



**THE NATIONAL YOUTH  
SERVICE CORPS SCHEME  
1973 - 2020:  
EMERGENCE, DEVELOPMENT  
AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

Edited By

**Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jr.  
&  
Chris. B.N. Ogbogbo**

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Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jr.

*Professor of History and International Studies, Federal  
University of Lafia*

&

Chris. B.N. Ogbogbo

*Professor of History, University of Ibadan*

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# The National Youth Service Corps Scheme, 1973 - 2020: Emergence, Development and Achievements

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## DEDICATION

To

All the founding fathers of the NYSC Scheme



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A

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## Notes on Contributors

### Editors

Ogbogbo, Christopher B.N. is a Professor of History at the University of Ibadan and the current Director of Research, Nigerian Army Resource Centre, Abuja. He is currently the Vice -President, Association of African Historians.

Okpeh, O. Okpeh, is a Professor of History in Department of History and International Studies, Federal University of Lafia and current President, Historical Society of Nigeria.

### Chapter Authors

Dr Abolorunde, Ayodele is a lecturer at the Department of History, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Dr Audu, Bem is of the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna, Nigeria.

Dr Azaigba, T. Kenneth is an Associate Professor in the Department of History and International Studies, Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State.

Dr Egbe, Fidelis is a Lecturer Department of History, Veritas University Abuja.

Emma-Lawson Hassan, Department of history and Diplomatic Studies, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria.

Dr Hamza, Maryam lectures at the Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna, Kaduna State.

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Dr Kwaghe Zara is an Associate Professor in History at the Department of History and International Studies, Federal University Lafia.

Dr Imbua, David is an Associate Professor in History at the University of Calabar.

Dr Muojama, Olisa is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of History, University of Ibadan.

Dr Nwaka, Jacintha Chiamaka, is an Associate Professor in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, Benin, Nigeria.

Dr Odey, Godwin is in the Department of History, Sokoto State University, Sokoto.

Dr Onobhayedo, Albert is in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, Benin, Nigeria.

Onwaniban, Evelyn is a Research Fellow with the Nigerian Army Resource Centre, Abuja.

Dr Onumonu, P. Ugo is in the Department of History, Adeleke University, Iwo.

Oladipo, Folusho Adewumi is of the Department of History, Bowen University, Iwo.

Dr Orngu, Chris is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of History, Benue State University, Makurdi.

Dr Ukase, Patrick is an Associate Professor in the Department of History, Kogi State University, Akungba, Nigeria.

Yandaki, Umar is of Uthman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto.

## FOREWORD

The National Youth Service Corps is undoubtedly one of the most enduring social institutions in Nigeria. Emerging shortly after the Nigeria Civil War, the Scheme was a child of necessity that was established to support post-civil war reconstruction efforts and particularly to promote unity and national integration. In establishing the Scheme, General Yakubu Gowon (rtd) quite frankly acknowledged the critical place of youths in the development process. His unassailable judgment in identifying the youth as agents of social change in post-civil war Nigeria is worthy of commendation. While we acknowledge the fact that the NYSC has had its challenges in the course of its development, as is the case with other institutions, we must add that these pale into insignificance when we objectively scope, dimension and benchmark its contributions to national development in its forty eight years of existence.

Some examples of this should suffice here for illustrative purposes. In addition to its exemplary role in promoting unity and national integration over the decades, the Scheme has been applauded for the development of education, healthcare delivery and social infrastructure provisioning across the country, through its primary assignment deployment and its community development service. Furthermore, the positive contributions of the NYSC in the credible conduct of elections in the country and the active participation of Corps members in national programs like population census, immunization exercise, HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention and care as well as their numerous interventions in the fight against the COVID-19 global pandemic is commendable.

The NYSC entrepreneurship training initiative is an eloquent illustration of the capacity and responsiveness of the organisation to the contemporary development needs of the

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country. I must place on record the fact that the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Programme has changed the narrative of our graduate youths from “chasers after white collar jobs” to “employers of labors and wealth creators”. I am aware many ex-Corps Members across the nooks and crannies of Nigeria are excelling in their chosen businesses. It goes without saying that through their creativity, innovations and entrepreneurial sagacity, contemporary Nigeria is undoubtedly experiencing the a new development in which a generation of profitable business owners are emerging and redefining the nation's difficult history of reliance on the oil sector.

Furthermore, in line with the Federal Government's policy on diversification, the current leadership has redirected the efforts of the Scheme towards contributing to the revenue basket of the nation. Arising from this, the NYSC has activated its garment factories in Minna and Anambra, its water filtration and bakery factories in Kubwa, Abuja, amongst others. The Scheme has similarly extended its business tentacles to the creative industry, where its cultural troop (the NYSC Troupe) is performing wonders across the country. Through these efforts, it is on record that only last year, the Scheme generated over 280 million Naira to the country's coffers.

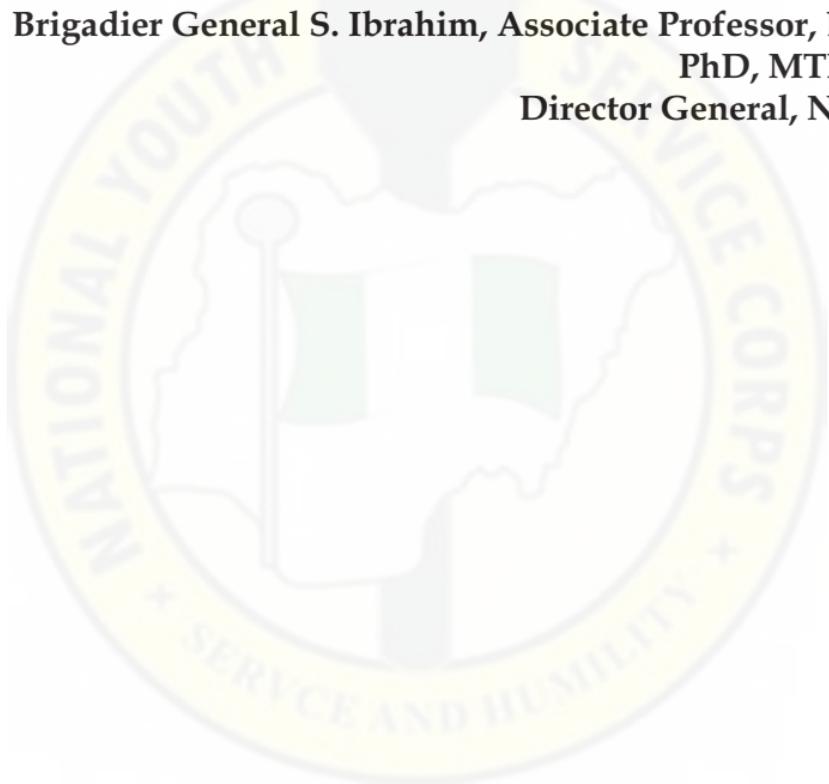
It is against the above backdrop that I am exceedingly delighted and indeed grateful to the editors and chapter contributors to this very important book titled *The National Youth Service Corps Scheme, 1973-2020: Emergence, Development and Achievements*, which focuses on the evolution of the NYSC since inception. I can confidently declare that this is the first authoritative history of the Scheme chronicled by professional historians drawn from across the nation's institutions of learning. Based on an extensive field work, robust interactions with primary, secondary and electronic sources which were carefully selected, synthesized, analyze and interpreted, the book avails readers first hand profound insights on the emergence, growth and operations, as

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well as achievements and challenges of the NYSC in the almost five decades of its existence. I commend NYSC staff and numerous stakeholders and wholeheartedly recommend the book to policy makers, youth-based organizations, youth mobilization agencies, institutions of higher learning, government and national and non-governmental organizations as well as corporate bodies.



01/4/2021

**Brigadier General S. Ibrahim, Associate Professor, DSS,  
PhD, MTRCN  
Director General, NYSC**



## INTRODUCTION

The study of the forty eight years existence of the National Youth Service Corp Scheme is coming at a time when the Nigerian Society is once again on the boil with the festering fissiparous tendencies across the Nigerian society. This analogous situation was what existed in the years before and after the Nigerian Civil War. The rising ethnic tensions in the country and the humongous multifarious security challenges are pointers to the fact that more effort is required in the persisting nation-building project. This book is partly a tale of a major effort made by the Military regime of General Yakubu Gowon to close up the yearning gaps that existed after the war amongst the various Nigerian peoples. It x-rays the strategic attempt that sought to involve the Nigerian Youths in the nations healing process after a fratricidal encounter. The NYSC scheme was a major move towards nation -building. Given that the scheme has survived for over half a century, we can safely assert that it is one of the legacies of the Gowon administration that can be rejigged and deployed to address some of Nigeria's contemporary challenges. After five decades of existence and activities, evaluating the score card of the scheme has become a necessity. It is pertinent to note that the NYSC scheme is one of the enduring and impactful institutions set up in 1973 by the General Yakubu Gowon government to address the intractable problem of state fracture and several other problems that bedeviled the country. The scheme demonstrates how state institutions can be created and deployed as a tool for social engineering. This text interrogates the origins of the scheme, her modus operandi, achievements, impact and icons of the scheme. The fact that institutions play critical roles in the development process have since been emphasized by leading scholars of development studies.<sup>1</sup> It is generally agreed that in addition to offering the

<sup>1</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (Yale University Press, 1968); Becky Carter, "Defining Institutions", in Governance and Social Development Resource Center, University of Birmingham, Retrieved

most assured nexus between policies and implementation, institutions provide the matrix for benchmarking the impact of development policies on society. This is besides providing the required contextual basis for understanding and making a sense of the entire gamut of the development process. Thus, as critical change agents, institutions promote efficiency and effectiveness in the governance process, while ensuring that all sectors and segments in society are not alienated from the development process at any point. For these reasons and a plethora of others, strong institutions have been identified as pivotal in the economic growth and development of modern societies. At a time the continent of Africa is grappling with numerous challenges which have implicated nation building, development experts are advocating and upholding strong institutions as possible solutions.<sup>2</sup> But we must note that, contrary to widely held views, Africans have always had institutions; that is, if we agree that institutions are integrated systems of rules that structure social interactions; and as formal and informal mechanisms which regulate human interactions and promote general good<sup>3</sup>.

Prior to the advent of colonialism, institutions in Africa thrived and operated as agents of profound social change and transformations. Although in some societies, these institutions existed and reflected the social relations of production; on an average, their functionality impacted the entire social processes in the continent. Under colonialism, these were reconstituted and new ones added to basically serve the colonial enterprise. Colonialism and the order it created across Africa underdeveloped social institutions in at least three basic ways, viz: (i) in the process of entrenching its primary economic concerns, it devalued African culture, norms and values; and created new ones that were at variance with the aspirations of the people; (ii) its authoritarian nature and character entrenched and

---

<sup>2</sup>Augustin K. Fosu (ed.), *Growth and Institutions in African Development*. Also read, Aysو Van Eysinga "The Role of Institutions in Development: Contemporary Debate and Application to Cote D'Ivoire's Experience, 1960-1990", Perspectives: A Publication of the International Development Programme (John Hopkins School of International Studies, 2014)

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey M. Hodgson, *The Evolution of Institutional Economics, Agency, Structure and Darwinism in American Institutionalism* (Routledge, 2004)

enforced the alienation of the mass of the people from the institutions that should ordinarily be at their beck and call; And (iii) it weaponized these institutions in the sense that instead of being agents of change and transformation, they were effective tools for oppressing and pauperizing the people<sup>4</sup>. It is this specific sense that colonialism is problematized as laying the foundations for weak institutions in the continent.

Having said that, we must emphasize the point that these inchoate institutions were handed over to our leaders when political independence was eventually negotiated in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As part of this process, political independence was a canard for neocolonialism, which was to become a major challenge to the newly independent African nations. We should note that neocolonialism implicated our political independence in multiple ways than one. First, it stunted the growth of African postcolonial economies without which political independence was meaningless.<sup>5</sup> Two, it handed over polities that were structurally defective and socially fractious.<sup>6</sup> And thirdly, it created a political class whose members were either inexperienced, lacked statesmanship and found it extremely difficult to manage the contradictions of nation building; and/or generally bankrupt.<sup>7</sup>

In this circumstance, national integration proved to be a particularly herculean task indeed. From Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa to Sudan in North Africa; from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda in East Africa to Cameroon and Rwanda in Central Africa; from Angola in Southern Africa to Nigeria in West

<sup>4</sup> See Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Toussaint L'Overture, 1976); Bade Onimode, *Imperialism and Mass Poverty: The Dialectics of Mass Poverty* (London: Zed Publishers, 1987); J. A Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley, 1991); Janice E. Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates and Sovereigns: State-Building and Extra-Territorial Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton, 1994); Ado Boahen (ed.), *UNESCO General History, VII: Africa Under Colonial Domination, 1800-1935* (Paris, UNESCO, 1990); And Toyin Falola (ed.), *Africa Vol. 3: Colonial Africa, 1885-1935* (Durham, North Carolina, 2002); P. I. Cain and A. G. Hopkins *British Imperialism, 1600-2000* (2nd Edition, London, 2001); And Claude Ake, *A Political Economy of Africa* (Ibadan: Longman Group Ltd, 1981), 71-85.

<sup>5</sup> Bade Onimode, *Imperialism and Mass Poverty*; And Claude Ake, *A Political Economy of Africa*;

<sup>6</sup> Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jr. and Ben Due Iyav, (eds.), *Leadership and Governance in Modern Africa* (Makurdi: House of Hits, Wine Press, 2015)

<sup>7</sup> W. Bokeelmann, O. Akinwumi, U.M. Nwankwo and A.O Agwuele (eds), *African Leadership Challenges and other Issues* (Berlin-Germany: Mediateam IT Educational Publishers), 2012; Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jr. and Ben Due Iyav, (eds.), *Leadership and Governance in Modern Africa* (Makurdi: House of Hits, Wine Press, 2015).

Africa; the challenge of multiculturalism became one of the core issues in the nation building efforts. The bloody civil wars which ensued in some of these countries after independence remained an eloquent testimony of the artificiality of the modern nation states crafted by colonialism, and underscored the imperative of deliberate efforts the leaders of these nations must make to sustain the corporeality of their polities. It is against this backdrop that the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme by the General Yakubu Gowon administration in post civil Nigeria comes into sharp focus and within which context it should be understood. The NYSC was initially created to drive the regime's post-civil war policy of Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation (the 3Rs), but soon became the largest youth mobilization agency in Africa committed to national integration and development. Throughout its almost five decades of existence, its quantum contributions to the development of post-independence Nigeria is incontrovertible.

This book, titled *The National Youth Service Corps Scheme, 1973-2020: Emergence, Development and Achievements*, chronicles the evolution of this institution since its emergence in 1973. Comprising of twenty one well-written chapters, the volume is fragmented into five closely interlocked sections. The first section which comprises five chapters avails the reader of a detailed background to the formation of scheme. It looks at that aspects of the history of Nigeria that sets the stage for the establishment of the scheme, the global context and idea of a service scheme, the processes involved in the establishment of the NYSC and its organizational structure. The second section focuses on the structure and policies of the scheme. Some of the themes examined in this section include, the military character of the scheme, its policy on posting and primary assignments, corps members voluntary groups and societies and the nature of the scheme's community development service. The third section examines the growth and development of the scheme and the five chapters here interrogated themes like the transformations it has experienced since its establishment, the role of leadership in its success story, changes and continuities in the NYSC uniform and the contributions of the scheme to sports and youths development in the country. Section four takes on the

achievements and contributions of the scheme to national development. The five chapters in this section discussed the NYSC and national development, the contributions of the NYSC to free and fair elections in Nigeria, the scheme and manpower development, the scheme's youth mobilization and development and the contributions of the NYSC to the Nigerian labour market. The fifth section focuses on the challenges and prospects of the NYSC. The two chapters here examine some of the teething challenges militating against the organization and the efforts taken to mitigate these even as the institutions hopes to survive beyond the 21st century.

Anchored essentially on primary sources and written in very simple language, the book is a major contribution to the history of the NYSC which although contributes immensely to national development, but is largely misunderstood by some Nigerians. It is hoped that the awareness the issues raised in the volume would generate amongst Nigerians would help resolve some of the misconceptions, ambiguities and sometimes ambivalence which some people hold against the social institution in spite of its massive contributions to national development. It is high time we began to acknowledge the role the scheme plays in nation building. Also, the challenges encountered by the scheme over the years are examined. A comprehension of these challenges will enable the stakeholders rejig the scheme for better and more impactful performance in the years ahead.

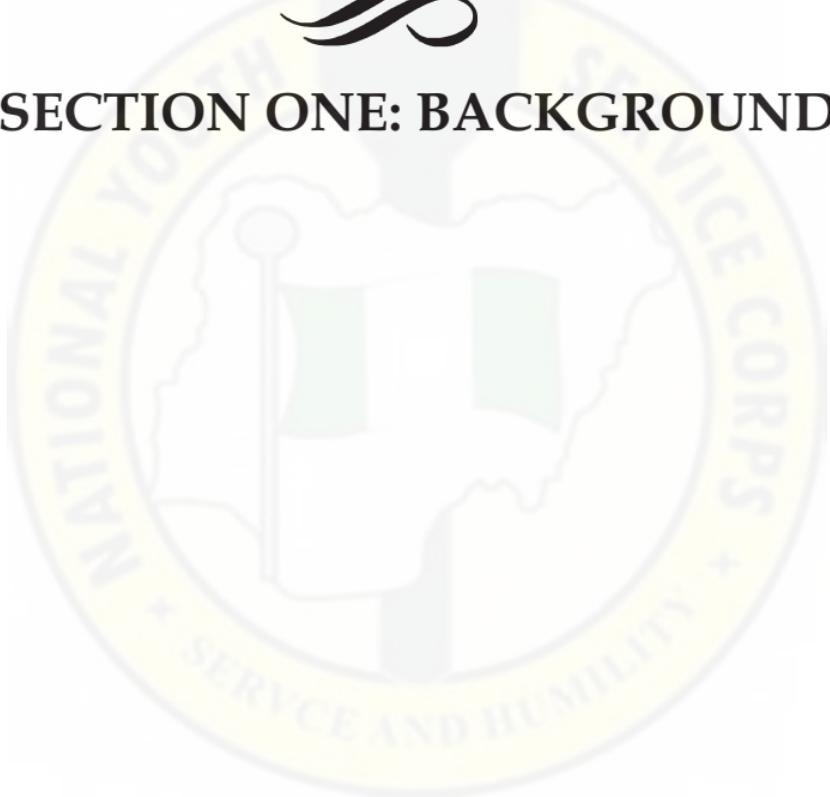
We express our profound appreciation to the founding fathers of the NYSC and is its current management led by the Director General, Brig Gen Shuaibu Ibrahim, for giving the approval and making resources available for the field work leading to the successful completion of this book. We also acknowledge with gratitude our partners at the NYSC Directorate, for their cooperation, encouragement and support. We thank our team of chapter contributors and research assistants through whose efforts the book was successfully completed. Above all, we return all glory to God Almighty.

*Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jr.  
Christopher B. N. Ogbogbo Abuja, Nigeria.*

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## SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND



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## Chapter One

# THE NIGERIAN BACKGROUND

*CBN Ogbogbo*

*Department of History  
University of Ibadan  
Ibadan, Nigeria*

Nigeria is a country of diversities and complexities. It comprises very many ethnic groups, a multiplicity of geographical landscapes and features, different vegetation and climatic conditions, varied socio-economic miscellanies, numerous delicious cuisines, multiple traditional political systems and hot-puree of cultures. Indeed, in whatever aspect of life one turns to in Nigeria, the picture that emerges is that of a salad bowl, a corpus of varieties. It is in these differences that the country derives her strength as well as her challenges. Therefore, in wielding the many Nigerian peoples together in the task of nation building, a major challenge has remained to get Nigerian peoples from every nook and cranny of the country to know and appreciate the multifaceted nature of the country.



Fig. 1: Nigeria's Six Geopolitical Zones

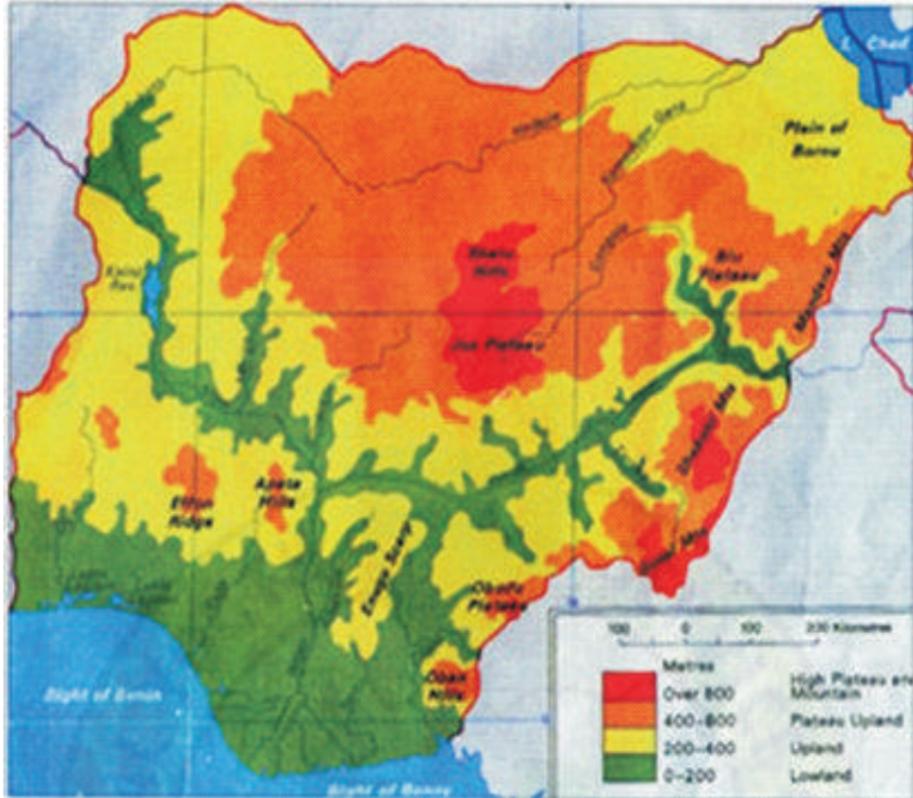
The various hitherto autonomous autochthonous groups in the Nigerian geographical area were brought together under one political umbrella in 1914 as part of British colonial adventure in Africa. This new political creation called Nigeria occupies a total land area of about 923,769 sq. km and is made up of over 250 ethnic groups. Linguists tell us that there are 529 languages in Nigeria which makes her the second most linguistically diverse country in the world.<sup>1</sup> At independence in 1960, it became a Federation which today is made up of 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory in Abuja. As at 2020, the population of the country is estimated to be over 206 million inhabitants, making her the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous in the world.<sup>2</sup> A prominent West African country, all her territorial neighbours (Benin Republic, Cameroon, Chad and Niger) have French language as their *lingua franca*.

The physical geographical features of the country are also diverse. At the southern extremity of the country is the coastal region that borders the Atlantic Ocean. It is the main swampy region of the country with a criss-crossing of rivers and water bodies. It is from this region of Nigeria that the Rivers Benue and Niger empty into the Atlantic Ocean. The rainfall in this region is intense and falls almost all year round. The peculiarity of the environment has shaped the people and the region's history and economic disposition. Before the emergence of the crude oil economy, the inhabitants were mainly fishermen, farmers, salt makers and canoe carvers. The land available for farming was circumscribed by the abundance of the swampy terrain.

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<sup>1</sup> F.O. Egbokhare (2020), "Resourcing Language for Peace and Security Management in Nigeria" being the text of a lecture delivered at the Nigerian Army Resource Centre, Abuja on 26 November 2020.

<sup>2</sup> CBN Ogbogbo (2020), in CBN Ogbogbo & Okpeh Okpeh (Eds.), "The Environment and Peopling of Nigeria" in *Nigerian History from the Earliest Times to The Twenty-First Century*, LANUV, Lagos.



**Fig. 2: Physical Features of Nigeria**

The discovery of humungous amount of crude oil deposit in the area in 1956 has made the area the goose that lays the golden egg. There has subsequently been increased migrations into the area by Nigerians and foreigners who seek to take advantage of the new oil industry. A major outcome of the oil economy is the development of cities like Bonny, Eket, Port Harcourt and Warri. These cities have become cosmopolitan and places of vigorous inter-group relations amongst Nigerians. It is in this region that you find autochthonous peoples such as the Edo, Efik, Etche, Ibibio, Ijo, Ikwerre, Isoko, Itsekiri, Urhobo, etc. Due to the nature of the terrain, most of the states formed in the pre-colonial era were city states that were limited in size due to the largely aquatic nature of the area.

Immediately above this region is thick forest belt otherwise referred to as the ever green forest. The occupants of the area are

mainly farmers and hunters. Some fishing is also carried out in some of the rivers that transverse the area. Blacksmithing and cloth weaving are also part of the occupational engagement of the peoples. The bulk of the palm oil for which Nigeria was reputed for during the palm oil trade era of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was mainly from this region. It was from this area that major centres of political civilization flourished. Prominent amongst these are the Benin and Oyo Empires. Yet, it was also in the forest region that we have the blossoming of non-centralised state systems such as was in Igboland. There are some highlands in the region. These are mainly in the Enugu area and the Ekiti axis. The predominant groups in this region are the Edo, Igbo and Yoruba and their major towns in the region are Aba, Abeokuta, Akure, Awka, Asaba, Benin, Enugu, Ibadan, Onitsha, Osogbo, Owerri and Uromi.

Moving northwards from the forest region is a place geographers referred to as the Middle belt. It is geographically a transition zone in which the thick vegetation of the forest region begins to thin out and some of the features of the savannah above is accommodated. The frequency of rainfall in the Middle belt diminishes with implications for the nature of the vegetation. It is the region where the Rivers Benue and Niger converge and make their descent into the forest and coastal regions. The region is sufficiently watered and so provides a good environment for farming both tuber and grain crops. It is due to the immense agricultural activities of the people and the quantum of their production that the area is affectionately referred to as the food basket of the region. Apart from the agricultural economy, the colonial period saw the emergence of the extractive industry in the region. Cities like Jos became famous for tin mining and attracted a lot of migrants from other regions. It is the home of the Birom, Egun, Gbagyi, Idoma, Jukun, Igala, Igbira, Nupe, Tiv and other indigenous minority peoples. They are settled in towns such as Abuja, Bida, Gboko, Ilorin, Jos, Lokoja, Minna, Okene, Otukpo and Makurdi.



