will affect his future (Afolaya, 2018). Youth empowerment in this context is an approach to stop all forms of marginalization and negligence of youths and to give them equal opportunity and access to education, financial control, entrepreneur capacity, political participation, leadership etc. regardless of gender (Idris, 2014).

Avail to say that good governance matter for empowering young people; especially in third world countries like Nigeria where transitioning to adulthood is increasingly becoming more difficult due to challenges in accessing quality education, decent jobs, healthcare and affordable housing. Abayomi (2021) asserts that socioeconomic insecurities have led to lower trust in national governments, potentially undermining the legitimacy of public institutions. And going by the Nigerian context of gerontocracy in an ageing society, the growing demand for sustainable development are likely to increase and generate long-term social and economic costs. Consequently, many young people express concern about inequalities, marginalization as well as their repercussions on well-being and inclusive growth.

Good governance according to Sari (2019) is the process whereby public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources and guarantee the realization of human rights. The benefits of good governance are reflected in all institutions that demonstrate integrity in appointments at all levels, both external and internal, and strong leadership and management skills in all of the places where they are needed. These institutional qualities are performance, adaptability, and stability while the principal good governance principles are participation/inclusion, non-discrimination/equality and rule of law/accountability (UN, 2019).

Therefore, it is widely accepted that the major indicators of good governance are basically on governance that is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and follows the rule of law with meaningful eradication or complete absence of violence and control of corruption (UN, 2019). Olajide et al., (2022) clearly notes that the importance of the 'Rule of Law' factor cannot be overemphasized. They argue that good governance requires fair legal frameworks that are enforced by an impartial regulatory body, for the full protection of citizens and stakeholders.

Then there's the crucial factors of transparency and accountability, which imply that decisions taken and their enforcement are in compliance with established rules and regulations with information freely available, provided in easily understandable forms and directly accessible to those who will be affected by governance policies and practices, as well as the outcomes resulting there from (Otieno et al., 2022). These Scholars aver that accountability is invaluable in evaluating the on-going effectiveness of public officials to ensure that they are performing to their full potential, providing value for money, instilling confidence in the governed, being responsive to the community and seen to be increasing youth's participation in fostering good governance processes. Responsiveness is yet another factor since good governance requires that organizations and their processes are designed to serve the best interests of citizens within a reasonable timeframe (Olajide et al., 2022).

Perhaps the most crucial factor underpinning good governance and sustainable development in a pluralistic entity such as Nigeria is 'Equity and Inclusiveness'. Psychologist David McClelland postulated that the surest way to destroy a place is through a segregation policy, which treats citizens differently (Cheung and Halpern, 2020). Thus impartiality is paramount with a system of youth consultation and involvement; wherein inclusive governance is quintessential to give the citizens the opportunity to maintain, enhance, or generally improve their well-being. This provides the most compelling message regarding government's reason for existence and value to society. Meanwhile, effectiveness and efficiency is what directly give rise to sustainable development because resources will be utilized carefully to produce favorable results that meet the needs of the citizens, while making the best use of limited resources including human, technological, financial, natural and environmental (Olajide et al., 2022).

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This scholarly work adopted the Social Contract Theory as its theoretical model of analysis for linking the conjectures of good governance, youth empowerment and sustainable development. In history, the social contract theory is virtually as old as socio-political philosophy itself, but its creation has been rightly associated with neo-classical political theorists as Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679); John Locke (1632-1704) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1478), universally recognized as best propounding creators of the theory (Mukoro, 2015). Categorically, this study draws insight from the social contract postulations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau articulated in 1762.

The major thrust of the theory holds that the true foundation of any governed society is a creation of 'a pact of a social contract' whereby all citizens in a society agreed to partake in a social union in the form of a deal under equal condition (Friend, 2016). The deal necessitated that everybody relinquished all natural rights and liberties; giving up their individual freedom in order to empower the collective for the 'general will' (Duignan, 2020). The people, by entering into the social contract assented to a generally beneficial framework (that is good governance) by which society could be organized for the common good. Therefore, individuals who by nature are free and equal, agreed to renounce part of their natural liberty for a social pact which they subject themselves for the sake of the advantages provided by civil society (Falaye and Okeregbe, 2016).