Fig. 3: Map of Nigeria showing some of the ethnic groups

At the northern extreme of the Nigerian geographical area is the Sahel savannah region that has experienced the incursion of the Sahara desert. It is arid and lacks the dominant green vegetation that characterizes the Forest and Coastal regions discussed earlier. It is watered by few rivers that enable some watering of the area. The main occupation of the peoples is farming, herding and trading. There are others who engage in blacksmithing, weaving and dyeing. It has vast land mass, and to the northeastern flank is the Lake Chad which in recent times has witnessed increased desiccation. In the pre-colonial times, several international trading centres like Kano, Katsina and Bornu emerged and have remained important cities to present times. Apart from grains, they also produced meat, hides and skins from rearing livestock. Their cattle remain the major source of beef production for the other regions in the country. The Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri and other minority groups who mostly occupy this region live in towns such as Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Maiduguri, Sokoto and Yola.

The point we seek to demonstrate is that the country's diverse geographical nature has resulted in assorted cultural formations that account for differing socio-economic and

political lifestyles of the peoples. Even their traditional beliefs have been affected by these features. While those in the highlands and mountains talk about mountain spirits and gods, those in the southern extremity of the country are more inclined towards water spirits and mermaids. The nature of Nigerian peoples' food intake has also been largely determined by these geographical features. While further north of the country, grains consumption seems to be the major staple of the people, those in the forest areas have yams and tuber crops generally as their major food source. For the coastal areas, fish and plantains feature prominently in their cuisine.

The peoples and communities that make up what is today called Nigeria have existed for thousands of years in the geographical areas where they located. However, it took the British conquest and imposition of colonial rule to bring the very many groups under one political authority in 1914. Since then, there have been the challenge of wielding the disparate peoples into a nation state. Although diverse, the many peoples have, down the ages, interacted with one another vigorously. These interactions span the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods in her history. Indeed, it has meant decades of cordial relationships as well as periods of tension between the multifaceted groups. Culturally, even though the groups have developed their unique traits over the years, they also have areas of cultural convergence as a result of hitherto existing inter-group relations. These many groups in Nigeria have over the years evolved their various cultural traits which have given them their unique identities. It can therefore be argued that before and since 1914, there has been a further consolidation and convergence of certain aspects of the different peoples' culture that can today be regarded as an emerging Nigerian identity.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the diverse environmental features of the country have contributed immensely in shaping the history and cultures of

the different Nigerian peoples.

The stories of origin of most Nigerian peoples are interwoven with those of their neighbours. While some communities and groups allude to migrations from places outside the Nigerian geographical area, others assert with certainty that they migrated from locations within the Nigerian area. The implication is that, in terms of origin, some Nigerian groups have some communalities with some other Nigerian peoples. As pointed out elsewhere, these migrations have not ceased. They have continued in different waves and guises for various reasons. This has complicated the nature of inter-group relations amongst Nigerian peoples. The waves of migrations are not just within the country but from outside the country. For example, Nigeria is currently witnessing in 2020, the influx of migrants presumed to be mainly Fulani from other parts Africa into Nigeria<sup>4</sup>. It is this that led to the conclusion that "migrations have continued in droves even in contemporary times for economic, political, social, environmental and various other reasons. We can, therefore, assert that migrations within and from outside the country have been a continuing phenomenon before, during and after colonial rule for several reasons"<sup>5</sup>.

The establishment, growth and development of some cities and urban centres since colonial era are partly due this phenomenon of population movements. This is the case with Lagos and Abuja at the Federal government's level, while at the state levels, towns like Awka, Asaba, Enugu, Ibadan, Jos, Kaduna, Kano, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt, Sokoto, Warri, Yenagoa, etc. have emerged as major urban centres. The point being made is that the growth and development of these towns is partly explicable in terms of the movement of peoples into

<sup>4</sup> N.E. Lenshie (2020), 'Nomadic Migration and Rural Violence in Nigeria: Interrogating the Conflicts between Fulani Herdsman and Farmers in Taraba State', *Ethnic Studies Review*, 43 (1) pp.65-69.

<sup>5</sup> CBN Ogbogbo (2020). "The Environment and Peopling of Nigeria".

these areas. There is also the phenomenon of migrations from rural areas of Nigeria to urban centres that serves as a point of convergence for those seeking greener pastures. These movements of people are not limited to locations within Nigeria alone, but have a good dose of movements into these cities from West Africa in particular and the rest of the African continent in their search for better economic opportunities. Prominent commercial cities such as Aba, Kano, Lagos, Onitsha and Port Harcourt are good examples of cosmopolitan cities that have acquired an international status.

It is important to emphasize that these cities have been a melting-pot for Nigerians from different ethnic groups. They have become major centres of inter-group relations as well as nation building. However, the cities represent a small percentage of where the bulk of the Nigerian citizens dwell. Indeed, a good chunk of the Nigerian population are rural dwellers. Rural areas that are grossly underdeveloped, lack infrastructural facilities and having populations that are largely homogenous and indigenous to the area. This was the picture of Nigeria during and after colonial rule. The differences amongst the peoples and areas were palpable. There was, therefore, a crave amongst patriots and nationalist to address these divisions in the country by formulating policies that will seek to forge the various peoples together and accelerate the pace of nation building.

One of the legacies of colonialism in Nigeria is the wielding of her disparate peoples under one political umbrella. This introduced into the body politics of the country intense political rivalry amongst the many ethnic groups in the quest for political power. It also brought certain dichotomies into the body politics of the country. For instance, the wielding together of hitherto autonomous groups created a categorisation of some as minorities and others as majority groups. These dichotomies resulted in rivalries amongst the various identities. There was also competition amongst ethnic groups for the emergent

economic opportunities. These rivalries created tensions and heated up the polity. The convergence of peoples in the growing commercial centres and new administrative cities seem to have exacerbated the competitions and rivalries amongst the various ethnic groups in the country. Various ethnic group associations began to emerge as organisations geared towards catering for and protecting the affairs of their members. For instance, there were the Egbe Omo Oduwa of the Yoruba, the Igbo Union and the Arewa Front of the Hausa-Fulani and other Northern Nigerian peoples. Apart from these major ethnic groups, there were many town unions that also sought political, economic and developmental advantages for their towns and members.

For our purpose, it is important to point out that the rivalries amongst these groups did create some tensions in the country and put substantial strain on cordial inter-group relations. Suspicion amongst one another became ripe. More importantly, there was ignorance about and prejudices against one another. This became much more manifested in the political sphere after independence. Apart from the fact that most of the political parties wore an ethnic toga, the politicians, in their search for power, exploited the ethnic differences. They, thus inadvertently, became ethnic jingoists who fanned the group differences. They, in every election circle, became more and more of a centrifugal force. It was this tense situation, coupled with a concatenation of factors, which provided a justification for a military take-over of the political machinery of the state in January 1966.

The wielding of the disparate groups in the Nigerian area into one political entity was completed in 1914 with the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Protectorates. What preceded the 1914 merger were what historians refer to as wars of pacification and subjugation between the Britain and the different Nigerian peoples. After the amalgamation, for administrative convenience, the country was divided into several provinces. By 1954, the country was divided into three

main regions. These were the Northern, Western and Eastern regions. This division sought to bring together groups that were ethnically, culturally and historically contiguous. While the Northern region comprised the Hausa-Fulani as the main dominant group with other minorities, the Western region was made up mainly of Yoruba peoples and some other less populous ethnic groups. The Igbo were the major players in the Eastern region and like the earlier two regions, they had a several minority groups. From this three regional political structure, an additional region, Midwestern region, was created from the Western region in 1963. From the four regions of the post-independence era, the country was reconfigured into twelve states on the eve of the Nigerian civil war in 1967. What is instructive for our purpose is the fact that with every novel political reconfiguration, new identities were created with its concomitant challenges and tensions between the peoples under the new identity and those from which they were extricated. Since then, there has been several state creation efforts by different military regimes that have culminated into 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory.

In accounting for the first military coup in Nigeria, several factors that we will not be able to explore gravitated the country into a three-year period of unprecedented massacre and bloodletting in Nigeria's history. What is important for our purpose is that there was substantial ethnic suspicion and a drifting apart of the various ethnic groups. The civilian politicians who manned the state lacked the political brinkmanship to properly co-ordinate the affairs of the state. Part of the charges against them was the unbridled corruption that characterised their era in the first half of the 1960s. The corruption, rivalries and attempt to dominate and control the constituencies of their political opponents, ultimately plunged the country into a 30-month conflagration.

The civil war that ensued, called the Nigeria-Biafra war, resulted in monumental destruction of lives and properties.

There was gross damage of the scanty infrastructural facilities hitherto existed. The country, especially the Biafran enclave which approximated to the then Eastern region, was heavily damaged. Roads, bridges, buildings, schools and hospitals all became part of the war casualties. Indeed, after the war, Nigeria was faced with the humongous challenge of rebuilding the country.

The General Yakubu Gowon's administration had at the end of the war declared that there was no victor no vanquished. His government consequently proclaimed the official policy of 3 Rs i.e. Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation. It was targeted at uniting the country through reintegration of the Biafrans back into the Nigerian fold. To accomplish the set out objectives required not just political will and the requisite financial resources but also the necessary manpower to rejig the country. In order to address the problem of disunity, it was realised that the issue of prejudice borne out of ignorance needed to be tackled in the hearts of the people.

Part of the strategy adopted by the military administration of General Gowon was to address the challenges of disunity and underdevelopment through the establishment of the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) scheme for graduates of higher institutions. There were two major likely dividends of the programme. It was expected that deploying the energetic educated youth population to every nook and cranny of the country will expose them to the varied cultures and peoples of Nigeria. This was expected to clear their misgivings and positively reorient their thoughts and actions towards other ethnic groups. It also served as a programme that should enable them understand their country and be able to address the development challenges confronting the country. This is especially so as the educated youth population constitute a critical mass of the educated population equipped with requisite skills that will enable them impact on the larger society.



**Fig. 4:** General Yakubu Gowon

It was, therefore, in the judgement of the General Yakubu Gowon's administration that the peculiar challenge of divisiveness and the centripetal tendencies that characterised the decades preceding that of 1970s should be redressed. Nigerian youths were, after the civil war, conscripted into the NYSC scheme to form the vanguard of those to usher a *resorgimento* that will give birth to a new Nigeria. The Youth Corps members were to be the answer to the seminal inquisition of Obaro Ikime in *In search of Nigerians*.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the Corps members were to provide the gravitational pull for the emergence of the 'de-ethnicised' Nigerian who understood the challenges of nation building and was willing to contribute his/her quota to the task of revitalising the Nigerian nation after the civil war. They were to provide that critical cord of unity amongst Nigerians in the post-civil war years.

Put differently, there has since 1914, been a considerable fusion of the various Nigerian peoples. Unfortunately, this aspect of Nigerian history, i.e. the cords of unity, is often not emphasised; rather, it is the actions of disunity that are regularly

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<sup>6</sup>O. Ikime, (1985), *In Search of Nigerians: Changing Patterns of Inter Group - Relations in an Evolving Nation State*, Historical Society of Nigeria, Ibadan.

focused on whenever there are nation building challenges. In the course of implementing the NYSC dream over the years, the programme has witnessed considerable tweaking, continuities and changes. What is important is that it has continued to survive in spite of the question of continuing relevance that has arisen in recent times. The rest of this book attempts a rigorous interrogation of the NYSC story, the achievements and successes of the programme and areas of inadequacy that could inform a rejigging of the scheme.

It is a truism that the idea of a youth service scheme is not a novel one. Other countries like Israel, United States of America, Tanzania, Botswana, Ethiopia, etc. did establish their youth schemes before Nigeria's. It is argued that taking into cognisance the nature of the Nigerian environment just before the 1970s and the timing of the establishment of the NYSC Scheme, it was apparent that the scheme was one whose time had come and the leadership of the country responded timeously to a yearning gap that was waiting to be filled.

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## Chapter Two

# THE IDEA OF NATIONAL SERVICE: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

*Okpeh O. Okpeh Jr.*

*Department of History & International Studies  
Federal University of Lafia*

“Ask not what your country can do for you;  
ask what you can do for your country”

**John F. Kennedy, January 1961**

### 1. Introduction

Historically, the notion of national service resonates with all nations. Nations evolve national values to which citizens subscribe. Allegiance to the nation is therefore almost always considered sacrosanct because national call to duty is the highest form of instinctive loyalty a citizen can accord his/her country. Across the globe, this sense of psychic and emotional identification with the nation on the part of citizens is what is referred to as patriotism. This profound loyalty to the nation has been expressed in many ways by different countries, depending on the values they cherish and strongly uphold, and the extent to which they subscribe to their history. Some express it by performing their civic duties to the nation, while others simply identify with and completely submit themselves to what their country considers as core national values. Yet others offer themselves in service to the nation in whatever form, at whatever level and for whatever purpose. Experts have observed that such total commitment usually requires the institutionalization of a social system and process which sets up values that transcend the parochial interests of the constituent parts of the nation.<sup>1</sup> As an integral part of this process,

the nation must also have and demonstrate the capacity to compel such respect and loyalty from citizens by the extent to which it protects and provides for them. It is against this backdrop that this chapter examines the idea of National Service (NS) from a global perspective and links this with our experience with the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). It discusses the pristine ideas and variables that informed its establishment in May 1973 and shows how changes at the global and national scenes have informed some of the structural transformations it has undergone. We would conclude by highlighting some of its major contributions to national development.

## 2. The Notion of National Service: Some Conceptual Insights

The notion of a National Service (NS) has never occurred in a vacuum. Indeed, across the globe, there is a sense in which nations latch on their historical experiences and sense of oneness, critical demographics and their perception of the international system as well as their role in it, to institutionalize national values with which citizens identify. A deeper understanding of the idea of NS would therefore require a conceptualization of the idea of the nation. We must ask what the nation is to understand the national values that arouse citizens' instinctive loyalty to the nation, in the first place. A variety of definitions avail themselves for consideration in this regard. In one context, the nation is conceived as a community of people whose members are bonded in one by a sense of community solidarity, cultural traditions, and a feeling of common identity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (London: Methuen, 1977); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, UK: Verso Editions, 198) Arthur A. Nwankwo, *National Consciousness for Nigeria* Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1985 York: University of Rochester Press, 2001); And Toin Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup>Goodknows Boladei Igali, *Global Trends in State Formation: An Introduction into the Origin, Survival and Demise of States* (USA and Canada: Trafford Publishers, 2014), 7

Benedict Anderson, however, argues that nations are essentially *imagined entities* which are delimited because of their boundaries and based on the idea of those considered to be *within* and *outside* the boundaries.<sup>3</sup> Based on this, he tersely submits that nations exist and are operated through exclusion: those who belong and those who do not.

On his part, Paul Gilbert offers what should ordinarily be considered as an elastic concept of the nation, in which he isolates and describes at least six different historical situations and experiences as unique concepts of the nation as follows:

The Nominalist notion of a nation: whatever a group of people who consider themselves a nation say a nation is; The Voluntarist notion of a nation: A group of people bound by a commonly-willed nation; The Territorial notion of a nation: A group of people located in the same proximity, or territory; The Linguistic notion of a nation: A group of people who share the same language; The Axiological notion of a nation: A group of people who have the same distinctive values; The Destinarian notion of a nation: A group of people who have common history, and a common mission.<sup>4</sup>

From the above, it is clear that nations do not just emerge; they happen and evolve on the basis of certain integrative variables. These could be a common origin, language, territory and/or historical experience. It is from a combination or all of these factors that national values, identity and consciousness sprout and develop and through which the instinctive loyalty and deep sense of identification with the nation evolves in the

<sup>3</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities...*

<sup>4</sup> Paul Gilbert, "The Nationalism Project" (Westview Press, 2016). Also see James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1970); Ernest Gellina, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, New York: The Cornell University Press, 1988); Anthony D. Smith, *Nation and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); And Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism, Theory, Ideology, History* (Second Edition), (Cambridge Polity Press, 2001)

people. Thus, as we argued elsewhere, national consciousness is never (has never been and will never be) a finished business so long as the nation exists and in so far as the citizens identify with the sovereign aspirations of the nation.<sup>5</sup>

It only ceases to exist when this loyalty to the corporate existence of the nation in its citizens evaporates or begins to wane. In such circumstance, there is usually a loss of faith in the sovereignty of the nation, which if not quickly mitigated could lead to the loss of legitimacy. Where this becomes the extreme case, as we saw in the experience of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Yugoslavia,<sup>6</sup> the diverse groups in the nation would seek radical alternative options, including the dismemberment of the nation.

In order to avert this rather awkward and unfortunate fate and all the problems this could ramify into, most modern nations deliberately evolve strategies, policies, values and build institutions to keep aflame national consciousness in their citizens which they uphold as a *sine qua non* for nationalism and by extension, a requisite ingredient in the development of any meaningful national ideology. According to Nwankwo, national consciousness involves a set of cultural attitudes and beliefs which are intended to give order and meaning to a nation's political, social and economic processes. In its absence, the leader wavers, the nation drifts and the people suffer.<sup>7</sup> Arising from these, there is a sense in which National Service, national

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<sup>5</sup> Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jr., "Towards an Ideology for National Integration in 21st Century Nigeria: Some lessons from History", in *proceedings of the 3rd Faculty of Arts National Seminar on the theme The Humanities and National Integration*(Makurdi: Faculty of Arts, Benue State University, 2004), 283.

<sup>6</sup>Mihajlo Mihajlov, "Can Yugoslavia Survive?", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.2, No.2,(Spring 1991), 79-91Boladei Igali, "Nationalism in the Soviet Union", in *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs* (1991); A. Shevtsov, *The State and Nations in the USSR* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1992); Gregory Gleason, "The Federal Formular and the Collapse of the USSR", *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 22, 3 (Summer), 141-163; "The Collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and its Implications for the New World Order", unpublished paper (1992); And Ted Robert Gurr, *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Geopolitical Conflicts* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1993)

<sup>7</sup>Arthur A. Nwankwo, *National Consciousness for Nigeria*, 16-17.

consciousness, nationalism and the idea of the nation are mutually inter-locked and reinforcing to define a people, their nation and their identity. This also explains why it is hardly possible to talk about national consciousness and identity without first referring to a people in a sovereign nation. People make up the nation to the extent that the sovereignty of a nation *ab initio* resides in the people and their commitment and loyalty to the latter.

Therefore, National Service is one of the many ways citizens demonstrate commitment and loyalty to their nation. It is a system by which citizens (usually young men and women) are made to compulsorily or voluntarily serve their country for a definite period of time. The idea is to re-orient them towards greater commitment to national ideals, unity and the development of their nation. As a concept however, National Service may be described as:

An organized period of substantial “engagement” and “contribution” to local, national or world community, recognized and valued by society, with initial monetary compensation to the participant.<sup>8</sup>

In another context, National Service has been closely associated with the military and its primary purpose of defending the nation. For example, Donald Eberly, while articulating the United States experience, links it with at least four purposes as follows: (i) to make military draft more equitable; (ii) to ease the problem of youth unemployment; (iii) to activate citizen responsibility; And (iv) it is a form of experiential learning.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Michaer Sherraden cited in Godwin O. Odeh, “NYSC's Engagement in the Development of Abuja, 1982-2011”,

*Rima International Journal of Historical Studies*, Vol. 1, No 2 (Department of History, 2018), 142.

<sup>9</sup> Donald J. Eberly, “The Changing Face of National in the 20th Century”, a paper presented at the Second Global Conference on National Youth Service, Abuja, Nigeria, October 10th -14th, 1994. Similarly, for views in this regard, read A. O. Sanda, “ Youth Service and World Peace”, paper presented at the Second Global Conference on National Youth Service, Abuja, Nigeria, October 10th -14th, 1994; And Godwin O. Odeh, “Demilitarizing and Democratizing the Appointment of NYSC Director General: Forging Civil - Military Relations” In Chukwuemeka C.C. Osakwe and O. E. Tangban, et al (eds.), *War, Society and Leadership in Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Brigadier General Shuaibu Ibrahim* (Kaduna: Nigerian Defense Academy, 2020), 19-34.

The above definitions underscore a plethora of issues which we should note, even if briefly, for illustrative purposes. First, is its structural nature; which emphasizes its organizational and formal character. While it lasts, participants are subjected to a capacity building.

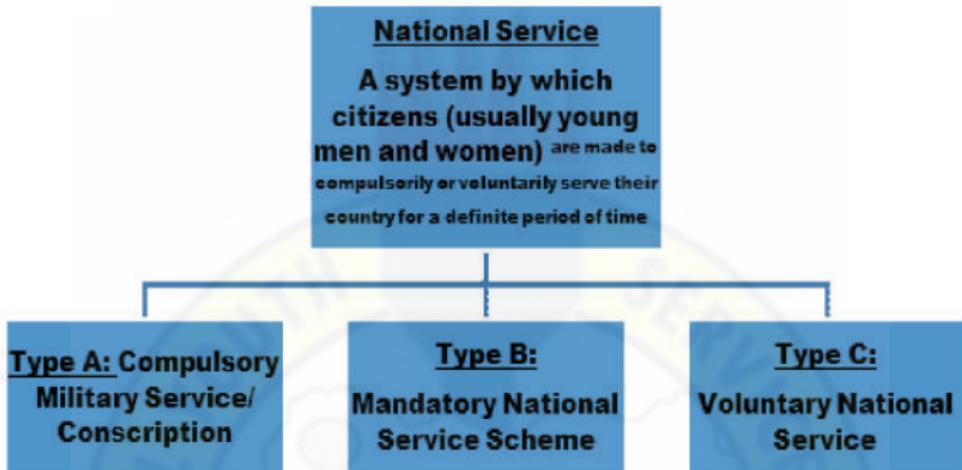


Table 1: Showing Typologies of National Service Globally

Source: Okpeh, 2020

#### Notes:

**Type A:** This typology of National Service is compulsory military service for a definite period of time during which youth are given purely military training involving the use of firearms; and imparted leadership and citizenship training. Those trained are considered reserves for possible integration into the military.

**Type B:** As in the case of Type A (above), it focuses on the youth who are required to mandatorily serve the nation for a definite period of time, usually not exceeding eighteen months during which they are taught the virtues of sacrifice, commitment and service to the nation. During the service period, they are trained to acquire requisite skills and managerial capability for future challenges.

**Type C:** This category of National Service is not compulsory or mandatory, but anchored on the principles of democratic living and upholds the need for selfless service to community or nation.

*Individuals on personal convictions present themselves for services to society.*

Process that would enable them learn new skills and imbibe new values that equip them for the challenges of the future. Frumkin and Jastrzab emphasized this point in their critical analysis of the benefits of National Service at four levels: citizenship, personal growth, social capital, and public work; all of which impact both the individual and his country positively. Secondly, it involves a definite period of time during which those participating render valued services to their community or nation. Thirdly, although it could come with monetary compensations for those involved, its primary objective and purpose transcends material gains; because, it is basically undergirded by the notion of citizenship and service to community and country considered a civic and/or patriotic duty.

We should perhaps note at the onset that participants in such services are usually young men and woman of specific age brackets, usually 18 to 35. The emphasis on this category of people is deliberate and the explanation is not far-fetched. The central place of youth in the advancement of humanity has been generally acknowledged by leading analysts.<sup>10</sup> This consensus of opinion appears to stem from the incontestable fact of their latent potential which if positively channeled could catalyze into a critical variable in the development process. Across the world and throughout the ages, nations deliberately invest in this category of people for obvious reasons. First, the youth are society's bridge to the future. As leaders of tomorrow, they have to be equipped for future challenges through a broad

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<sup>10</sup> For example, see the following works: K. Kenniston, *Youth Dissent: The Rise of a New Opposition* (New York: Harvest Books, 1971); P. K. Manning and M. Truzzi, *Youth Sociology* (Eaglewood Cliffs: Sage Publications, 1982); B. Coles, *Youths and Social Policy: Youth, Citizenship and Young Careers* (London: UCL, 1995); C. Benue J. Nwanegbo, J. T. Tsuwa and A. M. Jega (eds.), *The Youth, Democracy and National Development* (Abuja: SAP Publishing House, 1999); C. Breinbauer and M. Maddaleno, *Youth Choices and Change* (Washington, DC: PAHO, 2005); And the Benue Journal of Youth Development, Maiden Edition (Benue State University: Student Affairs Division, 2015).

empowerment process characterised by capacity building, skills acquisition and improvement of their knowledge base. Secondly and by virtue of their age bracket, they are and can be society's most productive segment, *ceteri peribus* (all things being equal). It is in this category of humans that we find the most intelligent, creative, ingenious, innovative; and also the most restless, agitated and destructive. Thus, society's hope for the future can either be actualized or dashed in the same degree to which it takes the youth. Thirdly, for continuity and development, both society and its youth need each other to advance the course of humanity.

## Evolution of the Idea of National Service

While we acknowledge the existence of the idea of service in all societies in the world, historically documented evidence of the practice of National Service has been traced to the Roman Empire around the 5th century BC, when a popular Roman General advocated a system where young men from different social backgrounds could be brought together for a period of time, during which they get to socialize and know themselves, given military training and taught the virtues of discipline, commitment and service to the Empire in friendship and the mutuality of purpose.<sup>11</sup> Most precolonial African nations also practiced this system as part of their ideology of nation-building. In the Zulu nation under Shaka for example, to become an *impis* (a fighter in the Zulu army) as a young man, one has to undergone a process of training and re-training which included, *inter alia*, isolation from the general public for a long period of time, total integration into the age-regiments and exhaustive capacity building, including training on the new technique of warfare.<sup>12</sup> The idea of National Service was again resurrected

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<sup>11</sup>T. Plutarch, "Plutarch's Life of Coriolanus", *Plutarch Lives*, Vol. 1 (Random House, 1992).

<sup>12</sup>E. A. Rither, *Shaka Zulu* (London: Longman Books, 1955); And J. D. Omer-Cooper, "The Mfecane and Great Trek", in *Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1966), pp. 357-378.

during the Second World War, when some nations codified it as part of the process of defending themselves. In 1939 for example, the United Kingdom National Service Act of 1939 was passed with the objective of enforcing conscription of all male British subjects between the ages of 18-41 to achieve this objective as a matter of core national interest.<sup>13</sup> Other European countries like France, Germany, Denmark and Norway soon followed and domesticated and popularized it in subsequent decades.

**Table 2: Showing Selected Cases of National Service Programs**

	Country	Name and Type of National Service Program	Year of Establishment
1.	United States of America	Civilian Conservation Corps (Voluntary Service) American Peace Corps (Voluntary Service) Volunteer in Service to America: VISTA (Volunteer Service) AmeriCorps (Volunteer Service)	1933 1961 1964 1993
2.	United Kingdom	UK National Military Service (Compulsory Service) Voluntary Service Overseas: VSO Voluntary Service UK Community Links (Voluntary Service)	1936 (Abolished in 1960) 1958 1960
3.	State of Israel	National Military Service (Compulsory Service)	1949
4.	Switzerland	Switzerland Service Civile (Voluntary Service)	1920
5.	Mexico	Mexico Servicio-Social (Voluntary Service)	1937
6.	Ethiopia	Ethiopia University Service (Mandatory Service)	1964
7.	Zambia	Zambia National Youth Service (Mandatory)	1963 (abolished in the 1970s and reintroduced in 2005)
8.	Nigeria	National Youth Service Corps (Mandatory) Boys Brigade Nigeria (Faith-based Voluntary Service) Boys Scout Nigeria (Voluntary Service)	1973 1960 1915
9.	Ghana	Ghana Youth Service Scheme (Mandatory Service)	1973
10.	South Africa	South Africa National Youth Service (Voluntary Service)	2004
11.	Cote D'Ivoire	Cote D'Ivoire National Civic Service Program (Voluntary Service)	2007
12.	Gambia	The Gambian National Youth Service Scheme (Mandatory Service)	1996

**Source:** Author's compilation from several sources, 2020

<sup>13</sup> See "National Service (Armed Forces) Act 1939", Hamsard.millbanksystems.com. Retrieved 15 December 2020. Also consult Richard Vinen, "National Service: Conscription in Britain 1945-1963", *The Guardian* (20 August, 2014). Retrieved on 15 December 2020

Globally, modern nations have adopted different variants of National Service according to their historical experiences. These go by different names and are operated in accordance with the core values of such nations and the depth and extent of nation-building challenges they are designed to address. As indicated in figure 1 above, it is possible to categorize National Service broadly into three types. The first and earliest type is what is generally referred to as Compulsory Military Service or Conscription (CMS). In France during the revolution in the 1790s, compulsory military service was the basis of the vastness and strength of the French military.<sup>14</sup> The practice was further deepened in the Napoleonic years, when compulsory conscription became a national policy.<sup>15</sup> With time, the system spread across most parts of Europe and was to remain till the last quarter of the 20th century. The Federal Republic of Germany for example, practiced CMS for male citizens from 1956 to 2011, when conscription was put in abeyance as part of the need to professionalize and modernize the German military and fully subject it to civilian authority.<sup>16</sup>

By far and till date, Israel and North Korea present classic examples of this category of National Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In Israel, CMS of at least one or two years is mandatory for citizens above the age of 18.<sup>17</sup> Hostilities from its Arab neighbors in the Middle East following the establishment of the state of

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<sup>14</sup> Sidney Painter, *French Chivalry: Chivalric Ideas and Practices in Medieval France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1940);

<sup>15</sup> It is often argued that the strength of Napoleon Bonaparte's military laid in the policy of compulsory military conscription which ensured the regular supply of fighting troops to his military. Every conquered territory was a potential source of soldiers through this policy. For details of this consult J. H. Rose, *The Life of Napoleon*, I (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902); And Gorge Rude, *Revolutionary Europe, 1783-1815* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966).

<sup>16</sup> William Carr, *A History of Germany: 1814-190* 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (New York and London: Routledge, 1991); and Frank B. Tipson, *A History of Modern Germany Since 1815* (California: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Although we should add that there is also voluntary national service anchored by religious bodies and social workers. For details see S. D. M Eberly (ed.), *The Moral Equivalent of War? A Study on non-Military Service in Nine Nations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1990); And Moshe Sherer, "National Service in Israel: Motivations, Volunteer Characteristics, and Levels of Content" <http://www.Journals.sagepub.com>

Israel in 1948 predisposed subsequent Israeli leaders to heavily invest in a strong military to defend itself.<sup>18</sup> As part of this process, mandatory conscription was adopted as a national policy that was to crystalize into the establishment of a “People's Army” in Israel. In North Korea, almost all able-bodied men in the country are required to serve in the army for 18 months by the time they are 28 years.<sup>19</sup>

As a centralized state under a dictatorship, military service is highly valued and in fact considered a mark of profound solidarity with the nation. Norway, Sweden and the United Arab Emirates are examples of other countries where CMS is still practiced.

The second variant of National Service is the Mandatory Service Scheme (MSS) which although compulsory for certain categories of people, is generally directed at citizenship and social capital formation and development, in addition to public work. The German scholar, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, articulated a global vision of the idea of National Service when he conceptualized it as a way of strengthening ties among the people of the world. In 1912, he vigorously advocated the engagement of young people in activities that would promote national development and the betterment of the world.<sup>20</sup> The contributions of the youth to the development of their respective nations and global interactions among youth services may be regarded as products of this idea.

This variant of National Service is quite popular in the United States where, for example, President Franklin Roosevelt, in 1933, institutionalized the opportunity for US citizens to serve their country by creating the Civilian Conservative Corps (CCC) to mitigate the vagaries of the Great Depression. As part of his

<sup>18</sup> Y. Allon, *The Making of Israel's Army* (Vallentine, Mitchell, London, 1970); Y. Allon, *Shield of David: The Making of Israel's Armed Forces* (Vallentine, Mitchell/Weidenfeld and Nolson, London, 1970); And Chaim Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars: War and Peace in the Middle East from the War of Independence through Lebanon* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984).

<sup>19</sup> Kim Chong-min, “Conscription System and Soldiers' Lives in North Korea”, *Pukhan* (August 1999), 134-145; Chong Yong-tae, *Internal and External Perceptions of North Korean Army* (Seoul: Korean Institute for National Unification, 2008); Robert L. Worden (ed.), *North Korea: A Country Study* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Multiformity of Man* (Norwich, Vermont: Argo Books, 1973)

New Deal Policy, this public work relief program enlisted men of between 18-24 years, placed them on a minimum wage and provided them food and shelter and who in turn, were available to discharge responsibilities given to them by government agencies.<sup>21</sup> There are other good examples of this type of National Service in the developing countries. In India, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru set up the National Service Scheme in September 1969 as a credible platform for mobilizing students, under the supervision of their teachers, to be directly involved in the tasks of national development.<sup>22</sup> The Indian NSS is anchored on the philosophy of skills acquisition and tailored towards addressing practical development challenges confronting the people. Similarly, in Nigeria after the Nigerian Civil War, General Yakubu Gowon established the National Youth Service Corps in 1973 to address the challenges of nation building.<sup>23</sup> Other examples of the MSS in Africa include the Tanzania National Youth Scheme (an offshoot of the youth wing of the Tanganyika Union, 1963), the Ethiopian University Service established in 1964, the Ghana Youth Service Scheme (1973), the Tirelosheba of Botswana (1980), Cote D'Ivoire National Civic Service (1997) and the Zambian National Youth Service (first introduced in 1963, abolished and re-introduced in 2005), to mention just a few significant ones.

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<sup>21</sup> This was proscribed in 1942, although other service schemes were introduced to address challenges as they emerged. In 1993 for instance, faced with the challenges of recession as US President, Bill Clinton established the AmeriCorps which was expanded to include Peace Corps and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) in subsequent years.

<sup>22</sup> The Indian NSS began with 40,000 students in 37 universities all over the country, but today after 50 years, it has over 3.8 million student volunteers across universities. It remains a core government scheme under the aegis of the Ministry Youth Affairs and Sports in Universities, colleges and schools. For details see H. H. Parmar, "The Role of National Service Scheme: An Opportunity for Youth to Contribute to Nation-Building" in *National Service Scheme and Nation Building*, Vol. 7, Issue 4, (March 2019), pp. 34-37; And S. K. Shashanks, "National Service Scheme: An Under Utilized Arm of Nation-Building", *Youth Journal*, (12 November, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> Godwin O. Odeh, *Nigeria NYSC's Role in the Founding of The Gambian National Youth Service, 1996-2004*, A PhD Dissertation Submitted to the Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, 2019; And *National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition*, (Abuja: NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, 2013). The details of this are discussed in the next segment of this chapter.

The third, and for now, the last type of National Service in the conceptual scheme we have formulated for analytical purposes, is the Volunteer National Service (VNS). This appears to be the most popular type of National Service because it is voluntary; in the sense that it is not compulsory or mandatory like the first two types. Driven on the logic of service to humanity through serving the people, the community or the nation; the VNS has no age limit (although it draws its membership from youth organisations) and it is most popular during moments of natural or man-made emergencies.<sup>24</sup> Outside moments of crises, they assist government agencies in enlightenment and advocacy activities essential for national development. The NVS has been associated with the notion of "volunteerism", itself a concept subjected to a myriad of definitions. While acknowledging this fact, we are inclined to accept the one offered by the International Labour Organisation and the John Hopkins State University, which refers to it as:

Unpaid non-compulsory work; that is, the time individuals give without pay to activities performed either through an organization or directly through others outside their own household.<sup>25</sup>

From the above, it is clear that volunteers in the VNS are never expected to receive any kind of monetary compensation, but are sometimes given stipends to help off-set living expenses and/or reimbursements to cover expenses incurred in the cause of service.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, the NVS is operated on a code of conduct to which members are required to mandatorily abide. Indeed, to ensure such strict compliance, it is usually regulated by state agencies or affiliate bodies. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV)

<sup>24</sup> S. D. M Eberly (ed.), *The Moral Equivalent of War?*. Also see Moshe Sherer, "National Service in Israel: Motivations, Volunteer Characteristics, and Levels of Content".

<sup>25</sup> Available at:

[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public...dgreports/...integration/...stat/documents/publication/wcms\\_162119.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public...dgreports/...integration/...stat/documents/publication/wcms_162119.pdf) [Retrieved on 17/12/2020]

<sup>26</sup> CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizenship Participation, "Civil Society Volunteerism Patterns in Africa: An Analysis of CIVICUS Civil Society Index, 2008-2011"

program, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and their affiliates, have continued to explore types of volunteer action and formulated a framework on volunteering practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> This framework acknowledges the existence of the notion of volunteerism in all nations of the world and broadly classifies them into two: the formal type, which operates within the confines of government agencies, and the informal type operated by individuals moved by human compassion to serve humanity. On this basis, it teases out at least six voluntary organization types as follows: charities, foundations, social welfare organisations, advocacy groups, faith-based organisations and recreational sports groups. There are also international, national and local variants of these bodies. The VNS resonates with humanity at every stage of its development: be it pre-modern, modern and postmodern. In its most modern form, it has been related with the First and particularly the Second World War during which the pains and agonies of these conflicts overwhelmed nations of the world. During this period, nations appealed to their citizens to either enlist in formal or direct volunteer services. From that period till date, the VNS and its replicas have continued to proliferate across all societies (see Table 1), performing duties which have profoundly impacted human existence. It is therefore not surprising why these forms of National Service are highly regarded globally.

#### **4. The Context of the Nigerian National Youth Service Corps Scheme**

The preceding foray into the idea of National Service is deliberately intended as a background to the understanding of our experience with the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme. What were the developments that made the NYSC

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<sup>27</sup> J. Butcher and C. J. Einolf (eds.), *Perspectives on Volunteering: Voices from the South* (Switzerland: Springer); And UNV, *Volunteering Practices in the Twenty-First Century* (London: United Kingdom, 2020) International, 2017)

institutionalization inevitable? What purpose was it designed to serve and to what extent has it served this? Generally, the idea of the NYSC is believed to have emerged from the events that led to the Nigerian thirty months civil war (fought between 1967 and 1970).<sup>28</sup> Commentators argue that it was the mismanagement of the country's multiculturalism by the ruling elites that led to the needless civil war, in the first place. The civil war was an eloquent testimony of the fragility of the colonialism-inspired modern nation-states in Africa which were generally prone to ethno-religious antagonism and conflicts.

Emphasizing this point, J. O'Connel in 1967 formulated his "the inevitability of instability" thesis in which he forcefully argues that (i) the boundaries of African nations were drawn arbitrarily by the colonial powers and that the ethnically and politically diverse peoples grouped together under the artificial boundaries were only held together by the force of a powerful, authoritarian and externally colonial power; (ii) that these ethnic divisions and social cleavages re-asserted themselves very powerfully as the competition for state power and other public resources deepened just before and after independence; And (iii) that the political elites who inherited power from the departing colonial rulers, having themselves been brought up under the authoritarian tradition of the colonial state, and having come to power under various ethnic platforms, lacked the state-craft skill-set to handle these ethnic conflicts, and so relied on

<sup>28</sup>For more on the Nigerian Civil War read: A. Ademoyega, *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup*, Ibadan: 1975; O. Obasanjo *My Command* (Ibadan: 1980); O. Obasanjo, *Nzeogwu*, Ibadan: 1987; A. Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*(Enugu: 1980); F. Oyewole, *The Reluctant Rebel*, (Akure: 1977); J. O. G. Achuzia, *Requiem Biafra* (Enugu:1986);

D. Jemibowen, *A Combatant in Government*, (Ibadan: 1978); B. Gbulie , *Nigeria's Five Majors*(Onitsha: 1981); J. Garba, *Revolution in Nigeria: Another View*, (London: 1968); R. B. Alade, *The Broken Bridge*, Ibadan: 1975; J. J. Oluleye, *Military Leadership in Nigeria: 1966-1979*,(Ibadan: 1985); And L A. Mazi S. Oluabuna, M.O. Thompson (eds), *The Nigerian 1966 Coup and Biafra: Myths and Realities*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 2018)

mediocrity, corruption and ethnic politics of divide and rule in order to survive.<sup>29</sup> The result was that national ideals were whittled down and the emerging African nation-states suffered legitimacy deficit which culminated into civil wars.

In Nigeria, the civil war underscored the urgent need for the State and its ruling elite to invest heavily in the project of national consciousness, creating a new political culture and inspiring Nigerians to greater national ideals and commitment. The war had created an almost chaotic post-civil war situation requiring the intervention of the State. Although at the end of the war, the Nigerian military leadership had declared that there was "no victor or vanquished" as a basis for a national rebirth,<sup>30</sup> the social cost of the war was indeed huge. It was partly to address these challenges that the State announced its post-civil war policy of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, all aimed at rebuilding the country, promoting national unity and mitigating future social conflicts of such magnitude.<sup>31</sup> But in order to achieve this goal, a crop of Nigerians were required to drive the national reconciliation and rebirth program. Two critical institutions were established for this purpose: the first was the NYSC, established on 4th May 1973 and the second was the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) set up six years later in 1979. While the former was targeted at

<sup>29</sup> J. O'Connel, "The Inevitability of Instability", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1967). For more on this see Shehu Musa, "Ethnicity, Social Cohesion and National Integration", in Round-Table Meeting on Ethnicity in Nigeria: Implications for National Development (Kuru: National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies Kuru, 1983); Steven Nkom, "The Social Basis for National Integration in Nigeria", in Abdullahi Mahadi and George A. Kwanashie, *et al* (eds.), *Nigeria: The State of the Nation and the Way Forward* (Kaduna: Arewa House, 1994), pp.430-444 ; And Matthew Kukah, "Religion and the Politics of National Integration", in Abdullahi Mahadi and George A. Kwanashie, *et al* (eds.), *Nigeria: The State of the Nation and the Way Forward* (Kaduna: Arewa House, 1994), pp. 445-458.

<sup>30</sup> Jonah I. Elaigwu, *Gowon* (Ibadan: West Books Publishers Limited, 1986); E. Osaghae and E. Onwudiwe, et al (eds.) *The Nigerian Civil War and its Aftermath* (Ibadan: John Archer Publishers Limited, 2002); And Armstrong M. Adejo (ed.). *The Nigerian Civil War, Forty Years After: What Lessons* (Ibadan: Historical Society of Nigeria, 2008)

<sup>31</sup> Okpeh O. Okpeh, "Post Civil War Reconstruction in West Africa: A Comparative Study Nigeria under General Yakubu Gowon and Liberia under Charles Taylor", in Toyin Falola and Raphael C. Njoku (eds.), *War And Peace in Africa*, Durham, North Carolina: Carolina University Press, 2010, pp. 325-350.

Nigerian youth, considered the nation's future, the second focused on the fairly elderly, serving and retired officers, technocrats, diplomats and administrators.

However, it should be pointed out that the idea of a national scheme in Nigeria was also partly aroused by Nigerian diaspora in the United States and the United Kingdom long before the civil war broke out. This crop of Nigerians were genuinely troubled by the divisive politics of the ruling elites which undermined the prospects of the First Republic and sought ways of mitigating it. Series of meetings were convened at the end of which a proposal was forwarded to the Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, on the need to establish a Peace Corp patterned after the one in the US before the January 1966 coup.<sup>32</sup> This group of concerned Nigerians again forwarded the document to General Johnson Aguyi-Ironsi, but as fate would have it, he was so immersed in the crisis of the period that he had little or no time to consider it prior the counter-coup of July 1966 that overthrew his regime and eventually claimed his life. Soon after the war, the idea of a national scheme was again mooted and this time, it received the blessing of the Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon.

Arising from this, Decree No. 24 of 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1973, abrogated by Decree No. 51 of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1993, now known as NYSC ACT CAP N84 Laws of the Federation 2004, proclaimed the establishment of the NYSC.<sup>33</sup> The objectives of the scheme are as follows:

- (i) To inculcate discipline in Nigerian Youth by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work and of patriotic and loyal service to the Nation in any situation they may find themselves;

<sup>32</sup> Interviews: Gregory Kas Enegewea, c. 76 years interviewed in Abuja by Dr. Godwin O. Odey, 28/04/2018. Enegewea was to head the team of the NYSC experts sent to the Gambia in 1996 to study the aim and expected outcomes of the Gambian National Youth Service Scheme.

<sup>33</sup> The National Youth Service Corps, *The National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 45th Anniversary Commemorative Edition* (Abuja: NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, 2018). We must add that these objectives have been reviewed several times by the NYSC Headquarters, although the core issues of unity and national integration remains constant.

- (ii) To raise the moral tone of the Nigerian Youth by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement;
- (iii) To develop in the Nigerian Youth, attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest;
- (iv) To enable Nigerian Youth acquire the spirit of self-reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self-development;
- (v) To contribute to the accelerated growth of the National Economy;
- (vi) To develop common ties among the Nigerian Youth and promote National Unity and integration
- (vii) To remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups; And
- (viii) To develop a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of Nigeria.<sup>34</sup>

Mobilized corps members are expected to swear an oath of allegiance to serve the nation with commitment and dedication, as is evident in fig 2. This pledge expectedly binds them to the ideals of the scheme and keeps them focused on national assignment throughout the period of service. We should add that this form of regimentation of the scheme is what has made some observers to push the argument that the NYSC is created in the image of the Nigerian military and it is operated in accordance with some of its rules of conduct.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The National Youth Service Corps, *The National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 45th Anniversary Commemorative Edition*, p. 20.

<sup>35</sup> Godwin O. Odeh, for example has called for the demilitarization of the NYSC Director Generalship as the first step towards the total transformation of the scheme in accordance with the prevailing democratic dispensation. This, he argues, would reposition the scheme and make more responsive to the challenges of the 21st century. For details see Godwin O. Odeh, "Demilitarizing and Democratizing the Appointment of NYSC Director General" in Osakwe and Tangban, *et.al* (eds).

A cursory look at the above objectives and the related NYSC pledge would reveal the fact that the scheme was indeed a product of profound introspection by its founders. As an instrument for enhancing national consciousness, unity and integration, it may well be driven by globally established and acknowledged body of philosophical ideas on National Service. Three of these are critical and should be noted as follows: (i) National Service as moral equivalent of war; (ii) National Service as service-learning, and (iii); National Service as a way of mobilising and stimulating solidarity among peoples of different socio-cultural backgrounds for higher national aspirations. It is for these reasons that some scholars have consistently acknowledged its essence as a national institution and advocated for its strengthening in our national life along with others like NIPSS.<sup>36</sup> The justification for such reasoning could be gleaned from the contributions of the scheme to national development, a theme we turn to in the next segment of this chapter.

**Fig 2: Sample of the National Youth Service Corps Pledge**

In pursuance of our aspiration to build a united, peaceful, prosperous, hate-free, egalitarian society and a great nation and our motto "Service and Humility."

I, .....OKPEH OCHAYI OKPEH, Jr.....

(Name of Member)

Member of the National Youth Corps 1991 hereby pledge to follow at all times the leadership of those in authority irrespective of their social and educational background and in particular, I shall:

- (a) At all times and in all places think, act, regard myself and speak first as a Nigerian before anything else;
- (b) Be proud of the fatherland, appreciate and cherish the culture, traditions, arts and languages of the nation;
- (c) Be prepared to serve honestly, faithfully and, if need be, pay the supreme sacrifice for the fatherland;
- (d) Be well-informed about the history, geography, economy and resources of Nigeria; (e) Regard fellow Nigerians as my brothers and sisters and myself as my "Brother's keeper";
- (f) Have a healthy attitude to work and play. I shall not only be ready to work in any part of the country to which I am deployed, but also genuinely identify myself with the problems and aspirations of the people of the areas in which I work;
- (g) Tackle difficulties and challenges in a disciplined and self-reliant manner, constitutionally pursuing grievances and properly channeling such for redress;
- (h) See myself always as a leader who must give effective leadership by my transparent honesty and selfless service;
- (i) Detest and shun bribery and all forms of corruption and nepotism; (j) Be courteous and polite to all and sundry;
- (k) Be obedient without being lavish; And
- (l) Always remember the motto and strive continuously to live up to the ideals of the National Youth Service Corps during and after my service year.

So help me God

.....OKPEH OCHAYI OKPEH, Jr.....

(Corps Member)

NYSC Call UP No. of Corps Member....Jos/56553.....

State Registration No. of Corps Member....0125....

Date...16th September 1991...

Sworn to the National Youth Service Corps Orientation Camp in...Yikpata, Kwara State... this ...1st day of ...October 1991

BEFORE ME  
.....SIGNED.....  
CHIEF JUDGE

## The NYSC Scheme and National Development

Ali Mazrui, the renown Kenyan political philosopher, once argued that the challenge of nation-building confronting contemporary Africa is fourfold: (i) how to indigenise what is foreign (ii) how to idealise what was indigenous, (iii) how to nationalise what was sectional and ethnic and (iv) how to emphasise what was African.<sup>37</sup> Embedded in this conception of the nation-building challenges is the all important question of the weak, dysfunctional, near or complete absence of strong institutions pervading the continent and why this must be mitigated for sustainable development to happen. The point is, strong or viable institutions benchmark and drive development, and until contemporary African nations and their leaders understand this, the continent and its peoples still have a long way to go in the backwaters of underdevelopment. In addition, and as we pointed out at the beginning, national consciousness and total solidarity with the nation cannot occur outside the institutionalization of national values to which all or a greater number of citizens subscribe or identify with. It must be a deliberate State policy which should be nurtured like the very idea of the nation.

It is against the above backdrop that we would attempt to explain the contributions of the NYSC scheme as a national institution which has contributed immensely to the project of nation-building in Nigeria since it was established 47 years ago. First, the scheme has remained the greatest and most effective instrument for youth mobilisation in postcolonial Nigeria. Yearly and since the decade of its establishment in the 1970s, the scheme mobilizes hundreds of thousands of youths across the country to avail themselves for national service. Indeed, there is no part of the country today that corps members are not found: from the most remote parts of the North to the creeks of the Niger Delta, corps members abound. By virtue of its structure and the philosophy underpinning its operations, the scheme has done very well in instilling discipline, focus and the highest

<sup>37</sup> Ali A. Mazrui, Cultural Engineering and Nation-Building in Kenya (Evanston, 1972), p. 7-10.

sense of purpose in the nation's youths. As eloquently captured by Brigadier General Ibrahim, the current Director General of the Scheme:

Youth are critical agents of change and social transformation in all human societies. In focusing on youth mobilization, the founders of the NYSC envisaged a pivotal role for Nigerian youth in the development process. I can confidently tell you that the NYSC, more than any other public institution in this country, has done exceedingly well in positively organizing Nigerian youth for national aspirations and development. This is an incontrovertible fact, but unfortunately, one that is hardly acknowledged by many Nigerians.<sup>38</sup>

Another area from which the contributions of the NYSC can be viewed is in the important sphere of national integration. Nigeria is a multi-cultural polity with not less than 350 ethnic nationalities at different levels of development fused together by history. Managing this mosaic of ethnic nationalities has been a herculean challenge that is at the very basis of the country's continued existence, what is sometimes referred to as the National Question.<sup>39</sup> Since its inception, the NYSC has been at the forefront of promoting cross-cultural consanguinity, integration and cohesion amongst Nigerians. The notion of the orientation camps where corps members are kept for weeks and pristine policy of posting corps members outside their states of origin have greatly helped Nigerians to appreciate the history, cultures and traditions of other Nigerians, thereby smoothening cultural

<sup>38</sup> Interviews: Shuabu Ibrahim, 55 years, Military Officer, interviewed on 15/07/2020.

<sup>39</sup> For more on the national Question, read: Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin, 1993); Eghosa E. Osahae and Ebere Onwudiwe (eds.), *The Management of the National Question in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Programme on Ethnic and Federal Studies, 2001); Nankin Bagudu and Dakas C. J. Dakas (eds.), *The Right to be Different: Perspectives on Minority Rights, the Cultural Middle Belt and Constitutionalism in Nigeria* (Jos: League of Human Rights, 2001); Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jr., (ed.), *The Sovereign National Conference* (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2003). And Yakubu A. Ochefu and Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jr. et al (eds), *Historical Consciousness, Social Engineering and Nation-Building in Nigeria* (Historical Society of Nigeria, 2014).

fault lines and promoting unity in diversity. Discussing this point, the Ooni of Ife, Oba Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi, Ojaja II points out that:

[the] NYSC is one the few programmes that have helped in keeping Nigeria together as one indivisible entity. The exposure young Nigerians gained during National Service has gone a long way to foster harmony among people of diverse backgrounds. It is gratifying to note the numerous inter-tribal marriages that have taken place as a result of couples meeting during the NYSC programme.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, the experiences of corps members during the service year have helped to shape their perceptions of the “Tower of Barbel” called Nigeria. Not only do they understand its historical evolution, but they have often come to appreciate the cultural differences and, more importantly, similarities of its peoples. Through such processes, cultures interface with one another, coalesce and eventually evolve and integrate in Nigeria. This cannot be taken for granted because no cultural group in any geopolitical entity can exist in isolation from others, its resource endowments notwithstanding.