Therefore, those at the helm of affairs (the Nigerian leviathans) are under obligation to work tirelessly to promote the welfare of the individuals that constitute the public community, and concomitantly gain their support, particularly the youth who make up around 70% of the population (Ndukwe, 2016). This is because the nitty-gritty of good governance administration centers on how well democratic leadership is able to deliver the dividends of democracy via good governance of indiscriminative political participation platform, quality education, youth empowerment with meaningful employment opportunities, provision of good economic atmosphere for development, upholding the masses political choices and social rights without imposing any gerontocratic leadership on them (Akhakpe, 2019).

However, it can be innocuously argued that the plight of the Nigerian youth seems shrouded in ruthlessness that has turned into a chronic cancer eating away the thoughtfulness of our youths who are seriously entrapped in the treacherous triangle of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. Instead of the good governance for which the Nigerian youths gave up their individual rights/liberties in a 'social pact', Okpe (2021) avers that the Nigerian youths are increasingly getting used to bad governance with attitudes of fatalism, resignation and acceptance of the situation; stomaching the continuous state of depravation as the new normal. As a result of this, instead of being part of machineries for the planning and implementation of national developmental goals of the country; lack of good governance in Nigeria and its accruing social problems has created an environment where youths are cheaply available for manipulation by self-seeking politicians (Chinnah, 2019; Kasali, 2020).

Scholars aver that governance failure in delivering the social contract of empowering the youths and providing an enabling environment for entrepreneurship to thrive, has lured several youths into engaging in activities they regard as the easiest source of livelihood and means of satisfying their wants. This is evident in youths' participation in illicit activities to meet their basic needs, ranging from armed robbery to pick-pocketing, political thuggery, ballot box snatching, kidnappings, drug abuse, internet fraud, ritual killings, and other vices (Otieno et al., 2022).

Youth as the Missing Link in Nigeria's Sustainable Development Pursuit

Instituted emphasis on youth empowerment in Nigeria stretches back to 1986 when the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was created (Idris, 2014). The Nigerian government over the years created different programmes with the policy intent of bettering the lot of the Nigerian youths with the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC), Micro Credit Youth Empowerment Programme, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE) and in the last five years the N-power youth empowerment scheme (Jata, 2019). Though different strategies including the N-power youth empowerment scheme were initiated to create employment and sustain economic development; yet the resulting effects are not sustainable with the current high rate of poverty and unemployment (Ndzwayiba, 2020). But how can empowerment successfully take place in a polity where priorities are misplaced, and the common good is truncated for the personal aggrandizement of the political elites; with flawed programme planning, poor funding, lack of accountability, to mention but a few (Okpata and Offiah, 2021).

Fasola (2019) observed that in Nigeria, we have trained artisans (skilled workers), but haven't created an economy for them; clearly denoting that weak leadership, debt burden, corruption, greed and lack of patriotism are major factors hindering the success of youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria. As at 2016 when Buhari's administration came into power, 86% of the Nigerian youths were pro-enterprise and were owners/operators of SMEs in Nigeria. These SMEs contribute 48% of national GDP, account for 96% of businesses and 84% of abysmal rate of employment opportunities (Pwc Report, 2021). Dismayingly, there's an increasing number of SMEs going into premature extinction due to failure of government to provide an enabling environment for sustainable development.

Initially, Nigeria was deemed a country that had one of the world's highest economic growth rates, averaging 7.4% since the 90's. However, the country's GDP growth rate dropped to 2.7% in 2015, and in 2016 it further dropped to 1.6%. As at 2018, the population growth rate was higher than the economic growth rate, and has remained so, with half of the population living below the international poverty line i.e. $1 per day (NBS, 2023). In August 2019, Nigeria hosted the Global Youth Employment Forum, organized by the International Labour Organization, which ended with a strong statement/call for increased and transformative action on youth empowerment. Yet finding a decent and productive job in the Nigerian labour market remains a herculean task (Ndzwayiba, 2020).