By far, the most widely acknowledged contribution of the NYSC to nation-building is in the sphere of quality manpower provisioning for the development of the country. Since the scheme focuses on mobilizing youth as agents of societal transformation, it cannot but be observed that it is a critical stakeholder in the Nigerian project. Emphasizing this important point, HRH Oba Babatude Adewale Ajayi, the Akarigbo of Remoland avers that:

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), since inception and through its mandate, has contributed to the development of the physical, moral and intellectual

growth of Nigerian youth, thereby giving them the opportunity to contribute their quota to the overall national development. In raising an army of vibrant and knowledgeable youths, the NYSC reserves as the largest man-power resource which has impacted significantly on the development of Nigeria.<sup>41</sup>

Corps members straddle every sector of the nation's society and economy, displaying raw talent, creativity, ingenuity and innovation. Both the public and private sectors have, over the last four decades, consistently and maximally tapped into this to optimize their productivity and enhance service delivery capacity from the lowest to the highest levels. The evidence of this can be gleaned from the way corps members keep winning merit and excellence awards in their places of primary assignments in recognition of their commitment and dedication to service. Responding to a question in this regard, General Ibrahim expressed with contentment that:

Corps members are everywhere in the nooks and crannies of this country. Even in the Escravos you see our corps members either working as medical doctors, nurses, medical laboratory scientists/technicians and so on. Also, the history of elections in this country cannot be complete without the NYSC ... Corps members are knowledgeable, smarter and can be held accountable. This is why corps members are always used for the conduct of elections in Nigeria.<sup>42</sup>

One important area corps members have demonstrated uncommon dedication to serving the country is in their contribution to rural development. By rural development here we are referring to the process of transforming the quality of life

<sup>41</sup> National Youth Service Corp, *NYSC Year Book: 45th Commemorative Edition*, p.81.

<sup>42</sup> Interviews: Shuabu Ibrahim, 55 years, Military Officer, interviewed on 15/07/2020. Similarly see NYSC, *NYSC News: Journal of NYSC* (Directorate Headquarters, APMAJU522020), 2020, pp. 68-74.

and economic well-being of people living in rural areas.<sup>43</sup> The rural areas in Nigeria houses between 75-80% of the total population of the country; it also produces approximately 80-95% of the food and other needs of the country.<sup>44</sup> Yet over the years, life in the country's rural areas have been stagnant and characterized by a vacuous existence as a result of which the rural dwellers are largely traumatized by poverty, hunger, destitution and diseases; as well as neglected. Through its policies on Area of Primary Assignment and particularly Community Development Service (CDS), the NYSC has since inception, brought government closer to the rural dwellers. Corps members through their group and personal projects, initiate and execute projects such as library building, bore-hole, bus-stop stands, roads and culverts constructions; as well as public conveniences rehabilitation, to mention just a few. In addition, they carry out humanitarian activities, public awareness and enlightenment campaigns on government policies and programs, advocacy and intervention initiatives which have changed the narratives of the rural areas in the country.

The NYSC Leadership Training and Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development programs have also immensely added value to the rural dwellers, who are the greatest beneficiaries of the jobs being created through the entrepreneurial activities of corps members. The remarkable increase in rural job creation in contemporary Nigeria remains a glaring achievement of the efficacy of these programs in tackling unemployment in the country.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> See, Onigu Otite , "Rural Nigeria" in Onigu Otite and Christine Okali (eds.), *Readings in Rural Sociology and Rural Economy* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1990), pp13-22. Also see S. K. Williams, *Rural Development in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1974); O. Ijere, *Leading Issues in Rural Development* (Enugu: Acena Publishers, 1992); And Mike O. Odey, *Food Crop Production, Hunger, and Rural Poverty in Nigeria's Benue Area, 1920-1995* (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2011).

<sup>44</sup> Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jr. "The Rural Woman and the Women Empowerment Question in Nigeria: A Reflection on Some Issues", in *African Journal of Environmental Law and Development Studies*, Vol. 1, 2005, pp.99-113.

<sup>45</sup> S. Stroud, *National Youth Service, Employability, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Livelihoods: Overview of the National Youth Service Landscape in Sub-Saharan Africa*.(2013),Accessed 17/12 2020.

Today we have a new crop of entrepreneurs that are employers of labour and not job-seekers swelling the army of the unemployed on our streets. Again, commenting on this, General Ibrahim has this to say:

The NYSC SAED and other related programs are actually doing incredibly well, especially in the areas of the production of employers of labour and more importantly, the creation of new jobs. Through the businesses ex-corps members have established, the country is experiencing a new development in which a generation of profitable business owners are emerging and redefining the nation's long history of reliance on the oil sector. We must emphasize that the 21st century belongs to this new generations of business men and women. Armed with creativity, ingenuity and an information technology enabled organizational skill-set, they will certainly rewrite the economic history of this great country. Welcome to the new Nigeria!<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

Globally, nations exist on the basis of national consciousness which defines the depth and extent of citizens' patriotic identification with them. Every nation creates its own national values and institutions in which its core national interests are reflected and to which its citizens are committed. The idea of National Service is a critical component of citizens' expressive solidarity with national ideals. As an ideology, it defines national goals and aspirations and creates the basis for the individual's unquestionable loyalty to his/her nation. Thus, it exists and is operationalized across nations all over the world as a veritable platform for the expression of faith and the demonstration of commitment to the sovereignty of a country. In Nigeria, the NYSC since inception in 1973, represents the most

formidable forum for the enlightened youth to express their solidarity and commitment to the unity of Nigeria. As we have shown in the preceding paragraphs, throughout its 47 years of existence, the scheme has served the purpose of mobilizing the nation's youths, training and equipping them to creditably and more effectively tackle the challenges of nation-building.

Although the NYSC scheme and the ideas underpinning its existence have undergone tremendous changes and transformation over the decades, there are still rooms for rejigging in light of emerging development challenges the Nigerian nation is grappling with. It would seem the gains the scheme recoded in the areas of uniting the country before 1999 are being reversed with the deepening and expansion of the democratic space since 1999. Religious bigotry and divisive politics which have consistently characterized the struggle for political power between the elites have undermined the corporeality of the nation. Today, we are confronted with the challenge of insurgency and discordant agitations for self-determination in virtually all the geo-political zones in the country. The NYSC scheme must appropriately respond to this challenge in ways that would calm frail nerves across the country. Using the instrumentality of its philosophy and intervention programs, the scheme should renew its commitment to national ideals, by strengthening corps members' capacity to engage patriotic advocacy with zeal, vigor and fervour. In addition, the ideology of national integration which the scheme propagates must move beyond mere campaigns. The NYSC Directorate should initiate concrete and strategic alliance with relevant government agencies and professional bodies to implement some of its lofty ideas.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> For example, we are yet to see any practical relationship between the Scheme and the National Orientation Agency, National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies and Professional organizations like the Historical Society of Nigeria and the Philosophers' Association of Nigeria, etc, all of which are critical to the national rebirth agenda of the current administration.

Nation-building is an unending serious business to which nations and their leaders must commit quantum resources and time. As our development challenges in the 21st century are being compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, new strategies must be brought to bear in order to stay above board. While the NYSC's response to the pandemic through the gallant activities of its corps members across the country is commendable, we must add that because it reserves the biggest monopoly of quality manpower repository in the country, a lot of networking would be required in the area of corps members posting for effectiveness. Employers of labor in the public and private sectors still reject corps members on posting to their establishments. Certainly, there must be something corps members can do and should be engaged to do. On the whole, we conclude that the NYSC scheme is a worthy idea which has contributed to the development of Nigeria. Indeed, judging by the philosophy undergirding it and the performance of corps members so far, it remains a true national monument from which every part of the country has directly or indirectly benefited. The scheme should be sustained and strengthened to continue to fulfill its onerous mandate to the nation.

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## Chapter Three

# THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS SCHEME IN NIGERIA

*Jacinta Chiamaka Nwaka*

*Department of History and  
International Studies*

### Introduction

The need to mobilize youths for national service locally and internationally has been a global trend since the Twentieth Century.<sup>1</sup> Though functional in some developed world before and during the Second World War,<sup>2</sup> it gained wide acceptance in other parts of the world as a mechanism for national unity and socio-economic development from the second half of the century.<sup>3</sup> With the end of colonial rule, many independent states of Africa turned to national youth service scheme as a means of harnessing the resources of their youth for tackling socio-economic problems and other challenges of the post-independence era.<sup>4</sup> The Ethiopian Students One Year Compulsory Rural Service, the National Service of Ghana Youth Pioneers, the Kenyan National Youth Service, The Malawi

<sup>1</sup> Eberly portraying, the origin of national service as an alternative to military service linked its emergence to the pioneering role of William James, (John Dewey and Eugen Roseenstock Haessy) who in his Moral Equivalent of War speech in 1906 laid the foundation for civilian service to be undertaken not only by those who conscientiously decline from military engagements, but also by young people from all walks of life. William argued for conscription of the youthful population who, according to him, would be drafted off based on their preference to such places as coal mines and fishing fleets, "where they would get the childishness knocked out of them and return to their societies with healthier sympathies and soberer ideas." Eberly D.J. (1994), "Youth Service and Human Heritage", Paper Presented at the Second Global Conference on National Youth Service, Abuja.

<sup>2</sup> The Civilian Conservative Corps (CCC) was set up in the United States following the Great Depression of the 1930s

to help provide constructive work for the youth at the time of mass unemployment. There were also, the Voluntary In-Service to America (VISITA) in the US, Graduate Voluntary Service and Cadet Voluntary Service, in Britain. <sup>3</sup> Udende, P and Salaou, A. (2015), "National Youth Service Corps Scheme and the Quest for National Unity and Development. A Public Relation Perspective" Available at

Accessed, 707/08/20.

<sup>4</sup> Sanda, O.A. (1994) "Youth Service and World Peace" Paper Presented on Second Global Conference on National Youth Service, Abuja.

Young Pioneers, the Ugandan National Union of Youth Organization, The Zambian Youth Service and the Tanzanian National Youth Service, were all established in appreciation of the uniqueness of youths' contributions towards nation-building at a very critical period in the lives of these States. In Kenya, for instance, the National Youth Service was established in 1964 to see to the "training of young citizens to serve the nation, and the employment of its members in task of national importance, and otherwise in the service of the nation"<sup>5</sup> In other words, the Kenyan scheme is primarily geared towards preparing its members for employability and for service towards national development. Similarly, Ethiopian National Service set up in 1964 required all university students to break their studies for one year before the final year to provide services, especially teaching services, in rural communities. Ghana's one-year post-graduate service and Malawi's Young Pioneer, in addition to other goals, equally reflected the need to address the problem of socio-economic development, especially unemployment by providing the youth with necessary training and experience.

In addition to socio-economic development, the quest for national unity and integration forms another major driver of national youth service in Africa. Having inherited colonial boundaries and political structures, inter-ethnic relations were tension-ridden generating intense animosities that metamorphosed into civil wars in extreme cases. In states with such experiences, the quest for national unity dominated discussions on nation-building at a time and formed priorities *vis-à-vis* national policies and implementations. As Eberly and Gal have stressed, the importance of youth behavior in rebuilding post-conflict societies cannot be overemphasized.<sup>6</sup> Nigeria is one of the countries in Africa whose national youth

<sup>5</sup> Griffin Gun, quoted in Onwere, Chioma, (1992), "National Youth Service Program and National Integration in Nigeria" PhD Dissertation , Institute of Education, University of London, p.179.

<sup>6</sup> Eberly, D. J and Gal, R. (2007), "A Role for Young People in Building Post Conflict Civil Society" *International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law* Vol. 9, No. 4 Available at [http://www.icnc.org/research/journal/vol9iss4/special\\_3.htm](http://www.icnc.org/research/journal/vol9iss4/special_3.htm) Accessed 07/08/20

service program appeared to have zoomed largely from the quest for national integration after a protracted civil war. The aim of this work is to historicize the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme in the country. In view of this, the work, which is sectionalized into three major parts, addresses the background to the establishment of the scheme, its establishment, and some key points of its instrument of actualization. All these are geared towards a better grasp of the forces behind and obstacles to the setting up of the scheme, its objectives, modus operandi and components at establishment, and the strength of the scheme as enshrined in its major instrument – the NYSC Act.

## **Antecedents to the Establishment of the National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria**

Although motivation for the NYSC in Nigeria is generally associated with General Gowon's post-war policy implementation, events that culminated into the birth of the scheme pre-dated the post-war period. While there is no evidence of a precise date on which the call for such service was made, the idea seemed to have been suggested by some Nigerians as far back as 1963.<sup>7</sup> The need to do away with tribal segregation and reposition the minds of Nigerians towards national cohesion, deal with the high rate of unemployment, and mobilize young minds for nation-building were among the key reasons for such a call.<sup>8</sup> However, the clamour for national youth service scheme in the country took a centre stage from 1965 when other prominent Nigerians especially those of the university system – students and lecturers, began to mount pressure for the scheme. Desiring a scheme modeled after Nkrumah's Young Pioneers of Ghana, Nigerian students called on the authorities of

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<sup>7</sup> Tai Solarin in 1973 noted that he had earlier called for the establishment of the national youth service around that time. See Solarin Tai, (1973) "Thoughts of Tai Solarin: The Flaws in Our Youth Service Corps", *Nigerian Tribune*, April 24, p.9.

<sup>8</sup> Ajiboye, Agunbiade, Solomon 1993, *The National Youth Service Corps: Challenge to Government, the Youth and the Nigerian Society*, (Ibadan: NISER University of Ibadan)

their various universities to establish a form of youth service for the nation.<sup>9</sup> That such demand was popular among university students in the mid-1960s is evident in the request which, according to Agunbiade, was made by the students of the University of Ibadan to the then Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who was on a visit to the University in 1965. In response to an appeal by the student leader to consider setting up a 'Young Volunteer Corps for both civilian and military purposes', the Prime Minister remarked that students "are dangerous without guns"<sup>10</sup>

Nigerian students appeared to have made their appeal for national youth service again in 1967 before the former leader of the Nigerian Military Government, General Yakubu Gowon.<sup>11</sup> In the same vein, the Committee of Vice Chancellors of Nigerian Universities favoured the scheme and was poised towards bold steps in this direction. The Committee, feeling that many sectors in Nigeria were neglected as a result of the movement of the youth to urban centers, thought it necessary to establish a scheme which would help to provide a reasonable spread of manpower in the country. Based on the reports of the panel it set up to examine the idea, the Committee of Vice Chancellors announced its plans to introduce the national youth service program in 1971 for undergraduate in their penultimate year.<sup>12</sup> The Committee further invited Mr. Alec Dickson, former Principal of the Man O' War Bay Training Center, to give expert advice on details of the scheme. Dickson's report which was submitted in 1970 dealt with issues relating to the objectives, administration, training, scope of the scheme and allowance for

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<sup>9</sup> National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), (1983). Summative Evaluation Report of the Ten Years of National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria, (Lagos: Directorate of NYSC)

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Ajiboye, p.1.

<sup>11</sup> Following a rumor that some students of the University of Nigeria Nsukka were drafted into the Biafran Army, a request was said to have come from the students on the Federal side to join the war as a form of national service.

<sup>12</sup> Committee of Vice Chancellors, National Service Scheme for Nigerian Students, Report of the Working Panel, April, 1969.

those that would be enrolled in the scheme.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, the Federal Military Government had commissioned a study enquiry in 1968 headed by LT. Col. Nicholas Ajayi Anyanru, to look into the probability of introducing a service corps for Nigeria; the report of the study committee did not only favour the national service scheme, it suggested that such program should run on voluntary basis.<sup>14</sup> Given the precarious situation in Nigeria at the time,<sup>15</sup> it was anticipated that the service corps would be "concerned initially with relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, but potentially becoming a permanent scheme for mobilizing Nigerian youth for development tasks"<sup>16</sup> There is no doubt that numerous public demands for such a scheme combined with the report of the government's study committee must have influenced government decision to take a bold step in the direction of national youth service at the end of the civil war.

Having identified ethnic suspicion, mass illiteracy, poverty and uneven distribution of the available manpower as parts of the major problems of the country after the war, the Federal Military Government pointed out five cardinal objectives of the Second National Development Plan (NDP) - a united strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy, a just and egalitarian society, a land of full and bright opportunities for all citizens, and a free and democratic society.<sup>17</sup> General Yakubu Gowon's unshakeable conviction in the potential of the youth in achieving these goals informed the inclusion of the National Youth Service Corps in the NDP:

<sup>13</sup> Alec Dickson's Report on National Service by Nigerian Students, August, 1970

<sup>14</sup> National Youth Service (1977), Evaluative Report on Four Years of NYSC Scheme, (Lagos: Directorate of NYSC)

<sup>15</sup> Nigeria was engulfed in a thirty-month civil war (1967-1970) that got its land and population, especially in its former Eastern Region, devastated.

<sup>16</sup> Adenowo, Abeke, (1972), "Youth Should Help in Developing the Nation", *Morning Post*, April 10, p.12

<sup>17</sup> Federal Republic of Nigeria, (1970), Second National Development Plan (NDP) 1970-1974, (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information), p. 261.

High priority will also be accorded to the establishment of a National Youth Service Organization designed to develop young persons in stimulated work conditions. The primary aim of the organization is to provide youth with appropriate training in various skills in real working conditions, inculcating in them a healthy attitude towards manual labor. The organization will also provide a means of channeling the talents and energies of youth towards national service through the spirit of community service.<sup>18</sup>

The usefulness of the program in addressing the problems of unemployment was equally articulated in the plan, as stated below:

A national Youth Corps will be established designed to provide healthy working orientation for young unemployed school leavers. The corps will be deployed on projects in the rural communities involving the building of roads, bridges, schools and dispensaries. In the process, various skills will be acquired in the areas of carpentry, welding, shoemaking, pottery, electrical works, motor and tractor driving...<sup>19</sup>

In other words, National Youth Service Corps as reflected in the second NDP captured fully the burning desire of Nigerians to channel the resources from this segment of the Nigerian population into socio-economic development. However, the insertion of the NYSC scheme into the National Development Plan did not imply its establishment. The scheme had to wait for another three years before it was finally set rolling.

One outstanding development that was key to its kick-off was the debilitating effects of the Nigerian Civil War and the need to unify Nigeria and Nigerians for national growth and development. The thirty-month war left Nigerians physically, psychologically, and emotionally battered with fear and

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

suspicion rife in various quarters. With such air of uncertainty, a good number of those with bitter experiences of the tragic war were unwilling to reside in some parts of Nigeria. Besides, given the character of the war, its winding and the top down approach to the post war peace-building, some Nigerians were made to live with bitter memories of the war - a development that was likely to prioritize ethnic loyalties to the chagrin of national consciousness.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, national integration featured prominently in Gowon's post-war programme. As leaders of tomorrow, the post-war integration programme cannot overlook the role of the youth in building a strong and united Nigeria. Indeed, Gowon seemed to have demonstrated his faith in the younger generation to secure the future of the country by giving the youth a special place in his post-war policy of integration. In 1972, the Federal Military Government announced its readiness to start the National Youth Service Corps scheme in the following year with graduate youth of Nigerian universities. In his address to mark the twelfth anniversary of Nigerian independence, the Head of the Nigerian military government stated:

The Federal Government recognizes that the future of this country lies in the hands of the youth of today. It is therefore prepared to ensure that it provides the physical, mental and spiritual environment in which these young persons can grow up to be worthy citizens of this great nation... I promised the nation, when launching the current four-year Development Plan that government proposed to establish a compulsory National Youth Service Corps, the aim of which is to bring together our qualified young men and women, and to inculcate in them a sense of discipline, dedication, national pride and

<sup>20</sup> Onuoha, Godwin. 2018. "Memory, Reconciliation, and Peace-building in Post-Civil War Southeastern Nigeria." African Peace-building Network (APN) Working Paper Series, no. 19; see also Korieh Chima, (2012), *The Nigeria-Biafra War: Genocide and the Politics of Memory*, (New York: Cambria Press)

consciousness through nationally-directed disciplined training not necessarily in armed forces, but in serving the nation in any capacity for a short period in their life before settling down in their chosen carriers.<sup>21</sup>

Further clarifications on the scheme were later made.<sup>22</sup> However, these clarifications did not preclude some negative reactions that greeted Gowon's speech and the move to establish the scheme. Irrespective of the fact that Nigerian students were at the forefront of the agitation for the creation of such scheme<sup>23</sup> they were the first to register their protest against government move in that direction.<sup>24</sup> University and polytechnic students protested in Ibadan, Lagos, Ife, Zaria, and Benin with placards which revealed the basis of their grievances. One of the placards in Ife read: " Youth Service with Adult Service"<sup>25</sup> In Lagos, student carried a coffin with the inscription: "#60 00 Compulsory National Service: Rest in Pieces"<sup>26</sup> According to the President of the National Union of Nigerian Student (NUNS), Mr. Chigozie Maduka, if the government wants to truly address the problem of nation-building, it must include all citizens including – public officers, commissioners and permanent secretaries who ought to take the lead in such program.<sup>27</sup> NUNS maintained that students will not serve in the program unless four key conditions were satisfied:

<sup>21</sup>Yakubu Gowon (1972), "Twelve Years of Nigerian Independence: National Broadcast" *The Nigerian Police Magazine*, 1972-7 . Independence Day Edition, p. 21

<sup>22</sup>One of such clarifications was made by the Head of the Nigerian Military Government, General Yakubu Gowon, in 1972 while addressing the crowd at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

<sup>23</sup> Of the 2852 who responded to the question on the type of service preferred, 85% of them opted for participating in a compulsory national service. For detail see NYSC, Evaluative Report on Four Years of NYSC, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Jonah Munonye, (2020), participants in the student protests at the then University of Lagos, Interview, Onitsha, 12<sup>th</sup> September.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Sanda A.O., (1982), *Problems and Prospects of the National Youth Service Corps*, (Ibadan: Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research), p.16

<sup>26</sup>Dr. Chigozie Maduka, (2020), The then President of the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS), Interview, Benin City, 8<sup>th</sup> October.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid, see also "Student Reps Should Be Included in the Planning and Execution Body" *West African Pilot*, December 9, 1972, p.1.

- Provisions of sponsorship and loan for all students in higher institutions in Nigeria
- Ensure adequate accommodation in these institutions
- Guarantee vacation job during long vacation and employment after graduation
- Utilize other youth, particularly unemployed secondary school leavers, in the meantime, while university graduates will follow later<sup>28</sup>

Maduka further noted that the students' protest was never against the scheme but rather, against its planning. In his words, "how can a student whose parents or kinsmen trained from loans and community contributions embark on a compulsory national service?"<sup>29</sup> This point was further emphasized by Amale who noted that national service is premised on the principles that every citizen renders services to the nation for benefit derived from it, but in the case of Nigeria's NYSC, the government, according to him, was asking for a return for the service it did not render.<sup>30</sup> He argued that the Nigerian students would not have given their approval to that planning package if they were invited to be part of the planning.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, the students' opposition to the scheme was, as Munonye affirmed, financially motivated, as well as a reaction to lack of inclusive program of planning.<sup>32</sup> It is pertinent to note that the students through their university unions had not only submitted their recommendations on national service to the Committee of the Vice Chancellors through Dickson's Committee in May 1970, NUNS, but had also called on the Federal Government to speed up plans for the establishment of

<sup>28</sup> Munonye, Interview; see also "Service Plan Refused for Graduates from June 1973" *Nigerian Tribune*, December. 1972 p.1.

<sup>29</sup> Maduka, Interview

<sup>30</sup> J. Amale, (2020), participant in the student protest at the University of Ife, Benin City, 2<sup>nd</sup> November.

<sup>31</sup> Munonye, Interview

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

national service for Nigerian students at the same period.<sup>33</sup> Based on the Tanzanian experience in which the failure of the authorities to involve students in the planning stage generated hostility against its National Service Scheme, Dickson had also advised in his report that the Federal Government of Nigeria should try as much as possible to carry students along in the planning stage through consultation.<sup>34</sup> The failure of the government to toe such cautious line therefore explained the negative reactions from the students.

Meanwhile, other efforts to accommodate the students' view through workshops organized by the Committee of Vice Chancellors in the University of Ibadan was aborted by NUNS when it staged a walk-out from the workshop accusing the Federal Government of proposing such a program without the students' input.<sup>35</sup> The impasse was later resolved when NUNS was invited for a preliminary discussions with representatives from the government. By the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1973, the student body had given its consent to the establishment of the scheme while seeking further clarifications from the government.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the students' protest, some academics in Nigerian universities reacted to the proposed program while acknowledging the importance of national service in Nigeria's development. In a symposium organized by the Association of Economics Students, University of Ibadan Chapter, there was a concern among academics on the possibility of turning the Scheme into an instrument for dampening the revolutionary potential of the youth.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> The Student Union of the University of Ibadan submitted its memorandum titled: "National Service for Nigerian Students – Best Step in the Best Direction" to Alec Dickson's Committee. See Dickson's Report, p.27.

<sup>34</sup> Dickson Report, p. 27.

<sup>35</sup> Maduka, Interview; see also Debate on National Youth Service Corps: Undergraduate Walked Out in Protest, *Nigerian Observer*, February, 24 1973, p.16

<sup>36</sup> According to Maduka, the government eventually invited the students to series of meetings which culminated in the acceptance of some of their demands including the tinge of the Nigerian Youth Service Corps with a paramilitary flavor; see also Students Now Pledges Loyalty to Gowon" *Renaissance*, March 15, 1973, p.3

<sup>37</sup> Balogun, Yemi, (2015), "Why Youth Service in Nigeria: The Contests and Agitations, 1972-1973" *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol.7, No.8, pp.153-171.

It was equally argued that an overhaul of the system was a more appropriate solution than the surface-scratching of the contradictions in the Development Plan.<sup>38</sup> The government was also asked to explain the rationale for compulsory service for students that saw themselves through their university education. Academics were said to have raised further concern about inadequate facilities for the scheme to be impactful on the students.<sup>39</sup> Finally, the opinion that the task of nation-building will not be achieved if only a section of the nation is mobilized was also popular among academics.<sup>40</sup>

Outside the university system, the proposed National Youth Service triggered some reactions as well. Some parents opposed the scheme on grounds that it would delay their wards from entering the labour market. Eager to have themselves relieved of the financial burden at home or pay back utilized loan, such parents argued that national youth service scheme in Nigeria should have been preceded by free education.<sup>41</sup> There were those who expressed fear of insecurity in other regions and, therefore, were unwilling to allow their wards travel to such areas.<sup>42</sup> Numerous other Nigerians suggested more concrete proposals that were strongly geared towards a socio-economic-oriented youth service.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, popular among public opinion is the view that the Scheme was primarily designed to address the obvious shortage of skilled labour in the north.<sup>44</sup> This argument was buttressed by

<sup>38</sup>Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Amale, Interview

<sup>40</sup>Balogun, "Why Youth Service..."