Table 1: Population/Productivity of Youths in Some Third World Countries

Name of Country	Total Population	Total Youth (%)	GDP (Growth Rate)	Youth Unemployment Rate
Nigeria	223,804,632	70.01	$440.8 Billion (3.6%)	53.40%
India	1,429,484,609	65.12	3.176 Trillion (8.7%)	23.22%
Ghana	34,121,985	57.08	77.59 Billion (5.4%)	7.14%

Angola	36,756,775	49.87	67.4 Billion (1.1%)	17.28%
Ethiopia	126,734,391	59.98	111.3 Billion (5.6%)	6.33%
Algeria	45,650,362	30.09	163.0 Billion (3.5%)	29.03%
Bangladesh	173,068,608	26.53	416.3 Billion (6.9%)	3.6%
Benin	13,712,828	65.23	17.14 Billion (7.2%)	4.18%
Columbia	52,085,168	64.10	314.5 Billion (10.7%)	21.61%
Kenya	55,100,586	58.72	110.3 Billion (7.5%)	13.47%

Sources: World Population Review (2023); Statista (2023); Central Intelligence Agency (2023).

Nigeria indeed has one of the youngest populations in the world with its current median age put at 18.4 years for both gender; and out of a population of 223,804,632 million people as at July 2023 (Statista, 2023). About 70% are youths (15-35 years), while 53.57% are of working age i.e. 15-64 (World Population Review, 2023). However, Nigeria is confronted with a disturbing youth unemployment rate of 53.40% (Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning, 2023), with poor GDP performance and worsening youth unemployment as shown in **Table 1**.

Since it is widely held that the greatness of any nation is in the quality of its people, in the worth of its governance and in the empowerment of its youths (Jegede et al., 2019); the foregoing circumstance therefore depicts the vast number of productive youth that could have being meaningfully engaged and empowered. Instead, they are lots of potential talents and ingenuity presently lying idle in waste; one can therefore imagine the socioeconomic and political force these youths would have wielded, and the tremendous contributions they would have made as a major productive subsector of the Nigerian population.

Jata (2019) rightfully argues that the Nigerian youth can play critical roles in sustainable development if their energy, intelligence and resourcefulness are fully and properly harnessed through investment in human capital. Even though poverty reduction and economic empowerment strategies have been part of measures deployed by the Federal Government of Nigeria towards attaining and achieving sustainable development in Nigeria, yet huge pool of productive base are yet to be optimally harnessed (UN, 2022). The consequences of failing to address this missing link in Nigeria's sustainable development pursuit has reflected in the various regional insurgences such as the Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, Niger Delta militancy, the New Biafra agitation, as well as the Unknown gunmen and kidnappers wreaking havoc in the country. Jegede et al., (2019) clearly emphasized that paying lip-service to the plight of the youthful population in Nigeria is the bane of any form of meaningful development in the country, and it will have dire global consequences for decades where Nigeria will continue to be enmeshed in huge debt burden in a decayed society and economy. Thus, the way out is to properly redeem the missing link (i.e. the youths).

Nigerian Youths and National Development

Youths they say are the leaders of tomorrow and the backbone of a nation, since the strength of a nation lies in the hands of the youths who are needed in the right texture to serve as oil lubricant for the wheels of change and sustainable development of the nation (Chinnah, 2019). But the prevailing circumstances in Nigeria have extenuated the potentials of youths as agents of social change. Access to quality education has become an elitist preserve even when Section 18(1) of our

1999 Constitution mandates the government to ensure that education at all levels is accessible to all Nigerian citizens (irrespective of gender). Meanwhile, our tertiary education is plagued with crisis of funding and incessant strike actions by ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities).

Figure 1: ASUU Strike Chart (1999-2022) Illustrated in Days
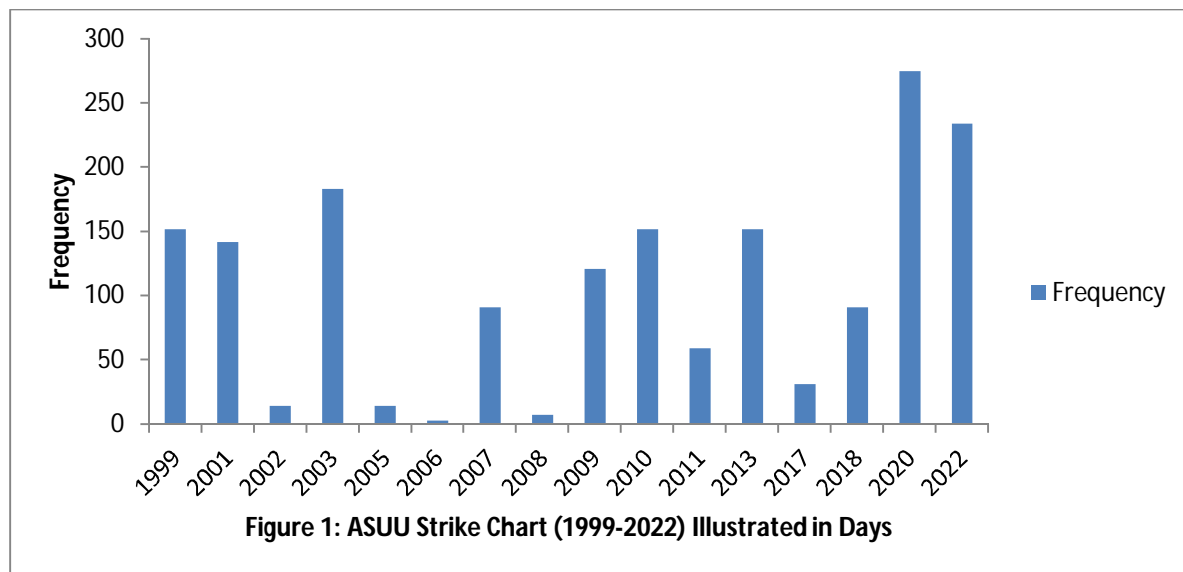
Statistics reveal that Nigerian Universities have generally embarked on strike for one of every three years since 1999, particularly as Nigerian lecturers through ASUU have gone on strike 16 times in the past 22 years and counting (Yusuf, 2021); while those who manage to get educated, graduate with no jobs or needed support for entrepreneurial ventures (Ojo, 2023).

Table 2: ASUU Strike Chart (1999-2022)

Year	Frequency (in days)	Percentage %	Duration
1999	152	9.1	5 Months
2001	92	5.5	3 Months
2002	14	0.8	2 Weeks
2003	183	11.0	6 Months
2005	14	0.8	2 Weeks
2006	3	0.2	3 Days
2007	91	5.4	3 Months
2008	7	0.4	1 Week
2009	121	7.2	4 Months
2010	152	9.1	5 Months
2011	59	3.6	1 Month-28 Days
2013	152	9.1	5 Months
2017	31	1.9	1 Month
2018	91	5.4	3 Months
2020	275	16.5	9 Months
2022	234	14.0	8 Months
TOTAL	**1,671**	**100**	**61 Months+**

Sources: Statista (2023); Yusuf (2021;, Wahab (2018).

The dimensions of youth empowerment in Nigeria should fully meet educational needs because education (human capital development) is sustainability-prone if optimally harnessed. This paper clearly emphasize that the large population of active youths would yield optimal productivity through robust investments in education that will help revamp the system devoid of strike actions, with exchange programmes, broadband and ICT expansion, investment in agriculture, technical and vocational training (informal education), etc. Unfortunately the percentage of budget share for education has continued to decline when compared to total budget, except for 2019 when education got 8.4% as can be seen in the table below:

Table 3: Budget Share for Education in Nigeria (2016-2023)