<sup>41</sup>NYSC, Summative Evaluation Report, pp.14-15

<sup>42</sup>Such fear at that period was informed by two factors - the nature of inter-group relations in Nigeria particularly after the civil war and the rising narratives of the existence of evil spirits in various parts of the country.

<sup>43</sup> Adenowo, Abeke, (1973), "Youths Role in National Development Stressed", *Nigerian observer*, May 29, p.24.

<sup>44</sup>One of the major challenges faced by Nigeria in the 1960s and 70s was the disproportionate concentration of skilled manpower in Urban areas. It was to solve this problem which was highly prevalent among medical doctors that the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) and National Council of Health Workers rolled out a program of one year compulsory service in rural areas as a precondition for full registration as a medical doctor and in pursuit of specialist training. For details on manpower distribution in Nigeria, see National Manpower Board (NMB), 1964 Nigeria's High-Level Manpower Studies, No. 2 Table 5; NMB, (1969), Survey of Manpower Shortage and Surpluses, 9Federal Ministry of Information) p.20.

the fact that majority of the graduates were from the southern part of the country. By the rule that requires a graduate to serve in a state other than his own, it follows that a good number of the southern graduates will find themselves in the north. Sequel to these reactions, General Gowon announced in February 1973 that there were still rooms for debate on the proposed Scheme.<sup>45</sup> By the end of March, 1973, oppositions to the scheme seemed to have subsided considerably for a take-off of the program.

## The Establishment

Having provided for the extension of deliberations and consultations for clarity, the Federal Military Government of Nigeria promulgated Decree 24 of May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1973 with which it officially set up the National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria. According to Section 1 (1) of the Decree: "There is hereby established a scheme to be known as the National Youth Service Corps". The service corps shall with a view to the proper encouragement and development of common ties among the youth of Nigeria and the promotion of Nigerian unity, be charged with all such functions as pertain to the objectives of the service corps as contained in section 1 (3) of the Decree.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, a government policy statement had earlier outlined the objectives which were captured in the Decree, thus:

- (a) to inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work, and, of patriotic and of loyal service to the nation in any situation they may find themselves;
- (b) to raise their moral tone by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement and social and cultural improvement;
- (c) to develop in them attitudes and mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest;

<sup>45</sup> "Youth Service Corps Debate Still Open, *Renaissance*, February 19, 1973, p.1.

<sup>46</sup> National Youth Service Corps (1973) *NYSC Act, Decree No. 24*, (Lagos: Directorate of NYSC) p.1.

- (d) to develop common ties among them and promote national unity by ensuring that –
- as far as possible youths are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin;
  - each group assigned to work together, is as representative of the country as possible;
  - the youths are exposed to the modes of living of the people in different parts of the country, with a view to removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance and confirming at first-hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic group.
- (e) to encourage members of the service corps to seek, at the end of their corps service, career employment all over the country, thus promoting the free movement of labor;
- (f) to induce employers, partly through their experience with members of the service corps, to employ more readily qualified Nigerians irrespective of their states of origin; and,
- (g) to enable Nigerian youths to acquire the spirit of self-reliance<sup>47</sup>

At a first glance, it appears the objectives as contained in the Decree failed to capture the quest for socio-economic-oriented youth service program. But this, Sander noted, was taken care of in specific areas to which corps members were to be deployed.<sup>48</sup> Among such areas were: road construction project, rural hospitals, other hospitals, surveying and mapping, food storage and eradication of pest, social and economic survey, rehabilitation of the disabled, teaching, execution of other rural projects, all government departments and stability corporation suitable for new graduates, attachment to development council, development of sports and any other appropriate area of

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, pp.1-2

<sup>48</sup> Sanda, A.O., *Problems and Prospects of National Youth Service...* p.21

<sup>49</sup> See National Youth Service Corps (1973) *NYSC Act, Decree No. 24, p. 5*; National Youth Service Corps (1993)

*NYSC Act, Decree No. 51, 16<sup>th</sup> June, p.7.*

employment<sup>49</sup> In other words, the yearning for youth involvement in socio-economic development was fully captured in its objectives. In addition to the objectives, the eligibility criteria for the youth service were equally outlined. Every Nigerian shall:

- if at the end of the academic year 1972-73, or, as the case may be, at the end of any subsequent academic year, he shall have graduated at any university in Nigeria, or
- if at the end of the academic year 1974-75, or, as the case may be, at the end of any subsequent academic year, he shall have graduated at any university outside Nigeria, or,
- if, at the end of the academic year 1975-76, or, as the case may be, at the end of any subsequent year, he shall have obtained the Higher National Diploma (HND) or the National Certificate of Education (NCE), or such other professional qualifications as may be prescribed, or,
- If, at the end of the academic year 1975-76, as the case may be, at the end of any subsequent academic year to the end of 1983-84 academic year, he shall have obtained the National Certificate of Education,
- be under an obligation unless exempted under Section 15 of the National Youth Service Corps Act, to make himself/herself available for service for a continuous period of one year from the date specified in the call-up instrument served upon him.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> National Youth Service Corps, (1973) *NYSC Act, Decree No. 24*, pp. 2-3; see also National Youth Service Corps, (1974), "Extension of Application Order" 19 Sept.



Fig. 5.1: Prof. Adebayo Adedeji

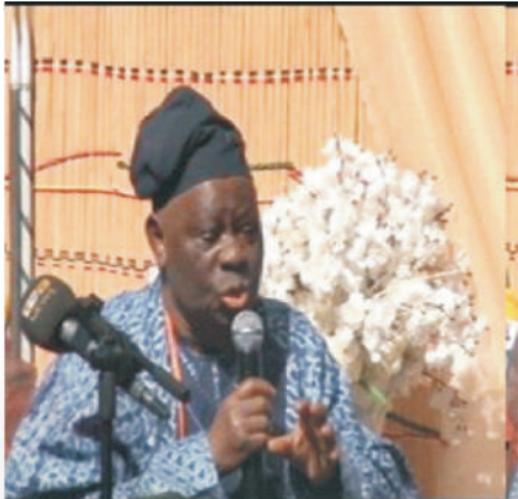


Fig. 5.2: Col. Ahmadu Ali

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1973, the Directorate of the National Youth Service Corps was inaugurated by the Head of State to see to the affairs of the program. Professor Adebayo Adedeji was appointed the first National Chairman, while Colonel Ahmadu Ali was the first National Director.<sup>51</sup> In order to drive the scheme, a four-phased program of activities was developed:

- Mobilization
- Orientation
- Primary Assignment and Community Development Service
- Winding-Up Activities and Passing-Out Parade

Mobilization, as the first phase of the program, involves collection of data on prospective Nigerian graduates eligible for youth service and deployment to the state of primary

<sup>51</sup> Other members of the Directorate were Professors H. Kodilinye, J.F. Ade Ajayi, E. U. Emovon, I.S. Audu, O.O. Akinkugbe and J.A. Okunlola (representing six universities in existence in Nigeria by then); Mr. M.A. Eweka (from the Police), Major Oladipo Diya (from the Armed Forces). Mr. A. Lamikaran (representing Nigerian employers), Alhaji Mohammad Yazidu, Mrs A.K. Pratt, Mrs. L. Dagashi (appointed by the Head of State, and one representative each from the Cabinet Office and the Federal Ministry of Education.

assignment. It begins with a Call-Up-Letter from the NYSC Directorate Headquarters which informs the candidates of the call-up-date, the state of deployment and the venue of orientation.<sup>52</sup> Those mobilized from various institutions must be students who have successfully completed their Bachelor's degree or HND program. Mobilization is followed by the orientation course which is a training program for para-military drills in preparation for the one- year service. The three weeks training, which is usually conducted in all states of the federation, is equally geared towards familiarizing the corps members with their new environment. During the period, service members live a relatively regimented life at the camp usually located outside the state capital. The orientation phase covers four key events: Swearing in Ceremony, General Orientation, Professional Orientation and the Terminal Parade.

<sup>53</sup>

From the orientation program, corps members are deployed according to section 9 of the NYSC Act to their area of primary assignment and community development. For primary assignment, they are expected to work under an employer of labour either in public or private sector for one year. Community Development Service (CDS) on the other hand, was originally a six weeks' program during which a Nigerian graduate on national youth service is expected to demonstrate his or her innovative skills and creativity towards the development of the place of deployment.<sup>54</sup> More recently, it has assumed a year-round program with corps members engaging in both primary assignment and CDS at the same time.

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<sup>52</sup>National Youth Service Corps, (1995), *NYSC Hand Book, Revised Edition* (Abuja: Directorate of NYSC), p. 15

<sup>53</sup>Ibid; see also National Youth Service Corps ,(2006), *General Policy Guidelines for NYSC Orientation Course.*(Abuja: Directorate of the NYSC)

<sup>54</sup>National Youth Service Corps, (1984), *Project Document, Nigerian Youth Service Corps,* (Lagos: Directorate of NYSC).

As the name suggests, Winding-Up program is a farewell package that features cultural display, drama and presentation of gifts to outstanding service corps members. The program brings all corps members to the state capital for a closing ceremony which equally provides opportunity for evaluation of the scheme. In attendance are usually the state governors and some other state dignitaries. At the end of the program, a certificate of participation without which employers of labour are not supposed to offer employment to Nigerian graduates is issued to every participant in the program.<sup>55</sup> It is pertinent to note that in some cases, participants upon completion of the national youth service program, are given full employment in their place of primary assignment. Some equally gain employment at the end of their youth service programme in other sectors within their state of deployment. This is not only in line with the national integration as envisioned by the scheme when it was set up, the Nigerian government at various levels further went extra mile in the early days of the NYSC to promote similar trends through various means.<sup>56</sup>

With the establishment of the Directorate of the NYSC, the program schedule for the first year of service (1973-1974) was approved as follows:

- Call-up - July 2, 1973
- Orientation Program – July 2-31, 1973
- Tour of the State Assignment, August 1-7, 1973
- Primary Assignment, August 8 1973-June 23 1974
- Secondary Assignment, Three Weeks during Christmas Holiday and three weeks during Easter Holidays (Community Development Service)

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<sup>55</sup> Those exempted from the program on various grounds are issued exemption letter in place of the certificate of participation. Medical doctors, lawyers and pharmacist are also issued deferment certificate to enable them do their one-year professional apprenticeship before service.

<sup>56</sup> In the early days of the NYSC, some state governments went extra mile to encourage corps members to get married in their states of service. One of the ways through which such was promoted was by picking the bills for some of the marriage rites in such areas.

- End-of-the year Debriefing Session, June 24-29, 1974
- Passing out Ceremony, June 30<sup>th</sup> 1974<sup>57</sup>

In other words, in less than six weeks of its establishment, the Directorate was expected to plan successfully the takeoff of the NYSC program in Nigeria. It was therefore not surprising to see a number of unforeseen challenges rearing their heads in an attempt to execute the maiden edition of the scheme. For instance, some of those mobilized and deployed in 1973 were eventually disqualified from participating in that year's national youth service because the Call-Up-Date of 2<sup>nd</sup> July preceded the release of degree examination results in some Nigerian universities. Of the 2,757 initially deployed, only 2, 364 graduates were eligible for participation.<sup>58</sup> Also, the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) embarked on an industrial action as the Call-Up-Date approached making it difficult for some mobilized corps members to travel to their states of assignment. Consequently, the Nigeria Air Force was engaged to airlift some of them where possible.<sup>59</sup> Despite these hitches, the Directorate was able to accomplish its assignment successfully in its first year. In an expression that revealed the arduous task it faced, its first Chairman, Professor Adedeji, remarks:

Only people who have ever been involved in the setting up of a nation-wide administrative machinery involving the active participation and corporation of all the state governments will fully appreciate what a gigantic task this was, even in the best of circumstances – not to talk of considerable constraint imposed by the lack of time<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Greogory Enegewea and Gabriel Umoden, (1993), *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Youth Service*,  
(Lagos: Gabumo Press), p.18

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> Professor Adebayo Adedeji, quoted in Enegewea and Umoden, p. 20

By the end of June 1974, the first batch of Nigerian graduates completed their youth service programme in the country, giving the scheme an air of success and a wind for consolidation. Following the provisions made for the extension of the scheme to other Nigerians, the NYSC (Extension of Application) Order of 1974 extended the scheme to Nigerians trained overseas who may want to volunteer to serve. By the same Order, it was made mandatory for overseas trained Nigerians who graduated in the 1974/75 academic year. Participation in the scheme was extended to the HND, NCE and other professionally-qualified Nigerians from the end of 1975/76 academic year. In 1977, age was removed as a factor for eligibility. The inclusion of NCE and HND holders created an upsurge in the number of Nigerian youth eligible for mobilization annually.<sup>61</sup> This, coupled with the increasing number of institutions of higher learning, led to an amendment of the eligibility criteria. The Decree No. 21 of 1985 exempted with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> August of the same year persons who:

- are over the age of 30,
- have been conferred with national honors,
- have served in the Nigerian armed forces or police for a period of more than nine months at the graduation date,
- holders of NCE with effects from the end of the 1984/85 academic year.

### Highlights of the National Youth Service Corps Act

The establishment Decree No. 24 of 1973 makes provisions for two governing bodies of the scheme at the national and state levels – the Directorate and the State Committee. Section 3-8 of the Decree spells out the administrative structure and functions of these bodies. Section 4 (1) entrusts the duty of policy formulation and overall supervision of the scheme to the Directorate. Thus, the Directorate, located at the national capital,

<sup>61</sup> From 3,513 in 1975/76, the number of mobilized youth for NYSC jumped to 6107 in 1976/77. In 1977/78, the number surged further to 10,814. By 1984/85, the number of participants in the program had reached 46,685. For more on this see Enegwea and Umoden, p. 27

is the highest governing and policy-making body of the scheme. Its chief executive is the Director who is based in the Directorate at the headquarters. The Directorate of the NYSC consists of the office of the Director and three main Departments – Administrative, Finance and Operations, and Inspectorate Departments. These are sub-divided into ten divisions – Administration, Account, Information, Corps Welfares and Discipline, Health Services, Data Bank, Operations Program, Planning and Evaluation, Regulated and other Professions, Job Placement and Corps Service Inspection Unit.<sup>62</sup> At its inception, the Directorate comprised a governing board made up of the Chairman, the Director (who is the chief executive), three other members one of who must be a woman. There are also representatives from the Armed Forces, the Police, the Nigerian universities, Federal Ministry of Education and Labor, the Nigerian Employers Consultative Association and the Cabinet Office. According to the Decree, the Chairman and members of the governing board shall be appointed by the President.

According to Section 4 (1), the Directorate is responsible for drawing up detailed programme with a view to accomplishing the objectives of the NYSC. It is also the responsibility of the Directorate to ensure compliance *vis-à-vis* the guidelines stipulated in the NYSC Act. The Directorate equally shoulders the responsibility of supervising and coordinating the activities of the NYSC at the state level, assigning duties to corps members in accordance with its already approved program of action. The task of evaluating the scheme annually and rendering of reports to the presidency also rest with the Directorate.

Section 6 (1) of the establishment Act provides for the creation of State Committee under the state governor. The State Committee assists the National Directorate in carrying out its functions in various states of the federation. It is headed by a Principal Inspector, also called the Chief Inspectorate, who is the

<sup>62</sup>National Youth Service Corps, ( 1977), *Evaluative Report on Four Years of the NYSC*,(Lagos: Directorate of the NYSC)

chief executive in every state. Among the functions of the State Committee are: compilation of information on all available jobs at the state level, arrangement of facilities especially accommodation and transportation for corps members, deployment of corps members within the state and compilation of the details of corps members for transmission to the Directorate.

Both the Directorate and the State Committee have undergone some transformative changes with subsequent modifications of the NYSC Act. For instance, section 3(2) of Decree 51 of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1993 reduced the members of the Directorate's governing board from 22 to 10 for effectiveness.<sup>63</sup> Section 6 of the new Decree equally changed the name of the State Committee to State Governing Board, which comprised the Chairman, the State Coordinator, representatives from the police, the army, education sector, commerce and industry, agriculture and natural resources.<sup>64</sup> As a way of inducing state commitment to the program, the new Act of 1993 further makes provisions for a minimum subvention of 500 000 Naira to be paid annually by every state to cater for deployed corps members within the states. Such subvention according to Section 7 (3), 'shall be provided before the commencement of the service year for which it is intended' The state government is further required in sub-section (4) to provide other facilities for the implementation and achievement of the program including land for agriculture, orientation camps and transportation facilities.

Decree No. 51 Section 8 (1 - 5) equally makes provisions for the creation of the NYSC program office at the LGA and zonal levels. The NYSC programme at the LGA, which is referred to as the "Committee" in the Act, with its headquarters located in the office of the L.G.A Chairman, comprised the Chairman, (LGA

<sup>63</sup>These are: the Chairman, the Director, one representative each from the Nigerian Police, the Nigerian Army, Committee of Vice Chancellors, Committee of Rectors of Polytechnic, Nigerian Employers Consultative Association, and three other persons one of whom shall be a woman.

<sup>64</sup>With the exception of the State Coordinator whose appointment is made from the Directorate, all others are the State Governors appointees.

Chairman Chairperson), Zonal Inspector, one representative each from the Nigerian Police, Health, Education, and Private sectors, Social Welfare, Community Development and Traditional Rulers. Among the functions of the NYSC/LGA office are: making provision for security of corps members in the LGA, ensuring that Community Development Program is pursued, assisting the selection of corps members for award, and making provisions for the welfare of corps members deployed to the LGA. Section 8 (5) further provides for the establishment of State zonal NYSC referred in the Act as "zonal office". It comprised a number of LGAs as may be determined from time to time and headed by a member of staff of the Directorate to be known as Zonal inspector.

The administrative divisions of the Directorate witnessed some changes following these modifications. The old divisions was replaced with 7 departments - Personnel Management, Finance and Supplies, Planning Research and Statistics, Inspection, Corps Mobilization, Community Development Service, and Corps Welfare Service Departments headed by directors.<sup>65</sup> With this, the status of the chief executive of the Directorate had to change from that of a Director to Director General. According to the NYSC Director of Administration, all these drives for changes and consequent transformations were geared towards improving the efficiency of the Directorate in "making NYSC prominent in national development efforts to show its relevance"<sup>66</sup>. As Enegwea and Umoden observed, the Directorate under Decree No. 24 of 1973, was "too unwieldy" for effectiveness.<sup>67</sup>

The NYSC Act further highlights the placement of the service corps. The Directorate is required to register every member of the service corps for deployment for national service in undertakings and projects enumerated in section 9 (2) of the

<sup>65</sup> More departments have been created since 1993 to cater for some challenges in the course of running the program. Currently, the directorate has about 13 departments. Sub-divisions of these departments are under Deputy Directors.

<sup>66</sup> National Youth Service Corps (1991) Minutes of Meeting of the National Director with Directors and Assistants Directors of NYSC Held from March 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> at Sheraton Hotel and Towers Abuja, p.1

<sup>67</sup> Enegwea and Umoden, p 28.

NYSC Act. In other words, priority is to be given to works involving hospitals, road constructions, farming, water schemes, surveying and mapping, teaching, social and economic services, food storage and eradication of pests and many others as contained in the Act. The Act equally requires the Directorate to put into consideration qualifications of corps members, existing vacancies and priorities of the nation before placing members for service program. The Directorate is therefore not to be compelled in any way to deploy a member of service corps to any project.

Evaluation and reports of performance of corps members are done quarterly. According to section 10(2), the quarterly report of service members shall show:

- The extent of his/her interest in the undertaking or project,
- The degree of comradeship he/she engenders amongst his fellow corps members and the people within the community he is serving or have served,
- Industry at work, resourcefulness and initiative,
- Character, address, temperament and integrity,
- Leadership and readiness to accept responsibility,
- Special contribution to the host community, and
- Any other information which may assist in evaluating the character of each member of the service corps

In recognition of the uniqueness of some professions as well as variations in human modes of operation, the NYSC Act provides for deferment where it is not possible to participate in the program in the year of graduation. Section 17 (2) gives the Directorate the power, subject to the approval of the National Defence and Security Council, to defer the call-up of any person or category of persons eligible for service for a specified period of time. In the same vein, the Directorate may reduce or extend the period of service for any person or category of persons when it is satisfied that there are genuine reasons for doing so. In addition to deferment, the same section makes room for

exemption of any person from all or part of the provisions of the NYSC Act. Upon being satisfied that exemption is necessary, the Directorate issues a certificate of exemption to the concerned candidate.

Though a free service to one's nation, the NYSC Act makes provision for a monthly allowance for every corps member deployed. Corps members are also entitled to free medical facilities on the same basis as public servants in all the states of the federation as well as transportation allowance to and from the state of deployment. In line with the demands of the time, some of these allowances have undergone series of review for upgrade.<sup>68</sup> Under Section 13(2), an employer of labour is required to provide accommodation for corps members at its service or pay a certain amount of money per month in lieu of accommodation.<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, a corps member is entitled to all welfare facilities provided for regular staff including medical services. With respect to protection, section 19 makes provisions for entitlement to the Public Officers Protection Act throughout the duration of service. Finally, the NYSC Act provides for offences and their penalties. Section 13 (3), for example, requires every service member to report for service as directed by the Directorate; prohibit ineligible candidates from service, and forbids double or multiple service, certificate forgery and illegal wearing of service corps uniform. Contravention of any of these attracts penalties, which, in most cases, are either fine or imprisonment, and in a worst case scenario, both. Section 16 (2), subject to the approval of the presidency, provides the Directorate with the power to make bye-laws for proper administration of the program. Every corps member is guided by bye-laws of the NYSC. A copy of these laws is issued on

<sup>68</sup> For instance, with the inclusion of the HND and NCE holders in the scheme, monthly allowance became 180 Naira for Bachelor's degree and HND holders while corps members with NCE received 137 Naira. A transport sum of 184 Naira was also made available to be shared as follows: Transportation to the state of deployment (50 Naira), from the state of deployment (50 Naira), Local transportation (84). Doctors and Pharmacist were exempted from the latter since they received car basic allowance.

<sup>69</sup> According to the NYSC Act of 1993, a minimum sum of 250 Naira is to be paid monthly to corps member when accommodation is not provided.

enrolment. Among the items addressed in the scheme's bye-laws are: the motto of the NYSC – "Service and Humility", its Pledge, Code of Conduct and Penalties for breaching them, medical provision, Leave of Absence, Identity Cards, Maternity Leave During Service year, Confidential Report, Channels of Communication and Short titles.<sup>70</sup> Contravention of any of the laws guiding one's conduct in these areas attracts some penalties which are enumerated in the NYSC Bye-Laws 3(2) and 10(2j).<sup>71</sup> It is pertinent to note that appeals can be made by an aggrieved person against any decision or exercise of the Directorate. Section 20 of the NYSC Act gives room for appeal to be made to the Presidency when corps members deem it necessary. In such a case, the Presidency, with the approval of the National Defence and Security Council, may confirm, reverse or amend the decision of the Directorate.

## Conclusion

Like many other nations of Africa at independence, Nigeria faced a multiplicity of challenges prominent of which was the problem of nation-building especially in the areas of socio-economic development and national unity. The quest for national service, which seemed to have begun in the mid-1960s, was in recognition of the unique contributions of the youth towards these goals. While the thirty-month civil war appeared to have dragged the issue of national integration to the centre stage leading to the establishment of the NYSC scheme, the quest for socio economic development equally reflected in the objectives and the Act that gave birth to the scheme. Indeed, nation-building is a dynamic process, and the flexibility in the NYSC Act seems to be in concordance with this fact. For those who argue that the NYSC has outlived its usefulness and should be scrapped,<sup>72</sup> it can only be said that such opinion is informed by

<sup>70</sup> National Youth Service Corps (1974), *NYSC Bye-Laws*, 20<sup>th</sup> June, (Lagos: Directorate of the NYSC)

<sup>71</sup> Ibid

<sup>72</sup> Among them were: Moshood Kalah (2011) "NYSC To Be or Not to Be" *The Guardian*, 24<sup>th</sup> May, pp. 4-6; Odulana, Adebayo, {2011}, "South West will Implement Uniform Policies" *Politics Today*, *Channels Television*, 2<sup>nd</sup> May.

the shallow view of the goals behind the establishment of the scheme. As an instrument of nation-building, the National Youth Service scheme in Nigeria can be re-packaged and re-channeled to address the crucial needs of the nation at any time. “The goals and objectives of the scheme as set by the founding fathers in the early 1970s are “according to the former Director-General of the NYSC, Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim “still very relevant to contemporary Nigerian situation”<sup>73</sup>



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<sup>73</sup> Keynote address delivered by the Executive Director of the NYSC Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim, in a meeting of the Director and assistant Directors of the NYSC Held in Sheraton Hotel and Towers, 14<sup>th</sup>

-15<sup>th</sup> March, 1991 p. 1; see also Afolayan, Adeola, Nzoka, M. Anthony, TapShang Emmanuel B, Tanimu, Yunusa, Ajayi Tunde W, Harris, Shehu B, (2020) *Selected Speeches and Strides of the 18<sup>th</sup> NYSC Director General, Brig. Gen. s. Ibrahim*, (Abuja: Directorate of NYSC).

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## Chapter Four

# ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE NYSC

*Fidelis Egbe*  
*Veritas University,*  
*Abuja*

### Introduction

When Nigeria attained political independence from her erstwhile British colonialist in 1960, the political structure of the country was a tripartite arrangement which unwittingly emphasised ethnic dichotomy. The political parties that midwifed the emergence of the leadership of the country at that time were largely ethnic - cum regional based parties as most of their supporters were domiciled in the regions where the parties were based.<sup>1</sup> Consequent upon the ethnic nature of the political parties, there arose a chain of political upheavals occasioned by the tussle for the acquisition and control of political power by politicians from the various regions. The quagmires which ensued include the census figures crises of 1962/63, the Western Regional crisis with the subsequent intervention of the Federal Government by declaring a state of emergency on the Western Region, the cases of corruption, the January 15<sup>th</sup> 1966 coup d' etat, the counter coup of July 1966 and the pogrom that followed, climaxing in the civil war of 1967-1970, where thousands of souls were lost and properties worth billions of naira destroyed.<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that all these challenges which confronted the young Nigerian state in the early years of independence stratified the country along ethnic cleavages even the more.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ifamose F.O. and Ojo O. E., *Main Trends in Nigerian History: From 1800 To 2000*, Oluwatoyin Publishers, Ibadan, 2013, PP.140-141.