Year	Total Budget (₦)	Share for Education (₦)	Percentage %
2014	4.61Trillion	492 Billion	10.7
2015	4.58 Trillion	493 Billion	9.1
2016	6.06 Trillion	480 Billion	7.9
2017	7.44 Trillion	458 Billion	6.1
2018	9.12 Trillion	651 Billion	7.1
2019	8.92 Trillion	745 Billion	8.4
2020	10.81 Trillion	607 Billion	6.5
2021	13.60 Trillion	771 Billion	5.7
2022	17.13 Trillion	923 Billion	5.4
2023	21.83 Trillion	1.7 Billion	8.2

Sources: International Center for Investigative Reporting (2022); The Cable (2023).

How can a country and its governing authorities empower the youth when budget for education is among the least financed? Scholars argue that for Nigeria to attain meaningful development that can be sustained, it should strive for a minimum of 20 to 30 percent budget in education (Olufemi, 2020; Ojo, 2023). We therefore hope that the new administration recently inaugurated, will do better in terms of education and other aspects of human capital development vis-à-vis youth empowerment. Abayomi (2021) corroborates that the vast majority of active youths in Nigeria would yield optimal productivity through thorough investments in education with at least 15-20% budgetary allocation, exchange programmes, broadband and ICT expansion, with adequate investment in technical and vocational training (informal education).

Most importantly, empowering the Nigerian youth in the dimension of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) would greatly boost sustainable development in Nigeria, since critical aspects of our country's socio-economic problems are linked to pitiable state of science and technology. Ojo (2023) posits that empowering the Nigerian youth for sustainable development through ICT is quintessential, considering the relevance of technology in navigating human environmental factors. Science and technology hold the key to the progress and development of any nation. Aneeto et al., (2016) emphasize that technology plays a Fundamental role in wealth creation, improvement of the quality of life and real economic growth and

transformation in any society. Besides, nations of the world that are technologically backward can hardly be economically developed; since social and infrastructural amenities are well created and maintained in an economy where science and technology are highly appreciated and utilized. Moreover, attaining sustainable system of transportation, communication, optimum electricity, good and steady water, healthy hospitals and schools is dependent on advancement in science and technology.

Avail that the level of technological know-how of our youths will determine the extent our country can go in its developmental level and viability. Furthermore in the dimension of youth empowerment through ICT education, exchange programmes is pivotal to equip technologically inclined Nigerian undergraduates and graduates with the foundational transferable skills, which can be replicated back in Nigeria in bridging the deficient skills gap. The transferable skills obtained would help empower Nigerian graduates to manufacture sophisticated and research driven products, with adequate enabling environment and business friendly policies.

Implications for Sustainable Development

The indicators of sustainable development for the Nigerian state is in line with the sustainable development goals (SDGs) aimed towards no poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry-innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, peace-justice and strong institutions, etc. The implication of sustainable development in the context of Nigeria is that empowering the youths will help bring aforementioned variables of sustainable development to fruition; because where youths are greatly empowered and involved in their nation's affairs, they begin to appreciate better that their potentials as change agents in the society is being greatly recognized, and would want to help sprung the country to a higher and continuous development trajectory.

It is a unanimous opinion that the most crucial ingredient and recipe in preparing and delivering national development that can be sustained into the future is 'good governance', which relates to the way and manner power is exercised in the management of socioeconomic resources, social welfare schemes and institutional arrangements needed to achieve the goals of development (Okpata, Ezika and Ukeje, 2019). Suffice to say that good governance is the practice whereby those who wield governmental power go ahead to conduct public affairs and manage public resources in a manner actually devoid of abuse and corruption, and with due regard for fundamental human rights, the rule of law and due process (Kasali, 2020).

Accordingly, the nitty-gritty of good governance administration centers on how well democratic leadership is able to deliver the dividends of democracy such as: indiscriminative political participation platform, quality education, youth empowerment with meaningful employment opportunities, provision of good economic atmosphere for development, upholding the masses political choices and social rights, etc.(Akhakpe, 2019). Thus, in a political unit like Nigeria where the indicators of good governance are lacking, it definitely points to the 'missing link', as the major reason why the predicament of the Nigerian youth is more of onlookers, instead of facilitators of sustainable development.