<sup>2</sup>Abubakar S., "The Challenges of Nation Building: Nigeria, which way forward?" in Ogbogbo C.B.N. and Okpeh O.O. (eds), *Interrogating Contemporary Africa: Dike Memorial Lectures 1999-2007*, Historical Society of Nigeria, 2007, PP.36-40.

<sup>3</sup>NYSC, "Background to the National Youth Service Corps Scheme", in *NYSC Hand Book Revised in 1995*, P.6.

Nigerians of various ethnic groups who had hitherto cultivated healthy intergroup relations, long before colonial rule, suddenly could no longer trust one another. People lived in fear, and were hesitant to relocate to other parts of the country after the civil war because of the events which precluded the war. It was therefore the urgent need to heal the wounds in the bleeding hearts of Nigerians, re-build trust and confidence, re-integrate and re-unite the Nigerian peoples, for a new and better post-civil war Nigeria, that made the Military Head of State at that time, General Yakubu Gowon, to introduce the 3 Rs of Reconciliation, Reconstruction and, Rehabilitation.<sup>4</sup> These three cardinal ideals of the post-civil war policy of the Federal Government of Nigeria were, as stated above, aimed at healing the wounds of the people and building trust amongst Nigerians of various ethnic groups, especially among the youths who were seen as the future leaders of the country. It was in line with the policy of the 3Rs and the dare need to build confidence and trust, as well as empower Nigerian youths, that the National Youth Services Corps (NYSC) was established in 1973, three years after the civil war.

## Formation of the NYSC

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was established by the Federal Government of Nigeria via Decree No. 24 which was promulgated on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1973, but it was Decree No. 51 of 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1993, which upon the return of democratic rule became known as “the NYSC Act CAP No 84, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004”,<sup>5</sup> that clearly and unequivocally spelt out the objectives of the Scheme as follows:

- To inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work, and of patriotic and loyal service to Nigeria in any situation they may find themselves.

<sup>4</sup>Chuckwu D.O., “Cleavages, Conflicts and Nigerian Federalism: A Historical Analysis”, in Okpeh O.O. and Ogbogbo C.B.N. (eds), *Federalism in Historical Perspective*, Aboki Publishers, Makurdi, 2013, PP. 135-136.

<sup>5</sup>National Youth Service Corps Yearbook 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition 2018, p 19.

- To raise the moral tone of the Nigerian youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement.
- To develop in the Nigerian youths the attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilisation in the national interest
- To enable Nigerian youths acquire the spirit of self-reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self-employment
- To contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy
- To develop common ties among the Nigerian youths and promote national unity and integration
- To remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups
- To develop a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of Nigeria
- The equitable distribution of members of the service corps and the effective utilisation of their skills in area of national needs
- That as far as possible, youths are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin
- That such group of youths assigned to work together is as representative of Nigeria as far as possible
- That the Nigerian youths are exposed to the modes of living of the people in different parts of Nigeria
- That the Nigerian youths are encouraged to eschew religious intolerance by accommodating religious differences
- That members of the service corps are encouraged to seek at the end of their one-year national service, career employment all over Nigeria, thus promoting the free movement of labour

- That employers are induced partly through their experience with members of the service corps to employ more readily and on a permanent basis, qualified Nigerians, irrespective of their States of origin.<sup>6</sup>

### **NYSC Vision Statement**

- To develop a sound and result oriented organisation that is strongly committed to its set objectives particularly those of national unity and even development.
- An organisation that is well motivated and capable of bringing out the best qualities in our youths and imparting in them the right attitude and values for nation-building.
- An organisation that serves as a catalyst to national development, and a source of pride and fulfilment to its participating graduate youths.

### **NYSC Mission Statement**

- To build a pragmatic organisation that is committed to its set objectives with the ultimate goal of producing future leadership with positive national ethos-Leadership that is vibrant, proud and committed to the unity and even development of the Nigeria State.
- To be at the fore front of National development efforts, as well as serve as a profitable platform for imparting in our youths values of nationalism, patriotism, loyalty and accountable leadership.
- To raise the moral tone of our youths by giving them opportunity to learn about high ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement.
- To develop in our youths, attitude of mind acquired through shared experience, and suitable training which would make them more amenable to mobilisation in the national interest.

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<sup>6</sup>NYSC, "Background to the National Youth Service Corps Scheme", in *NYSC Hand Book Revised in 1995*, P.8.

- To ensure Nigerian youths acquire the spirit of self-reliance, a reliable source of economic empowerment and effective participation in nation building.
- To develop an organisation that is alive to its responsibilities and responsive to the needs of the country.

## Operational Structure of the NYSC

For a practical realisation of the lofty ideals of the NYSC as encapsulated in its objectives, vision and mission above, the NYSC at its inception in 1973, adopted an operational structure which ensured a devolution of authority from the top to the bottom. This organisational structure was necessary to accommodate all shades of interest in the country. Administratively, though the NYSC Scheme is under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, the main administrative power house of the NYSC is the National Directorate Headquarters, which is headed by the Director General of the Scheme. It is the responsibility of the Director General (DG) to ensure the day-to-day running of the Scheme and its overall success. He is assisted by Directors who head units in the national Directorate Headquarters. These Directors (heads of units) had staff of various grade levels who work with them.

At the state level, the structure consists of a Secretariat headed by the State Coordinator with also various levels of staff working with them. However, at the Local Government Level, the NYSC Scheme has offices in each of the LGAs, which for the purpose of administrative convenience are grouped into zones and headed by Zonal Officers (ZO).

It is important to bear in mind that at the National Directorate of the NYSC, the structure consists of a board made up of the Chairman, the Director General, Representatives of Committees of Vice Chancellors, Representatives of Rectors of Polytechnics, Representatives of the Armed Forces, Representatives of the Police, the Nigerian Employers

Consultative Association, and three special members.<sup>7</sup> The responsibility of the board is to advise and guide the Directorate in policy implementation. As stated above, the implementation and day-to day running of the scheme is the responsibility of the Director General assisted by Directors heading key units and departments in the Directorate. The main autonomous units which are under the office of the Director General are: Press and Public Relations, Internal Audit, Reforms, and Legal Unit.<sup>8</sup> Basically, there are thirteen departments and several sub-units or divisions at the Directorate Headquarters which are the departments of:

1. Corps Mobilisation
2. Corps Certification
3. Human Resource Management
4. Procurement
5. Planning, Research and Statistics
6. General Service
7. Information and Communication Technology
8. Corps Welfare and Inspectorate
9. Community Development Services and Special Projects
10. Ventures Management
11. Finance & Accounts
12. Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development
13. Special Duties

These departments are responsible for the effective execution and implementation of the details of the NYSC programmes which include orientation course, primary assignment, community development service, and winding-up/passing-out programmes, among others.<sup>9</sup>

For a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the organisation and structure of the NYSC, it is pertinent to deepen

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<sup>7</sup>National Youth Service Corps NYSC Hand Book revised in 1999, pp. 1-10.

<sup>8</sup>National Youth Service Corps Yearbook 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition 2018, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup>National Youth Service Corps Yearbook 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition 2018, p. 22-24.

the discussion on the structure at the federal level before expanding that of the state and local government levels. This is apt because a surface examination of the structure of the NYSC would reveal a seemingly complex web of an organisation in which there would be a possible over-lapping of responsibilities and thus trigger animosity amongst staff which could result to underperformance of the system. On the contrary, however, an indebt examination of the organisation and structure of the scheme shows that the facial complexity is actually a catalyst for efficiency as every facet of endeavours which will promote the realisation of the overall objectives and purpose of the scheme is properly streamlined and catered for. For example, the Department of Planning, Research and Statistics is made up of four units which are: Policy and Plans Division; Research, Statistics and Library Division; Project Monitoring and Evaluation; and Technical Assistance Units.<sup>10</sup> There are also branches in most of these units. For instance, while the Policy and Plans Division unit comprise Planning and Policy Analysis Branch, Research, Statistics & Records, and Liberty Branches make up the Research, Statistics and Library Division. The Project Monitoring and Evaluation Unit is divided into two branches which are the Project Monitoring and, Evaluation branches.

It is the responsibility of the Department of Planning, Research and Statistics to, among others, coordinate the plans and programmes of all the various Departments of the NYSC, ensure the organisation and coordination of annual management conferences, ensure the proper organisation and coordination of pre-orientation workshops, organise and coordinate orientation course activities, plan and execute winding-up/ passing-out activities. It is also the responsibility of the department to manage the records, library and archival resources of the NYSC, provide library services to both staff and researchers as we as the general public. The department also

ensures that there are adequate facilities prior to the commencement of orientation camps, liaises with other collaborative agencies, local and international NGOs, to facilitate technical assistance, undertake evaluative studies and research, in order to determine the extent of the impact of the scheme and its activities. In addition to the above discussed responsibilities of the Department of Planning, Research and Statistics, the department also collects, analyses and evaluates reports on the scheme for management's use, sorts and monitors the performance and efficiency of every sub-unit to determine its usefulness or otherwise, assigns orientation duties to staff, engages in constant collation and processing of data statistics that relates to personnel, finance, physical resources, operations and outputs, etc.<sup>11</sup>

From the above, it is obvious that the Department of Planning, Research and Statistics is one of the major engine rooms of the scheme, given its enormous responsibilities. The department stands as a general in a battle field, providing the strategies and coordinating the execution of the battle plan as well as monitoring and evaluating its success and failures in the overall interest of the purpose of the war. It is, therefore, not out of place to state that the structure of the NYSC in terms of planning, research and statistics is efficient as epitomised by the success and progress of the scheme so far.

Another department in the organisation and structure of the NYSC is Community Development Service and Special Projects. Although this department does not have obvious branches, its responsibilities are very strategic as they focus on the core of youths' skill developments which is natured and enhanced in the course of community development service (CDS). Some of such responsibilities include: ensuring the groupings of CDS groups in line with the approved 16 groups of the scheme, providing the right mentoring which encourages corps members to embark on personal CDS activities that provide dual benefits, i.e. make the community better and also develop the

<sup>11</sup>National Youth Service Corps, 2016 Annual Report of the Scheme, pp. 1-2.

individual corps member; collating and analysing the reports of CDS reports from all the thirty-six states of the federation and the Federal capital Territory, and training of volunteers which assist at the various orientation camps.<sup>12</sup>

Another important department in the structure of the NYSC scheme is Press and Public Relations Unit. Its three divisions are: publications, publicity and new media. It is the responsibility of the publications branch of the department to undertake the publication and distribution of the in-house journals of the scheme which include NYSC News Magazine, Security Tips, etc; monitor the production of journals from the various states and ensure that it conforms with the NYSC standard in terms of its content and quality, maintain and preserve a library of the various publications from the various state secretariats of the NYSC, and other organisations collaborating with the scheme, offer editorial advice on all NYSC publications, documents and other news items of the scheme.

The publicity branch is responsible for the advertising of the scheme's programmes and other activities that are not covered by the media relations, collating, processing and dissemination of information on the activities of the scheme to the general public, handling of the corporate image management of the NYSC via the adoption of a mix public relation strategies. The publicity branch is also responsible for ensuring the maintenance of cordial working relationship with the mass media to ensure effective coverage of all events of the scheme. Also, it organises press briefing for the Director-General when the need arises.

New Media: This branch of the Press and Public Relations Department of the NYSC is responsible for the projection of the image of the scheme via the various social media which include: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and whatsapp, to enable the scheme effectively and efficiently engage its stakeholders in a highly and ever increasing socially digital world. It also ensures

prompt response to on-demand engagement at any time and any place such demand is made. This ensures user - interactive feedback which enables the scheme to resolve issues speedily and provides correct information to curtail the spread of rumours; it also makes it possible for user - participation in real time communication to take place.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the above is the Department of General Services which has two branches or subdivisions namely: maintenance division and general service division. Its functions include the following: administration of the transport of the scheme, utility services, store management, maintenance services, office allocation, and security.<sup>14</sup> This unit is particularly important in the structure of the NYSC as it ensures that facilities are in good condition in the scheme for effective and smooth operations.

The Human Resource Management Department is yet another unit in the structure of the NYSC. It is made up of four divisions which are: Human Resources Planning with four subdivisions, Career management with three subdivisions, Training and Executive Development with two subdivisions, and Staff Welfare and Industrial Relations, with three subdivisions.<sup>15</sup> The general responsibilities of the department include appointment, promotion and discipline of staff, manpower and succession planning, establishment matters, staff training and capacity development, career and performance management, industrial relations and labour matters, staff medical and health services, pension and post service matters, staff sports and games, secretariat of senior and junior staff committees.<sup>16</sup> It is worthy of note that one of the cardinal objectives of the NYSC is youth empowerment and development. To achieve this, the officials of the scheme must be empowered to be in the proper frame of mind to help develop the corps members.

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<sup>13</sup>National Youth Service Corps, 2016 Annual Report of the Scheme, pp. 9-10.

<sup>14</sup>National Youth Service Corps, 2016 Annual Report of the Scheme, p.11. <sup>15</sup>National Youth Service Corps, 2016 Annual Report of the Scheme, p.13. <sup>16</sup>National Youth Service Corps, 2016 Annual Report of the Scheme, p.15.

Therefore, the importance and relevance of the Department of Human Resource Management as an integral part of the organisation and structure of the NYSC cannot be over emphasised. There is also the Corps Welfare and Inspectorate Department which has the primary responsibility of monitoring the activities of corps members, seeing to their welfare and ensuring their security throughout the period of the service year. It comprises five subdivisions which are: corps welfare, corps insurance, corps health services, corps inspectorate, and corps merit & discipline. Other functions of the department include formulation of policies on inspection duties to be implemented at the State, zonal and local government levels; supervising the offices in charge of corps welfare in the state, zonal, and local government levels, embark on periodic inspection of the location of corps members across the federation to complement the efforts of the State Secretariat, Zonal as well as Local Government offices in terms of qualitative service delivery; ensure proper health service delivery for corps members through reimbursement of properly certified medical bills; maintain corps members' insurance policy, process payment of death benefits to next-of-kin of deceased corps members; ensuring a befitting burial for corps members who die in the course of the service year; coordinate merit award for corps members at the national level who have distinguished themselves during their service year; effect disciplinary action on corps members to serve as deterrent to aberrant behaviours; collaborate with INEC on the use of corps members as ad-hoc staff in concord with the MoU between NYSC and INEC; organise NYSC/stakeholders forum to ensure a broad-based consultation with the intention of widening the scope of intervention which would elicit cooperation from critical collaborators; hosting of NYSC management/corps members at the national level; organising training workshops for Inspectors Development Programmes and other stakeholders.<sup>17</sup>

The role of this department in the structure of the NYSC is very important because it deals with issues that have direct impact on the corps members' welfare. If we take into cognizance the fact that most corps members are posted to places different from their states of origin in line with the philosophy of the scheme to forge unity and togetherness among Nigerians, especially the youths, it therefore becomes expedient to ensure that corps members are as comfortable as they could possibly be in their places of national assignments. This underscores the importance of the department of corps welfare and inspectorate.

Another department in the structure of the NYSC is Corps Certification Department. The department's statutory function is the issuance of all NYSC instruments which are basically Certificates of National Service, Certificate of Exemption and Letters of Exclusion. The department has three subdivisions namely: a) certification, which has two branches of production and certification; b) Exemption, with equally has two branches of exemption and exclusion; c) Verification which is a standalone branch.<sup>18</sup> The responsibility of issuing certificates to successful corps members who have completed their one year mandatory service to their fatherland or letters of exemption or exclusion is a 'sacred' duty to fatherland within the organisation and structure of the NYSC because the mandatory nature of the scheme and its acceptability makes its certificates a sine qua non for graduate youths of Nigeria, moving forward. There is the tendency of persons not qualified to be issued any of the NYSC certificates which amounts to such persons getting it illegally. It is thus the duty of the department of corps certification to ensure that such illegal acquisition of the certificates of the NYSC is not possible.

There is also the Procurement Department. This department is saddled with the responsibility of handling all procurement matters, including works and services. The department has two subdivisions which are: the capital procurement and the

recurrent procurement. More specifically, the department draws procurement scheduling by specifying time-line within which goods and services would be acquired and delivered in a fiscal year. The department also prepares the annual procurement plan for both capital and recurrent expenditures, and ensures an effective and vibrant tenders board secretariat responsible for ensuring compliance with the provisions of the Public Procurement Act, 2007. It also conducts periodic market survey in order to gather necessary information on the prices of goods and services to guide the award of contracts; ensures, through proper monitoring, that the quantity and quality of goods, works and services supplied to the scheme are of specific as well as acceptable standard; records and maintains electronic database on contractors and suppliers for the scheme.<sup>19</sup>

Again, this department is very strategic within the organisation and structure of the scheme as it deals with all the supplies and other materials used by corps members during the year of services. Any lapses on the part of this department especially in the mobilisation and camping of corps members could obliterate an already established positive public opinion and perception of the efficiency and efficacy of the organisation and structure of the NYSC. Thus, the role of procurement department is very important in the structure of the scheme.

Furthermore, there is the Corps Mobilisation Department which is charged with the responsibility of mobilising all eligible Nigerian graduates of both local and foreign universities and polytechnics for national service. The department which is made up of three subdivisions of mobilisation, evaluation and deployment, is equally responsible for the formulation of guidelines for the deployment of corps members for the effective utilisation of their skills in their places of primary assignment for the overall good of the community; exemption of all Nigerian graduates who are not qualified to serve, in line with the

provisions of the NYSC Act; relocation of corps members when necessary during and after orientation exercises; collaborating with corps producing institutions, examination bodies and the Federal Ministry of Education to ensure seamless mobilisation exercises; revalidation of mobilised graduates who failed to turn up for national service; remobilisation of corps members who absconded in the course of national service, etc.

Another department in the organisation and structure of the NYSC is the Information and Communication Technology Department. This department which was added to the structure of the scheme in 2012 given the exigency of the time and the need to digitalise the organisation of the scheme has two subdivisions which are: a) hardware/software service divisions, made up of hardware development support & software development support; and (b) data management service, comprising application support & data control. Its functions include: enforcement of standards and procedures of administration and management of software system in the scheme; promoting the use of ICT in the operations of the scheme for better services of staff, via e-governance initiative, including the development of the required software in a coordinated manner; initiating the direction and plans for the ICT infrastructure of the scheme; ensuring the development, implementation as well as maintenance of software application that responds to the common needs of different departments of the scheme.<sup>20</sup>

The establishment of this department in 2012 is one of the changes in the organisation and structure of the NYSC scheme. The change was occasioned by the need to improve efficiency and effectiveness of staff in the general operation of the scheme, and bring to bear in its day-to-day activities, the positive impact of ICT in a humongous organisation as the NYSC.

The Legal Unit is another department of the scheme. It is an autonomous unit that is directly under the office of the Director-General. The major functions of the unit is to provide legal advice by rendering qualitative legal advice to the management of the NYSC on administrative issues; represent the scheme in courts and arbitral panels in the prosecution and defence of cases involving the NYSC; formalise contracts agreements for supply of various items and drafting/vetting customised agreements, memoranda of understanding and other legal instruments between the NYSC and other persons; coordinate the activities of the Corps Legal Aid Scheme which renders free quality legal services to indigent in-mates and members of the society in need of legal assistance; host the secretariat of the NYSC National Governing Board; and carry out other administrative duties assigned to the unit.<sup>21</sup>

Also a department in the structure of the NYSC is the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Department. The mandate of this department is first and foremost to promote and cultivate the culture of self-reliance amongst corps members by organising series of entrepreneurship and hands-on training, and also leverage on the availability of existing institutions for resource mobilisation for corps entrepreneurs. The strategy adopted by the department include: capacity building, collaboration & partnership development, advocacy and policy influencing, as well as monitoring & evaluation.<sup>22</sup> Its other responsibilities include formulation and implementation of policies on corps entrepreneurship development programmes; development and building of partnership with necessary stakeholders on the entrepreneurship issues; establishing contacts and connections with relevant employment agencies; supervising, monitoring and evaluating NYSC entrepreneurship programmes; providing corps members with advice and counselling on jobs; and linking corps entrepreneurs

<sup>21</sup> National Youth Service Corps, 2016 Annual Report of the Scheme, pp.28-29.

<sup>22</sup> National Youth Service Corps, 2016 Annual Report of the Scheme, p. 29.

with funding agencies for start-up capitals, among others.<sup>23</sup>

It is necessary to stress that this department is particularly important in the structure of the NYSC scheme because it deals with the aspect of the programme of the scheme which empowers the corps members and equips them to become employers of labour rather than employees. The importance of this department and its activities is most appreciated often by the corps members in the post service year when they put the entrepreneurial knowledge and skills acquired during the NYSC service year to gainful use to make them better people.

In addition to all these departments in the organisation and structure of the NYSC is the Ventures Management Department. This again was a recent addition to the structure of the scheme in 2012. The essence was to rehabilitate and maintain farm settlements and ventures to meet the needs of the scheme in terms of training and empowerment of youths towards self-reliance, corps members' kits, and feeding in orientation camps. One of the economic importance of this department is reduction in the cost of food and other items that would otherwise be bought during orientation camps. The department is comprised of four subdivisions which are: arable farm, animal husbandry, factories, and mills. Its functions include: the formulation and implementation of policies on NYSC ventures; coordination, supervision and monitoring of NYSC farms and Agric programmes and services; ensures the organisation of workshops as well as training programmes for corps members, farms, mills and NYSC factory officers; building and nurturing of partnership with stakeholders for NYSC ventures; coordination of farm settlements involving NYSC; and commercialisation of inventions by corps members.<sup>24</sup>

There is also the Audit unit which is directly responsible to the Director General of the NYSC. The unit has two subdivisions,

<sup>23</sup> National Youth Service Corps, 2016 Annual Report of the Scheme, p.30.

<sup>24</sup> National Youth Service Corps, 2016 Annual Report of the Scheme, p. 31.

namely: National Directorate Headquarter and Store Audit, and State Secretariats and Ventures Audit. The functions of this department are: to ensure compliance with extant rules and regulations on financial matters by providing internal checks; ensure that the system for the collation of revenue is adequate; also ensure that expenditure and payments are duly authorised; crosscheck to ensure that there are adequate means for the verification of all stores and assets of the scheme; ensure the accurate keeping of account records and books; and check the overall operation of the scheme for economic purpose, efficiency and effectiveness.<sup>25</sup>

There is also the Finance and Account Department. This department has four main subdivisions with several units in them. These are: a) Account Division consisting of: other charges, salaries, checking and, final accounts. (b) Budget Division made up of: recurrent expenditure, capital expenditure and, budget monitoring. (c) Directorate Headquarters/State Fund Division made up of Cash Office, Advances and State Accounts. (d) Venture/Special Projects division which comprises: ventures, SDGs/HIV/AIDS, and Pension & Gratuity. The cardinal responsibilities of this department are to provide financial advice to the Director-General of the NYSC who is the chief accounting officer of the scheme, and other departmental heads of the organisation; ensure that the appropriate in-built controls are established in the accounting system of the scheme; and manage all funds and public money due and receivable in the organisation. Other functions of the finance department are effectively discharged by the subdivisions. For example, the accounts division provides advise to the Director, Finance and Accounts, on the effective allocation of financial resources to the various departments of the scheme. The budget division is involved in the preparation, submission as well as defence of the budget of the scheme. The processing of mandate and payment of all vouchers and

mandates processed through GIFMIS/REMITAS are the duties of the DHQ/ State Fund Division. The aspect of processing payments via mandates to resource persons for SDGs training/WAP training and WAP loans to SDGS ex-corps entrepreneurs is the duty of Ventures/Special projects Divisions. Other Charges Unit is responsible for the raising of payment vouchers for all approvals, keeping records of departmental cash allocations and expenditures, and ensuring that vote books are maintained, updated and balanced. Salaries Unit is responsible for the preparation and processing of payment of staff salaries through IPPIS. It is the duty of the Checking Unit to ensure that there is compliance for all payments as stipulated by existing rules and financial regulations. The Final Accounts Unit is responsible for the preparation and submission of transcripts to the Office of the Accountant-General of the Federation (OAGF). Cash Office Unit is in charge of receiving/processing of all income voucher and mandates processed through GIFMIS/REMITA. Processing of approved coordinated tour allowances, DTA mandates, maintenance and updating of individual loan ledger are the responsibilities of Advances Unit. While State Accounts Unit has the responsibility of preparing AIEs for funds remitted to State Secretariat and FCT, as well as processing of orientation/passing-out expenses, and treating of relocation and interstate adjustments of corps members' monthly allowance.<sup>26</sup>

The last but not the least department is the Reforms Unit in the office of the Director-General. This department emerged as one of the changes in the structure of NYSC in line with the Public Service reform Initiative of the Federal Government of Nigeria. Basically, it has three subdivisions which are: Service Delivery, Gender, and Distress Call Centre. Each of the subdivisions has specified responsibilities within the department. For instance, the Service Delivery branch ensures

<sup>26</sup>National Youth Service Corps, 2016 Annual Report of the Scheme, pp.34-35.

that services are delivered timely and effectively at all service windows, receives and directs visitors at the National Directorate Headquarters to the appropriate places within the complex, ensures that the resolution of complaints from various service windows and clients using the official grievances redress mechanism of the scheme as encapsulated in the charter of NYSC through official telephone lines, customer comment cards, SERVICOM Customer Relations Activities Register and suggestion boxes, provide enlightenment for both staff and corps members on service delivery, prepare a comprehensive service charter for the scheme, monitor to ensure service delivery and compliance of the scheme, organise seminars and workshops for staff of the scheme to educate them on the appropriate method to actualise the reforms initiative, and train as well as monitor SERVICOM Corps vanguards across the country. The Gender branch is responsible for sensitising NYSC staff and corps members on gender issues, addressing issues of violence especially against female corps members, provide appropriate counselling for corps members and staff that are victims of gender-based violence, liaise with appropriate organisations, development partners, government ministries, departments and agencies to carry out activities boarding on reproductive health, girl child education, violence against women, breast/cervical and other gender issues, and training as well as monitoring Gender Corps Vanguards nationwide. And the Distress call centre is responsible for receiving distress calls from corps members, staff and other stakeholders of the scheme.<sup>27</sup>

The foregoing discussion on the organisation and structure of the NYSC at the federal level reveals that the nature of the structure takes into account the necessity for wholistic and detailed organisation of the scheme to ensure efficiency and deliver on the mandate of the scheme. This is epitomised by the subdivisions of the departments some of which are further divided into specified units. It is therefore not out of place to

assert that the organisation and structure of the NYSC at the federal level is a complex web for efficiency.