Okpe (2021) corroborates that the Nigerian youths are increasingly getting used to bad governance with attitudes of fatalism, resignation and acceptance of the situation; stomaching the continuous state of depravation as the new normal. Thus with repressed emotions and untapped energies, they provide cheap labour for executing the dictates of political gladiators and ethnic

champions. Hence, instead of being part of machineries for the planning and implementation of national developmental goals of the country; lack of good governance in Nigeria and its accruing social problems has created an environment where youths are cheaply available for manipulation by self-seeking politicians (Chinnah, 2019; Kasali, 2020).

Instead of standing for what is their right in the conduct of elections and electoral processes, Nigerian youths are rather used as political thugs and party stalwarts in exchange for stomach infrastructure because poverty, illiteracy, prejudice, and unemployment are correlates that generate and worsen human needs; therefore constituting a state of deprivation (Idris, 2014; Sari, 2019; Olajide et al., 2022). This has pushed a lot of Nigerian youths into militancy, banditry, insurgency, and even proscribed secessionist movements agitating for New Biafra in the southeast. The resultant effect of all these anomalies is a disjointed country ignited by violence, destruction, massacres, kidnapping and complete moral depravity. In fact, a total breakdown of law and order, anarchy and annihilation of the Nigerian state is likely, unless we retrace our steps back to empowering and utilizing our youths as change/development agents.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, youth employment remains one of the defining challenges of our time, and addressing youth employment in Nigeria through empowerment entails finding plausible solutions with and for young people who are seeking a decent and productive employment opportunities that are nowhere to be found. It can be innocuously argued that the misplaced priority of the Nigerian government and its middle-of-the-road cash handouts as youth empowerment programmes is not sustainability sensitive enough or heterogeneously suitable to push the nation out of its unemployment trouble and socioeconomic ills. Hence there's no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria needs a thorough reformation in governance. Empowerment creates opportunity and avenue to effectively participate and share authority in deciding the political, economic, social affairs of their nation. And by youth empowerment, we specifically imply altitudinal, structural and educational process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and others in the society. We vehemently argue that effective youth empowerment is only foreseeable with good governance administration in Nigeria where there is equal respect for the freedom of all, rule of law and constitutionalism, independence of the judiciary, political legitimacy, accountability, openness and respect for public opinion, freedom of the press and of associational groups; where common good (general will) truncates personal aggrandizement, and makes it possible for all to share in the life of a society in a way that actualizes their potential, both as persons and as contributing members of the community.

4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

We need reformed governance that is receptive to the youths, participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and follows the rule of law. Good governance will facilitate efforts towards those who are working but are living in poverty due to poor minimum wage and rising inflation; as well as marginalized group who are frustrated in their predicament of our unfavorable politico-economy.

To remedy the plights of the youths, the Nigerian government needs to review its current empowerment programmes targeted at reducing unemployment among youths. The government

should involve the youth in redesigning the programmes, prioritizing areas of interventions based on needs assessment, developing measurable indicators and putting in place mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of the programmes. Participation of the youths will enhance the development process, especially in taking ownership, which will substantially improve their productivity and quality of life.

The dimensions of youth empowerment should address both labour supply (through education, skills development and training) and labour demand (through job creation and an enabling environment for entrepreneurship), as well as the quality of work available for young people (with regard to labour standards, working conditions and wages); so that Nigerian youths can actually become catalyst for sustainable development.

Therefore the youth empowerment dimension of SMEs (Small and Medium scale Enterprises) is crucial as key drivers of the economy, which absorb Nigeria's teeming population is very important. Thus there should be sincere efforts on improving infrastructures to relief entrepreneurs from spending massively in generating electricity and goods/services transportation hurdles on deplorable roads. Also of importance is tax relief and removal of counterproductive unfriendly business policies like exorbitant licensing fees.

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