### Structure of the NYSC at the State Level

At the state level, the administrative structure of the NYSC is made up of committees whose membership are appointed to by the Governor of the State from the following: one person from the office of the Governor, usually in the grade of Permanent Secretary, to be the Chairman of the Committee, a member of the Armed Forces, a member of the Nigerian Police, A Principal Inspector (which was later re-christened Chief Inspector), four other people each to represent commerce, agriculture and natural resources, and local government.<sup>28</sup> It is important to point out that in most states of the federation the Chairman of the Committees were usually the State Commissioners of Education.<sup>29</sup> The State Secretariat which is the administrative office of the NYSC at the state level is usually located in the capital of each state, and headed by a Chief Inspector who has the responsibility of seeing to the day-to-day running of the scheme in the state. Like at the national Directorate where the Director-General is the overall accounting office of the scheme in the country, the State Chief Inspectors are the chief accounting officers in the various states. They ensure the proper organisation of orientation camp programmes especially the seminars for corps members in the state and the passing-out parade. It is also the responsibility of the State Chief Inspectors to act on complaints from corps members and their employers in their areas of primary assignments; very importantly, the Chief Inspector is answerable to the Director-General of the NYSC.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Samuel O. Asein, *Call to Service: Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme, 1973- 1993*, pp. 43-45.

<sup>29</sup> Chioma Onwere, "National Youth Service Corps Programme and National Integration in Nigeria", Ph.D Thesis, Department of International and Comparative Education, Institute of Education, University of London, 1992, pp. 95-96.

<sup>30</sup> Chioma Onwere, "National Youth Service Corps Programme and national Integration in Nigeria", Ph.D Thesis, Department of International and Comparative Education, Institute of Education, University of London, 1992, pp. 95-96.

The last administrative structure of the scheme at the Local Government level is grouped in to zones. In fact, given the three-tier structure of the NYSC, the State Secretariat could be said to be the spinal cord of the scheme. Nonetheless, the zonal offices at the Local Government serves as a point of contact for corps members especially those posted to remote and distant places where it could be difficult and economically unwise to travel to the state secretariat often to resolve minor issues. Thus, the Zonal Offices of the NYSC is strategic in its administrative organisation and structure.

### **Changes in the Organisation and Structure of the NYSC**

In every human institution and endeavour, change is a continuum. Since its establishment in 1973, the NYSC has not remained stagnant in terms of its organisation and structure. As time evolved, new exigencies emerged which required that the scheme should rejig its organisation and structure to accommodate emerging needs for more efficient operation of the scheme. Interestingly, while the basic structure of the scheme has remained largely unchanged since its inception, the various changes which have taken place overtime, did not radically alter the organisation and structure of the NYSC as designed from the on-set. However, the changes which have taken place in the scheme has been in line with the general policy of the Federal Government, or the vision of the various Director- Generals when appointed to office. This pre-supposes that while the overall aim and objectives of the NYSC remained sacrosanct, and the organisational structure to realise these objectives has also remained fairly unchanged, there have been, over the years, various leaderships at the Directorate of the NYSC with various ideas on how to speedily and more efficiently attain the 'sacred objectives' of the scheme. It was, therefore, the administrative styles of the Director-Generals (DG) in the attempt to achieve the objectives of the NYSC and the goals of the DG, and the challenges faced by the scheme at the time, that informed the type and nature of changes in the organisation and the structure

of the NYSC. For example, at the inception of the scheme in 1973, the structure comprised the Directorate (which was later renamed National Directorate) and the State Committee alone. However, later on, there was the establishment of the zonal system and the used of Corps Liaison Officers at the Local Government level to meet the increasing need of the scheme,<sup>31</sup> especially the increase in the number of graduates mobilised for national service under the scheme.

Furthermore, the structure of the scheme at the state level was changed due to political decisions of the Federal Government. In 1973 when the scheme began, the State Secretariat were twelve, but three years later, 1976 to be precise, the administrative units at the state level increased to nineteen from the initial twelve with the creation of more\* states in Nigeria. By 1986, it increased to twenty-one as there was again the creation of more states. And by 1991, it became thirty units, then the present thirty-six with the FCT.<sup>32</sup> Thus, political decision by the government often necessitated the rejigging of the organisation and structure of the NYSC. It is worthy to mention that the status of the head of the scheme at the state level was also restructured. Prior to 1990, the head of the NYSC State Secretariat was a Chief Inspector who at the inception of the scheme was addressed as Principal Inspector but was later rechristened Chief Inspector. Given the administrative restructuring occasioned by the civil service reforms of the Federal Government of Nigeria, the status of the NYSC State Chief Inspectorate was elevated to that of a Directorate. In this new structure, the Chief Inspector became known as the State Director. He/she functions as the head of administration of the scheme in the state.<sup>33</sup> This elevation of the State Inspectorate to Directorate was done to empower the states and enable it to discharge more responsibilities bearing in mind that most of the operations and activities of the scheme revolves around the

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<sup>31</sup> Samuel O. Asein, *Call To Service: Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme, 1973-1993*, P.4.

<sup>32</sup> Samuel O. Asein, *Call To Service: Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme, 1973-1993*, P.47.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Abdullahi Muhammed, Former Staff of NYSC Sokoto State, 2001/2002, on 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2020, in Abuja.

states. It was therefore necessary for the states to be adequately empowered and equipped for the responsibilities on its shoulders. It has been noted that:

the changes in the number of states have necessitated the creation of new lines of relationship between the central body and its constituents state directorates; it has entailed increased budgetary implications in terms of creation and development of appropriate infrastructural facilities, increased manpower needs and inevitable strain on the human resource capacity, especially after the 'purges' that have taken place. Because changes resulting from state creations have always taken place half way through the service year, considerable re-organisation has often had to be embarked upon to reflect the new territorial boundaries of existing state directorates and to realign with both the centre as well as the new offshoots.<sup>34</sup>

Further changes in the organisation and structure of the scheme were policy implementation aimed at ameliorating the challenges faced either by NYSC staff or corps members themselves. For instance, in 1997, collaboration with other agencies were put in place. Such include: NYSC/Israeli Embassy collaboration, NYSC/ University of Colorado, USA, etc.<sup>35</sup> To further motivate corps members for greater productivity in their primary places of assignment, the scheme in its re-organisation introduced a policy where employers of corps members were obliged to provide transportation either in terms of vehicle or allowance to corps members to facilitate efficient and effective discharge of their duties at the place of primary assignment<sup>36</sup>. To encourage employers of corps members to

<sup>34</sup> Samuel O. Asein, Call To Service: Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme, 1973-1993, pp.47-48.

<sup>35</sup> Proceedings of NYSC 1998 Annual Management Conference held from 24<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> March, 1998, at Country Home Motel, Benin City, Edo State, p.12.

<sup>36</sup> See NYSC Hand Book Revised in 1995, p.22.

implement this new policy, the scheme, prior to the effecting the policy, increased the transport allowance of corps members. In the same vain, the scheme equally came up with a change in its operations where pregnant corps members on maternity leave, who hitherto received allowance but were to serve extension to make up for the maternity period were henceforth to be paid full monthly allowance for the period of the maternity and would not need to serve and extension on account of maternity, instead, the usual three weeks terminal leave granted to corps members at the end of the service year was now to be regarded as part of the maternity leave and would no longer be granted to pregnant corps members at the end of the year.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, by 1998 the scheme re-organised its operations in some departments for greater efficiency and accountability. A system of pre-auditing of all payment vouchers at the National Directorate Headquarters (NDHQ) on daily basis was put in place. All items and materials supplied to the central store at the NDHQ must henceforth be properly verified, quarterly taking of stock in the central store was also put in place; post-auditing of all centres and areas of revenue generation of the scheme was equally established, and a system where staff and management of the scheme both at the NDHQ and the States Secretariats would be periodically audited was enshrined the operations of the NYSC.<sup>38</sup> This was to ensure proper financial accounting and accountability in the various transactions of the scheme with other corporate establishments, and to curb the tendency for corruption in the system. It was expected that this adjustment in the policy of the scheme will also be adopted by the State Directorates for greater efficiency of the scheme.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> NYSC Hand Book Revised in 1995, p.23.

<sup>38</sup> Proceedings of NYSC 1998 Annual Management Conference held from 24<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> March, 1998, at Country Home Motel, Benin City, Edo State, p.19.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Bassey Okon Bassey, former store-keeper, NYSC State Secretariat, Calabar, Cross River State, on 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2020.

Prior to this time, the scheme had expanded its structure via the creation of Zonal Offices at the state level to ensure that corps members in every nook and cranny of the states of deployments had easy access to NYSC officials in the course of their service to their fatherland. To this end, at the meeting of the National Directorate with Directors and Assistant Directors of NYSC, held from 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> March, 1991, at Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja, the policy was reiterated and directive given for immediate implementation of the new structure. For example, the chairman and DG of the NYSC at the meeting in Sheraton, stated that:

at the Calabar meeting of the Honourable Minister for Youths and Sports, it was agreed that states should assess their needs for setting up of NYSC Zonal offices in each state and make their reports to the Headquarters. He reminded conference participants that the Headquarters of zones must be in the Local Government Headquarters and central so that it could be easily reached by corps members within each zone. He then called for progress reports to assess the preparation and readiness by the states for the take-off of the Zonal Offices.<sup>40</sup>

It is important to bear in mind, as stated earlier in this discourse, that the changes in the organisation and structure of the NYSC overtime, were informed and necessitated by the challenges confronting the scheme, and the vision of the DG towards tackling those challenges. It has been observed that DGs often do not unilaterally discard the policies which their predecessors had put in place. What often takes place is that successive DGs continue to improve on the good policies of their predecessors, while introducing new ones in addition, to meeting the needs of the scheme in the current time. This undocumented principal of continuing with previous good policies of the scheme by successive DGs has resulted in policy

<sup>40</sup>See minutes of meeting NO.1/1991 of the National Director with Directors and Assistant Directors of NYSC, held from 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> March, 1991, at Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja, p. 18.

stability and overall good performance of the scheme so far. Thus, the creation of the zonal offices of the NYSC at the state level was in line with the vision of the management of the scheme at that time. For instance, part of the vision of the DG at the period in discuss was reported thus:

While noting the great role which the youths had to play in the national development, he (DG) acknowledged the tremendous contributions which the scheme had made to the growth and development of the country in the past 18 years as well as the efforts of the past administrators of the scheme towards its success so far. Taking off from his previous position that if much had been accomplished in the past, much more could be done and achieve now.....My dream here is one of lifting the scheme to a greater height- far higher than could be imagined. In furtherance of this philosophy, he said that the impact of the scheme as a service organisation must not only be felt more and more by the society, but that the scheme must also move in a new positive direction and strengthen its operation. He said the aim, among others, is to put in place a more vibrant scheme, operating as one big family, spreading its tentacles everywhere to effect national unity and development in every nook and cranny of the country. In short, I want a scheme that can be relied upon to do a nice job at all times, no matter the nature or circumstances.<sup>41</sup>

In furtherance of the DG's vision above, other changes were introduced in the organisation of the scheme to overcome administrative bottlenecks that slowed the pace of progress of the scheme. Some of the new policies include ensuring

<sup>41</sup> See minutes of meeting NO.1/1991 of the National Director with Directors and Assistant Directors of NYSC, held from 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> March, 1991, at Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja, p.18.

adherence to the policy of job placement for corps members. The policy insisted on corps members being posted to areas relevant to their subject discipline and, more importantly, where their services were needed. This was to curb the increasing rate of corps rejection by employers where they were posted for primary assignments. State Directors were to ensure the implementation of the new policy and also ensure that there were more openings for the placement of corps members for primary assignments.<sup>42</sup> The policy also required the Federal Government to allocate some projects slated to be financed by the Local Government to corps members at the grassroot. Furthermore, there was a change in the nomenclature of the Job Placement Unit of the NYSC scheme to a new one known as Job Advisory and Counselling Unit.<sup>43</sup>

As a means of motivating the top echelon of the scheme, to put in more efforts towards the realisation of the goals of the NYSC, there was a re-organisation of the salaries of Directors of the scheme to reflect that of their counterparts in the civil service. Thus, to this effect, the salaries of NYSC Directors were adjusted to that of Grade Level 17 like that of their counterparts in other Federal Government establishments.<sup>44</sup>

It should be noted that at the inception of the scheme in 1973, enrolment by Nigerian graduates for the NYSC service was not mandatory. In fact, the first set of graduates that were mobilised for the service were from the universities existing then, which were: University of Ibadan, Ibadan; University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; University of Ife, Ile-Ife; University of Lagos; and University of Benin. Graduates of other tertiary institutions were initially excluded from the scheme on the grounds that the scheme was just in its first year; its trial year. It was therefore important to limit the numbers of

<sup>42</sup>See minutes of meeting NO.1/1991 of the National Director with Directors and Assistant Directors of NYSC, held from 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> March, 1991, at Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup>Minutes of meeting NO.1/1991 of the National Director with Directors and Assistant Directors of NYSC, held from 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> March, 1991, at Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Minutes of meeting NO.1/1991 of the National Director with Directors and Assistant Directors of the NYSC, held from 14<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> March, 1991, at Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja, p. 10.

participants in that first year to enable the organisers learn the ropes.<sup>45</sup> However, between 1<sup>st</sup> July of 1977 and 31<sup>st</sup> July of 1985, it became mandatory for all Nigerian graduates who studied in institutions of higher learning, either in Nigeria or abroad, to participate in the National Youth Service Scheme, age notwithstanding. In fact, exemption from the scheme on the ground of age was abolished in July 1977, but was re-instated by July of 1985.<sup>46</sup> This structural change in the organisation of the scheme had what could be described as an 'almost instant effect' on the population of participating corps members. For example, it has been stated that:

In 1973/74, 2,258 graduates constituted the foundation of the NYSC Scheme and by its fourth year, the number had risen to 5,944.... This number of participants has been tentatively recorded as 10,200 for the 1977/78 service year, representing an increase of 41.7% over the previous year's figure. This remarkable increase, the highest annual increase since the establishment of the scheme, was due to the changes in the scope and terms of participation coupled with the abolition of the age limit with effect from 1977. Female participation rate which was 13.6% in 1973/74 rose to 19.9% in 1977/78.<sup>47</sup>

However, graduates of some professional courses as medicine, law, pharmacy, etc, were authorised to do their one-year apprenticeship or professional programme before embarking on the national service. Interestingly, it was the age as at the time of graduation that will be taken in to cognizance for lawyers and medical doctors for mobilisation for the national services. This means that once a law graduate or medical students successfully

<sup>45</sup> Samuel O. Asein, *Call To Service, Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Scheme, 1973-1993*, p. 49.

<sup>46</sup> National Youth Service Corps, *NYSC Hand Book Revised in 1999*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>47</sup> Folayan Ojo, *Evaluation on Four Tears of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme*, National Youth Service Corps Directorate Headquarters, Lagos, November, 1977, p. 16.

completes his/her programme in the university, and thereafter proceed to law school or internship, the NYSC would only consider the age of the person when he/she graduated from the university, not the age when he/ she will be completing the professional apprenticeship. Worthy of note is the fact that graduates of other disciplines who do not engage in mandatory professional programmes were expected to complete their one-year service before embarking on programmes of higher degrees like M.A, M. SC. etc. According to Decree 51 of June 1993, it is only those who successfully graduated from a Degrees/Diploma awarding institution that could be mobilised for the national service under the scheme.<sup>48</sup>

In the course of mobilising graduates for national service under the NYSC Scheme, it was observed that there were cases of omissions and wrong postings of corps members. To redress this issue, a three-layer policy was put in place within the structure of the scheme. First, prior to the commencement of orientation in the various NYSC camps across the country, Schedule Officers in the various institutions are used to effect corrections of omissions and wrong posting. Second, while the actual orientation is on-going, the State Coordinator facilitated corrections from the Directorate, and thirdly, after orientation, the National Directorate could still effect corrections via States Secretariats of the NYSC.<sup>49</sup> The essence of infusing this measures in the structure of the scheme was to ensure that issues of omissions and wrong posting, which often times were not deliberate, were resolve speedily by the national Directorate to facilitate smooth take-of the corps members' service year.

Added to the forgoing was the change in the policy of redeployment. Usually, the organisation of the NYSC scheme created room for redeployment of corps members with genuine and important reasons, from states where they were initially posted to other states after due examination and confirmation of the sincerity of the person applying for redeployment. However,

<sup>48</sup> National Youth Service Corps, *NYSC Hand Book Revised in 1999*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>49</sup> National Youth Service Corps, *NYSC Hand Book Revised in 1999*, p. 13.

the management of the scheme realised that they were cases of abuse of redeployment procedures. Corps members who did not feel comfortable with their posting often did everything possible to be redeployed to states of their choices. This negates the objective of the scheme and the policy of posting of corps members which is to ensure that corps members are posted to other parts of the country different from the places of origin so that they can learn the cultures of others and have a better understanding of the total way of life of the people as well as contribute to the development of the community where they serve. The overall aim as discussed above is to promote unity among Nigerian youths and to empower them for future responsibilities. It is therefore antithetical and indeed inimical to the realisation of the objectives of the scheme to redeploy corps members without sincere cases to other places. Thus, a new policy was put in place in the annals of the organisation of the scheme to minimise abuses of redeployment. Redeployment of corps members was henceforth to be done on quarterly basis.<sup>50</sup> Room was, however, made for emergency cases only.

Furthermore, administratively, there was also the restructuring of the Technical Services Department which was created in 1989 as part of the re-organisation of the NYSC. The purpose of the re-organisation of the Technical Department was for effective management and utilisation of available resources of the scheme. It was noticed that the enthusiasm which greeted the setting up of the Community Development Service (which focussed on farming) dwindled in no time, in spite of the huge financial investment of the scheme in the projects. Put differently, the NYSC did not get returns on investment in the CDS which focused on farming. Therefore, it became expedient to re-structure the department for greater efficiency and return on investment. To this end, the department which hitherto was made up of five main divisions was prune down to three

<sup>50</sup> Minutes of meeting NO.1/1991 of the National Director with Directors and Assistant Directors of NYSC, held from 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> March, 1991, at Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja, p. 21.

comprising CDS Farms with the following units: Crop Production, Livestock/Food Processing, and Finance and Marketing. The second division, known as Engineering and Building Works, had as its sub-units the following: Mechanical/Automobile, Electrical/Maintenance, Design and Planning, and Construction. The third division was Community Development Services made up of Social Services Unit and Environmental Improvement Unit.<sup>51</sup>

It is important to point out that the restructuring above in the organisation of the NYSC was apt as it was strategic, because it was result-oriented and actually brought about improvement in the NYSC CDS farms. Other sub-units in the divisions equally became more efficient and result-oriented. More importantly, there was a gradual return on the investment of the scheme as the output of the Community Development Services farms became available and useful during orientation camps to support the feeding of corps members.<sup>52</sup> There was also adjustment in the orientation programme of the scheme. This was in the introduction of Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Programme. The need for this adjustment in the structure of the contents of the orientation programme was the nature of the challenges faced by corps members in their post-service years, in terms of employment. Recall that apart from graduates of disciplines such as law, medicine, pharmacy, etc, who had to undertake one-year professional programme after their university education, the bulk of graduates from other disciplines were often mobilised directly from their various institutions for national service under the NYSC scheme. Most of these graduates, prior to their mobilisation from their institutions where they studied, had probably never worked nor earned income of their own. The one-year NYSC national service thus becomes for them the first

<sup>51</sup> Minutes of meeting NO.1/1991 of the National Director with Directors and Assistant Directors of NYSC, held from 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> March, 1991, at Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja, p.23.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Bassey Okon Bassey, former store-keeper, NYSC State Secretariat, Calabar, Cross River State, on 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2020.

experience of employment and opportunity to start a life of financial independence from their parents.<sup>53</sup>

Observably, upon the completion of the one-year of national service, most corps members develop new life styles and financial independence which makes it difficult for them to fit in the former life-style of living under the roof and control of their parents, and more importantly, depend again on them for financial sustenance due to lack of jobs after the service year.<sup>54</sup> Apart from the fact that this situation is not in tandem with the objectives of the scheme which, among others, is to empower the Nigerian youth, the post-service condition of many corps members results to frustration which could lead to crime, corruption, and create a situation around the post-service corps member where the values of the orientation training could be jettisoned in preference for any means of survival. This situation was unacceptable to the Management of the NYSC. Therefore, to ameliorate this situation and empower corps members to have something to fall back on and start a living after the mandatory service year, there was the introduction of the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Programme (SAED) into the curriculum of the orientation course of the scheme. The programme, which is dual faceted, is made of in-camp training as well as post-camp training.<sup>55</sup> This was to ensure a more holistic development of the latent skills in corps members and also expose them to new and simple skills with which they can become self-employed, and even become employers of labour. Statistics available suggest that the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurial Development Programme has been very successful because over seven thousand ex-corps members<sup>56</sup> have been able to put the knowledge acquired from the

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Abimbola Ojo, Corps members, Lagos State, 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2020.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Philomena Oluwatosin Ajayi, Former Corps Member, 2017/202018, Ibadan, 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2020.

<sup>55</sup> National Youth Service Corps Yearbook, 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition, 2018, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> National Youth Service Corps Yearbook, 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition, 2018, p. 17.

programme to use by establishing thriving businesses in various parts of the country.

Indeed, the introduction of SAED into the scheme was no doubt a re-organisation that facilitated the attainment of a major objective of the scheme, which is to empower Nigerian Youths. This was obvious because apart from the NYSC scheme, there was no other known programme in the country that has successfully mobilised so many Nigerian youths from different ethnic background and training, and has been able to successfully manage them in the course of the orientation programme. Moreover, no other institution in the country has been able to come up with a programme such as SAED, which arms the corps members with the skills to attain financial independence and become employers of labour, rather than ending up as job seekers after the service year. The objective of empowering Nigerian youths, which is a cardinal objective of the scheme, would certainly have been defeated if the NYSC was unable to design the SAED programme which prepares the corps members for life after service.

In the year 2014, there was, again, an expansion in the structure of the programme of the scheme. The Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers (HIRD) was introduced in response to the needs of the many rural communities where corps members serve. Basically, the initiative was to ensure the provision of quality and affordable healthcare for the people of the communities. In the early years of the scheme, there was a disparity in the posting of corps members between the urban centres and the rural areas because there was the concentration of industries and other establishments with the capacity to absorb corps members.<sup>57</sup>

Cities such as Lagos, Kano, Port Harcourt, Enugu, etc, with industries and many companies received high numbers of corps members. This was to the detriment of the rural communities without establishments were corps members could be assigned

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Bassey Okon Bassey, former store-keeper, NYSC State Secretariat, Calabar, Cross River State, on 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2020.

for their primary assignments. Rural communities could, therefore, not gain maximally from the services of corps members.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the managers of the scheme saw this challenge and introduced the HIRD to bring medical services close to the people. There were equally other programmes that were put in place as Community Development Service, CDS, of the corps members, to ensure that rural dwellers harvested the gains of the NYSC. One of such programmes was the introduction and partnership of the scheme with the Road Safety Corps. This was important given the increasing need for the people of the rural areas to migrate to urban centres in search of job opportunities and better life. Of course, the differences in the life-style of the people in the city and those of rural dwellers was high. It was therefore important that inhabitants of the remote areas were schooled on the safety measures to cope with the urban life style. Thus, the introduction of Road Safety Group in the organisational structure of the NYSC as a Community Development Project was apt.<sup>59</sup> It should be mentioned that the Road Safety Group of the corps members in the CDS did not concentrate on educating rural dwellers alone on safety procedures, those of them who served in the urban centres where high vehicular movement and long hours of traffic were experienced by commuters on daily basis participated actively, as part of their CDS, to decongest traffic, especially at junctions and inter-sections.

Other such CDS groups as Reproductive Health & HIV/ AIDS, Anti-Corruption, Service Delivery (which has to do with attitudinal change and rebranding), Drug Free and Quality Control, as well as specific medical support such as Red Cross, Breast Without Spot, Polio Plus, etc, were all put in place.<sup>60</sup> This necessitated partnership between the parent bodies of these organisations in Nigeria and the NYSC, in order to first educate

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Justina Atamma, Former Staff of NYSC, Cross River State, on 12, August, 2020.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Justina Atamma, Former Staff of NYSC, Cross River State, on 12, August, 2020.

<sup>60</sup> ABC of Community Development Service, A Publication of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Community Development Service and Special Projects, June, 2014, p.4.

the corps members, before they (the corps members) were posted out to their primary places of assignment where they were expected to engage in CDS in the areas enumerated above. It should be noted that apart from the collaborative CDS programmes discussed above, the nature of the organisation and structure of the CDS programmes of the NYSC made room for the formation of group community development services, such as: Corps Legal Aid Group, Sports Group, Cultural and Tourism Group (which often include band, dance, drama & tourism), Education Development Group (dealing with such issues as mass literacy, adult education, extra murals), ICT, Environmental Protection and Sanitation Group, Editorial/Publicity Group, Agro-Allied Group, Charity Group, etc.<sup>61</sup>

The diversity, almost in all basic human endeavours, by the NYSC CDS programmes, was deliberately structured by the management of the scheme, over time, to ensure that emerging basic societal problems are tackled, or services provided for a more quality life for the people of the communities by the corps members. For example, when the scheme commenced in 1973, the HIV/ AIDS pandemic had not emerged, and so the need for a group CDS on such issues was not necessary. However, as the pandemic increasingly became a threat to human existence, the need to educate people, especially the youths, on how to keep safe, became even more necessary. Thus, the re-organisation of the structure of the CDS was necessary to cater for the emerging and urgent needs of the society.<sup>62</sup> It could therefore be confidently said that every adjustment in the organisation and structure of the NYSC was apt, not only because it is always a response to the needs of the communities, but also because it has often enhanced the living standard of the people of the communities. This is reflected in the acceptability of corps members in various communities across the country. In some cases, corps members who were outstanding and whose CDS impacted very positively on the people were rewarded in various ways.

<sup>61</sup>ABC of Community Development Service, A Publication of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Community Development Service and Special Projects, June, 2014, p.4

<sup>62</sup>Interview with Justina Atamma, Former Staff of NYSC, Cross River State, on 12 August, 2020.



**Fig. 6:** Brig. Gen. Shuaibu Ibrahim, Director -General NYSC

In recent times, especially from 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2019, when the current Director-General of the NYSC, Brig. Gen. Shuaibu Ibrahim, assumed duties at the National Directorate, in Abuja, as its 18<sup>th</sup> DG, new exigencies and his vision for the scheme required that the NYSC structure should be adjusted to facilitate the realisation of his visions and ideals for the scheme. In his address during the handover/takeover ceremony, the DG stated succinctly that

My vision will be to sustain effective utilization of the potentials of the Corps Members, pursue a technologically driven organization, improve on the welfare of both Corps Members and the staff, as well as their security, strengthened the existing collaborations with stakeholders, and rejig the NYSC ventures in line with the NYSC Act.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Selected Speeches and Strides of the 18<sup>th</sup> NYSC Director-General, Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim, Dss, PhD, MTRCN, pp.8-9

Indeed, the practical application of these objectives of the Director-General of the NYSC began to manifest almost immediately given the upward review of the monthly allowances of corps members to N33,000.00 (thirty-three thousand naira).<sup>64</sup> This change was hinged on the fact that the previous allowance paid to corps members could no longer sustain them in the face of new economic realities in the country, especially taking into consideration the fact that corps members were encouraged to save part of their allowances to start-up the implementation of the skills acquired in the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Programme of the NYSC in addition to whatever, other assistance they may get from the partners of the scheme. The change in terms of increase in the allowance of corps members went hand-in-hand with the provision of security for corps members to discharge their duties in their variously assigned places of primary assignment.

It would be recalled that the spate of insecurity in recent times in some parts of Nigeria, especially the case of insurgency in the North-East and banditry in the North-West, as well as other forms of threat to the lives of Nigerians, made it difficult for corps members to serve in certain parts of the country. Whereas, the idea of the scheme is to promote unity in diversity through the posting of corps members to places other than their regions and places of birth, parents and guardians were no longer comfortable that their children/wards be posted to parts of the country where their safety was not guaranteed. This situation was a clog in the wheel of the scheme to attain the objective of promoting unity, especially amongst Nigerian youths. Thus, providing security for corps members in their places of services by the 18<sup>th</sup> Director-General, was a new policy in the structure of the scheme which restored confidence to parents, the management of the NYSC, and the corps members themselves, that their safety is assure during national service under the NYSC scheme.

<sup>64</sup>Uji Abdullahi Iliyasus, "Brig-General Ibrahim and his reforms in the NYSC", *Blueprint*, July 24<sup>th</sup> 2020, retrieved July 25<sup>th</sup> 2020.

Furthermore, in response to a growing digitalised world, the scheme was restructured by the current DG, Brigadier-General Shuaibu Ibrahim, to be more ICT compliant in order to facilitate faster and more efficient service delivery. This change was expressed by the DG when he stated that:

It is my pleasure to address you on this occasion of the 2018 ICT Desk Officers' training workshop. This programme is in furtherance of Management's commitment to building staff capacity for enhanced performance. I find the programme gratifying because it reflects one of the focal areas on my agenda for the scheme, which is to pursue a technologically-driven organisation.<sup>65</sup>

This innovation in the ICT unit of the NYSC was demonstrated in the acquisition of operational license for a radio station for the NYSC, which will propagate the activities of the scheme and provide information that will disabuse the minds of the critics of the scheme. In addition, the scrupulous application of improved ICT unit in the structure of the NYSC led to the taming of the influx of unqualified individuals into the NYSC camps thereby unnecessarily increasing the overhead cost of the scheme.<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has revealed that in terms of its organisation and structure, the NYSC has never been static. While retaining the design of its structure and organisation from inception, as time evolved and new exigencies emerged, the scheme has had to continuously rejig its organisational structure as driven by the vision and ideals of the Director-Generals at the helm of affairs of the scheme. It is worthy to observe that over the

<sup>65</sup> See Selected Speeches and Strides of the 18<sup>th</sup> NYSC Director-General, Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim, Dss, PhD, MTRCN, p.10.

<sup>66</sup> Uji Abdullahi Iliyasus, "Brig-General Ibrahim and his reforms in the NYSC", Blueprint, July 24<sup>th</sup> 2020, retrieved July 25<sup>th</sup> 2020

years, a sense of military discipline has been infused into the the activities of the NYSC scheme, especially with regards to its administrative and management style. This is because successive DGs of the scheme have maintained most of the policies of their predecessors, while introducing their own ideas based on the current needs of the scheme. Suffice it to say therefore that the successes and achievements of the NYSC since 1973 till now is basically due to decisions in its organisation and structure in response to the exigencies of the time.

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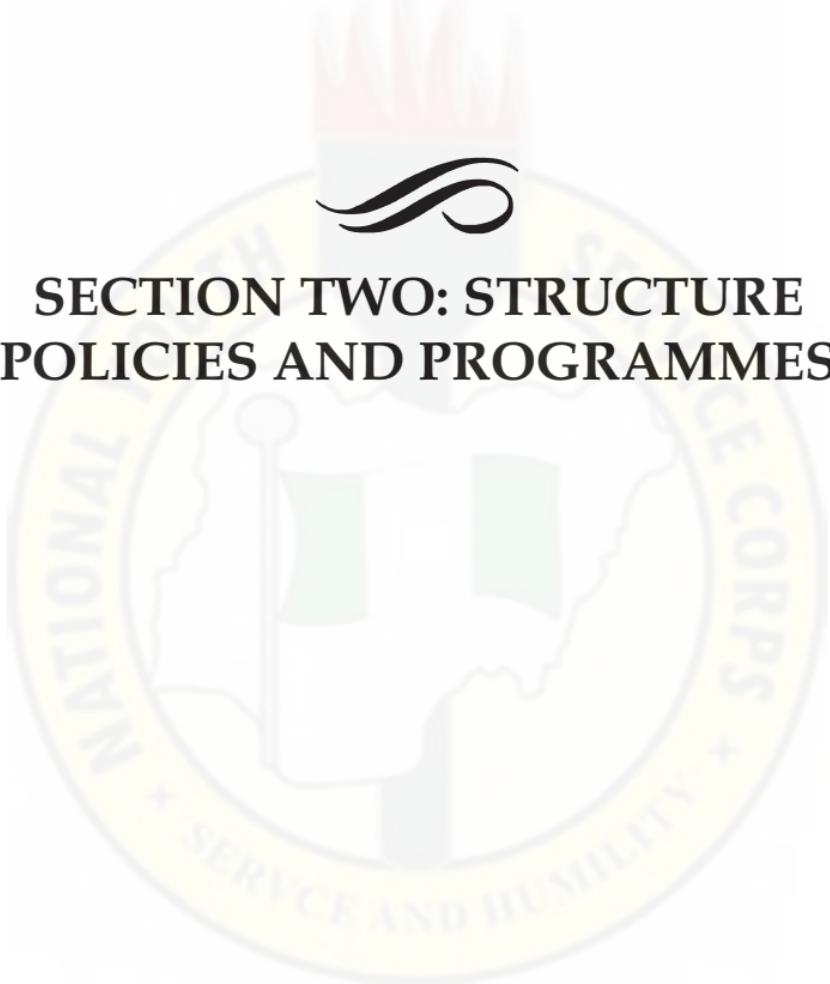
Report of the Committee on the Effective Utilization of Corps Members.

S/N	Name	Age	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
1	Abdullahi Muhammed	73	Former NYSC Staff	Abuja	10 <sup>th</sup> August, 2020
2	Abimbola Ojo,	26	Corps Member	Lagos State	1st August, 2020
3	Bassey Okon Bassey	68	Former NYSC Staff	Calabar	11 <sup>th</sup> August, 2020.
4	Justina Atamma	67	Former Staff of NYSC	Calabar	12 <sup>th</sup> August, 2020
5	Philomena Oluwatosin Ajayi	30	Former Corps Member	Ibadan	5 <sup>th</sup> August, 2020.

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## **SECTION TWO: STRUCTURE POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES**



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## Chapter Five

# THE ARMY AND THE CHARACTER OF NYSC

*Bem Japhet Audu*

*Department of History & War Studies*

*Nigerian Defence Academy*

*Kaduna*

### Introduction

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was established in 1973 by the government of General Yakubu Gowon. The historical background of the policy is traceable to the events that took place in Nigeria towards the last half of the 1960s. The years 1967-1970 were characterised by the Nigerian civil war.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the war, the General Gowon administration came up with new policies that would promote post-conflict peace, reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. Consequently, the vital need for national unity led to the birth of the NYSC. The NYSC programme was born through Decree N° 24 of 22nd May 1973.<sup>2</sup> This shows that the NYSC was established with a view to bring about national unity and develop communities through the youths of Nigeria. A month later, the ruling military government came up with the legal framework which outlined the objectives of the scheme to include inculcating discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work and of patriotic service to Nigeria in any situation they may find themselves; raising the moral tone of the Nigerian youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement, social and cultural

<sup>1</sup> M.R. Barrick and M.K. Mount, "Effectsofimpressionmanagementandself-deceptiononthepredictivevalidityofpersonalityconstructs", *JournalofAppliedPsychology*, 81(3), 1996, p. 262.

<sup>2</sup>Barrick and Mount, "Effectsofimpressionmanagement,"

improvement; developing in the Nigerian youths the attitudes of mind acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilisation in the national interest; enabling Nigerian youths to acquire the spirit of self-reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self-employment; contributing to the accelerated growth of the national economy; developing common ties among the Nigerian youths and promoting national unity and integration; removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance and confirming at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups; and developing a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of Nigeria.<sup>3</sup>

The objectives of the scheme include developing a sound and result-oriented institution that is committed to the realisation of national unity and even development. It is an organisation that is well motivated and capable of bringing out the best qualities in our youth and imparting in them the right attitude and value for nation-building, which serves as a catalyst to national development and gives the participating graduate youths a sense of pride and fulfilment of. The primary objective of this chapter is to explain the causes and outcomes of military regimentation of the NYSC and the implications of this on the general organization of Corps members and their character disposition during and after service. The chapter tries to establish the relationship between Army regimentation and the organization of the NYSC on the one hand, and the impact of this on corps members and the operations of the general NYSC on the other.



Fig. 7: A Nigerian Army Officer inspecting an NYSC Quarter Guard

Drill is the basic foundation of military regimentation and a yardstick for measuring the level of discipline of a force that sharpens the individual soldier's military career. The primary mandate of the Nigerian army is to defend the state from external aggression and internal insurrection.<sup>4</sup> Soon after independence in 1960, the Nigerian army suppressed a secessionist bid by the former Eastern region, which declared itself the Republic of Biafra in 1967. Since the 1960s, the Nigerian army has contributed to several internal security operations, helping the police and other civil authorities to restore law and public order. It has also contributed substantially to UN peacekeeping operations, regional peace operations authorised by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and operations mandated by the African Union (AU).<sup>5</sup> Its senior-

<sup>4</sup>E. Azinge, E. "Military in internal security operations: challenges and prospects", Paper presented at the Nigerian Bar Association 53rd Annual General Conference, 28th August, Tinapa-Calabar, 2013.

level training institutions continue to attract officers from foreign militaries.

Regimentation and drilling in the Nigerian Army is hinged on two cardinals which are professionalism and responsiveness. Professionalism is about doing things the way they should be done based on the ability and skill expected of a professional that should be noted for competence. The foundation of military professionalism is military discipline. Its attributes include organisation, expertise, responsibility, corporate solidarity and adherence to professional code of conduct. On the other hand, responsiveness is the ability to respond adequately to situations by being proactive. Indeed, this is in line with the Nigerian Army (NA) regimentation and drilling doctrine. In between these pillars are the core values that will drive the officers and soldiers to adequately imbibe the culture of professionalism and responsiveness.<sup>6</sup>

Responsiveness is the quality or state of being responsive. It is the ability of an officer or soldier to promptly respond, adapt and adjust to given instructions within a given time frame. This has to do with personal responsibilities, especially as they relate to a group which in this case is the NA drilling. Paramount to personal responsibility is being responsible for one's own actions and well-being. In this scenario, consequences are suffered when one fails to do what is right. Being responsive refers to our ability to make decisions that serve our own interests and the interests of the group. Typical examples of the pillars of professionalism and responsiveness are the NODUF exercises that the NA has been conducting in different areas in the country.<sup>7</sup> Professionalism and responsiveness are like joint ventures as they are interrelated. In their application, consequences must be accepted, and blame and retribution given to officers concerned. In like manner, strict, conscious and

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Ashiru Ahmed, Lagos: Babs Animashaun, 09 October 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Okechukwu Igwe, Lagos: Babs Animashaun, 09 October 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with RSM. Jang Pachok, Lagos: Babs Animashaun, 09 October 2020.

consistent adherence should be recognised and rewarded. This means that we have to commit ourselves to lead, follow, solve problems and display situational awareness at all times. Indeed, it involves working hard and even taking risks, which could be daunting and also rewarding. Core issues that emanate from professionalism and responsiveness include training, regimentation, welfare, operational exigencies, logistics, Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC), Inter-Agency Cooperation and observance of core values. We shall examine these in some more details.<sup>8</sup>

Drilling is discipline and instruction directed to the development and formation of character and acquisition of enhanced skills. Drilling, being a cornerstone of military professionalism, underscores the importance of a sound, robust and standard engagement. The ability to be professionally responsive to any operational situation, therefore, depends largely on the level and type of training of a nation's military. Therefore, military vision envisages that training in all aspects of professional duties must be given its rightful place. The NA has rich customs, traditions and ethics. These translate to the high level of regimentation as witnessed in the NA from its inception up to late 1990s. Regimentation as practiced during this period was built through a series of activities meant to reflect the essential elements of professionalism. These activities include drills, parades, mess life, training and recreational activities. Resuscitation of regimentation through regular conduct of parades and restoration of declining mess life, amongst others, are now given serious attention. Commanders at all levels are thus to ensure that orientation cadre are conducted for young soldiers and officers posted to units in order to enshrine in to them aspects of unit regimentation early.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>J.S. Blandin and J.H. Morris, "Predicting attrition among non-high school graduate Army enlistees", *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 8(4), 1982, p. 645.

<sup>9</sup>P.D. Bliese and R.R. Halverson, Group consensus and psychological well-being: A large field study. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 28(7) 1998, p. 563.



Fig. 8: Regimented and Disciplined Corps Members on Parade Ground

Regimentation and drilling play significant roles in the transformation of the defence sector in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, regimentation can be traced to the creation of the Royal British West African Frontier Force (RBWAFF) which evolved into the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria at independence in 1960. This was obtainable because the new personnel needed to be trained in the art of defending the territory and the nation's interest with the use of lethal force.<sup>10</sup> The form of drilling received at this early stage was mainly that which would prepare the indigenous armies toward assisting the British army during the World Wars. However, from 1960, the Nigerian Army's regimentation and drilling changed direction, and now involves the learning of tactical and rudimentary skills such as first-aid and field hygiene, map-reading, patrolling, post duties, and so on. This was kick-started so as to ensure that military personnel were ready to go on tours in areas where they are needed to maintain global peace.

<sup>10</sup> D. Bohn & E. Schmitz, *Waiver policy and attrition, Research Report*, NRC-96-01. Arlington, VA: Navy Recruiting Command, 1996.

It thus became a necessity for the NA to establish regiments and advanced military drillings for effectiveness and efficiency in the discharge of military duties. It was for this reason that the Armed Forces Command and Staff College, Jagi, and the Infantry Corps Centre and School (ICCS), the Department of Army Training and Operation (DATOPS), Army (CTOP 'A') (Nigerian Army, N.d), were established so as to regiment and drill the military in line with global best practices. More so, there is the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA), Zaria, created in 1964 owing to the necessity to teach military personnel in the Nigerian Armed Forces; the National War College, Abuja; the National Defence College, Abuja; the Training and Doctrine Command HQ (TRADOC) located in Minna, Niger State, which is responsible for doctrinal command, training and combat development of the military; and the Nigerian Military School, Zari.<sup>11</sup>

The National War College prepares both indigenous and foreign top military officials and civilians alike through in-depth studies of command-cum-policy operations. This is done via a number of means, including the organisation of conferences, classroom discussions, simulated military campaigns, and other on-field drilling activities. The military training institute in Nigeria which alone awards its trainees with University-equivalent degrees is the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA), Zaria. The primary purpose for setting up the Academy is for the impartation of military crafts and values, erudition and/or scholarship, and expertise in the art of war which every young and upcoming officer needs to be well equipped with for the task of national defense.<sup>12</sup>

The Command and Staff College, Jaji, is a defence establishment which is geared at enhancing the professional prowess of the military officials of the three arms of the Nigerian military and civilians in the defence ministry through in-depth study of command-cum-staff operations. The College is one with an international reputation and recognition. Little wonder,

<sup>11</sup>Bohn and E. Schmitz, *Waiverpolicy*

<sup>12</sup>Bohn & E. Schmitz, *Waiverpolicy*

military personnel from countries within and outside the African continent, such as Tanzania and Guyana, have been accepted to study at the institution. The duration of the training course in the College is ten months. The Armed Forces Command and Staff College (AFCSC), Jaji, Kaduna State, is a training institute majorly involving the three service arms of the Nigerian Armed Forces. When the Staff College was kick-started in 1976, only two courses were offered. However, with time and following the tripartite configuration of the College where there is the land (army), maritime (navy) and aerial (air force) departments, three courses were offered by the College, and these courses were structured according to the ranking of the military. The courses comprise a one-year Senior Course for Majors and their equivalents, a twenty- week Junior Course for Captains and their equivalent, and a Staff Duties Course for Senior Non-Commissioned Officers of the three services.

Also, there is the Infantry Corps Centre and School located in Jaji, Kaduna. Military education at the Centre is fundamentally reserved for military and paramilitary personnel of the Nigerian defence sector. As with most of the other military institutions in Nigeria, the training courses of the Infantry Corp Centre and School focuses more on the impartation of skills and professional experiences on peacekeeping issues. Although its structures and curricula were designed majorly to suit the teaching of peacekeeping courses, basic military drillings are also handled by the school. That is why five other drilling facilities at different locations in the country in Bauchi, Kachia, Kontagara, Lantale, and Nsukka were erected.<sup>13</sup>

## Regimentation, Drilling and the NYSC



**Fig. 9: Corps Members Training at the Orientation Camp**

Basic training is a part of cultural and social learning, covering the development of skills, values, and normative judgments about things that are appreciated as applicable and rewarding in the military.<sup>14</sup> Regimentation process and drilling in the NYSC takes place during the orientation camp when new corps members are taught the value system and the desired and customary behaviours (the norms) and perspectives needed for participating in the NYSC. According to Ashiru, through this process, which is referred to as "learning the ropes", the corp member is able to "cope with psychological, physical, social, and moral demands in order to satisfy essential needs and reduce psychological tension".<sup>15</sup> Corroborating Ashiru's position, Okechukwu presents five phases corps members pass through during regimentation and drilling in the NYSC camp. These

<sup>14</sup> A. Fawole, "The Psychological Foundations of Nigeria's...

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Briggs Onifade Ibukun, Ex-corpser, Bode Thomas, 10 October 2020.

phases include: verification, socialisation, maintenance, re-socialisation, and passing out.<sup>28</sup> According to him, each distinct phase involves mutual evaluation of an individual: (1) verification of a prospective member, (2) socialization of a new members, (3) maintenance of achieved full membership, (4) re-socialisation of a physically challenged member, and (5) orientation of new members.<sup>16</sup>

The most stressful phases occur while trying to inculcate the regimentation norms on every corps member who all carry different mindsets and attitudes. In this case, since it is not a full military setting, soldiers are restricted from dishing one a certain level of drilling and punishment during regimentation. This affects the regimentation outcome as not all corps members fully incorporate and assimilate the regimentation norms at the end of the orientation camp.<sup>17</sup> Naturally, there are personal differences as to how a person prepares for service. Usually, the lines of skills and commitment are drawn as examples of how a person's abilities and orientation may fluctuate and develop during the regimentation process.

In general, a person who is discharged after regimentation and drilling in service should demonstrate either a higher or inadequate level of skills or commitment. It is expected that before entry, the person orients him or herself to service by exercising, discussing with friends and family, seeking information, making plans, and organising civilian obligations prior to service. The encounter with the military (at the entry level) initiates the systematic integration of the person into the military training with the exception of training in arms. This is expected to initiate the socialisation and the adjustment process. The acceptance of the person takes place during the basic training period which usually lasts throughout the whole advanced training period.<sup>18</sup> Finally, the encounter with the

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Aderibigbe Enilolobo, Ex-corper, Bode Thomas, 10 October 2020.

<sup>17</sup> O. Oyeboke, "Essays in Political Economy and Development", (A dissertation presented to The Department of Public Policy in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the subject of Public Policy), Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, May 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

military results in the new socialisation process with the youth corps member returning to civilian life and facing new challenges. In particular, future conscripts would have to consider how well they will adjust to being away from their family, friends, and current environment; how well they will meet the probable physical demands of the military or paramilitary service; whether they will fit in socially, and whether they will adjust to the expected orders, regimentation, and personal deprivations.

The overwhelming majority of corps members are usually not fully prepared for the first few days of basic drilling. Some corps members also contemplate the benefits that are gained and the experiences that the regimentation and drilling offer. Based on these kinds of comparisons, concerns and expectations, most corps members gain a certain degree of self-knowledge and convictions about their potential military capabilities and develop an attitude towards their participation in the camp. In addition, the comparison of personal perceptions with the experiences of others allows them to arrive at expectations about how well they will adjust to the regimentation, including its perceived values, norms, and required behaviour.

Entry into the NYSC camp designates the end of the anticipatory stage for corps members and the beginning of the encounter stage. At the latter moment, the new environment, such as a military unit, begins to introduce corps members to the details and demands of military culture, such as the normative standards, tasks, roles, and habits of the military social system. In the process, the military takes the whole personality, attitudes, perspectives, and normative attachments as subject to modification and provides an identity transition where a civilian is so transformed as to almost adopt a soldier's identity. In regimentation and drilling, the perceptions, dispositions, goals, motives, behaviour, and social relations of corps members are all under the systematic influence of the military culture and leaders. Thus, while the person's military, physical, and intellectual skills are developed, transformation of his entire

character and emotions are under a planned transformation. In this process, some cognitive processes may help corps members to adjust to stress and maintain well-being despite stress. For example, besides having realistic expectations about the regimentation, the ability to find or create meaning in stressful events, the sense of being capable of handling the situation, and the feeling of personal resilience is important for corps members. Although some corps members have enough correct information and know what to expect on the first few days in the camp, the military is still expected to expose everyone of them to some degree of stress as they go through the initial steps of unlearning familiar things and learning how to survive in a hierarchical, rule-governed, timetabled, and a physically, mentally and socially demanding environment.

In drilling, the corps member acquires the knowledge and skills for social and task-related relationships in the military. Specifically, corps members learn the nature of assigned tasks, the degree of his or her authority and autonomy, the amount of provided support, and the degree of shared information and exhibited concern and trust. It is possible that regimentation changes the corps members' attitudes and habits, but it is equally possible that at least some corps members are ready to join the military because of their pre-service orientation. In the NYSC system, it is normal that corps members are not fully prepared to accept experiences during the first days of regimentation, and this in spite of their personal preferences. However, corps members have only limited influence on the military practices, and are not able to change the situation. Therefore, their pre-existing personality characteristics and the existence of situational stressors and organisational support determine the quality of the adjustment process.

Conversely, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) is a one-year, mandatory programme for Nigerian citizens who should be less than 30 years old when they graduate from a tertiary institution. The government enforces participation by making it illegal for private or public sector employers to employ

any graduate who does not possess an NYSC completion or exemption certificate. With over 200,000 participants annually, it has an annual budget of 75 billion naira (about US\$400 million) making it by far the largest government programme targeted at youths. NYSC was established in 1973 after the Nigerian civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970. The civil war was fought along ethnic lines, as the majority of Igbo South-Eastern Region seceded to form the country of Biafra following severe violence against the Igbo in different parts of Nigeria. From its inception, an explicit goal of the NYSC was to reconstruct, reconcile and rebuild post-war Nigeria. It was designed to address the dual objectives of meeting national development needs and promoting national integration. The youths mobilised into the programme were expected to mitigate the acute shortage and uneven distribution of skilled labour across the country. At the same time, by enrolling youths from different regions of the country to serve together and by exposing them to the modes of living in different parts of Nigeria, the scheme sought to remove ignorance and prejudice and promote national unity.

Consequently, the focus on tertiary-educated youths is in recognition of their potential as national leaders and influencers, as well as their ability to provide skilled labour. The introduction of the NYSC was met initially with some resistance and public protests. However, over time, it became established as a core institution in Nigeria. It is now enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (Section 315) and its influence extends to all local governments of the country through the presence of corps members. Nevertheless, the NYSC remains a controversial topic in Nigeria and there are regular demands for its termination in the popular press from critics decrying its large costs and limited impact. On the other hand, supporters of the scheme claim that it plays a significant role in promoting inter-group harmony. However, there has been limited empirical evidence on the impact of the programme.

The service year is divided into four components, with the first component beginning with a three-week regimented orientation camp in each state. During this period, corps members are required to wear uniforms throughout the camp and are not permitted to leave. Orientation exercises such as physical training and drills, sports competitions, lectures on different social issues, language classes, and social activities, are designed to internalise the ideals of the programme, build comradeship among corps members and introduce them to their host state. At the end of the orientation, corps members receive posting letters to a place of primary assignment in a local government within the state. They work at this place for the remainder of the year, mostly as school teachers, but also as workers in hospitals, government offices, private companies and non-profit organisations. Corps members receive a monthly stipend comparable to the federal minimum wage from the government, and often, a supplemental stipend and/or housing from their employer.<sup>19</sup>

A third component of the programme is Community Development Service (CDS). One day each week, instead of working at the place of primary assignment, corps members work on community service projects in teams. CDS teams serve in a variety of ways such as environmental sanitisation and beautification projects, HIV sensitisation, extra-mural classes for secondary school students, road safety campaigns, among others. Lastly, at the end of the year, upon receipt of a clearance letter from participants' primary employers confirming satisfactory completion of their duties, NYSC issues a certificate of completion to corps members in a passing out ceremony. The structure of the NYSC service year results in two layers of inter-ethnic exposure. First, participants are exposed to a diverse mix of other college graduates from different states of the country during the orientation camp as well as during the weekly community service projects. This exposure is common to all participants since they are all in diverse NYSC cohorts. The

second type of exposure occurs during the day-to-day activities of the primary assignment. Corps members interact with students, co-workers, clients and other members of the local community.

### Challenges to Regimentation in NYSC Camp

In Nigeria, fresh graduates of institutions of higher learning (universities and polytechnics) who are below 30 years of age have to participate in a one-year programme referred to as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). At the start of each service year, participants are camped and subjected to a three-week orientation course which features intense physical fitness training, among other activities. The regimentation challenges revolve around the fitness programme designed for the camp subjects during the three weeks orientation period. For some corps members, the fitness programme usually leaves some adverse effects on their physical health. Sudden intense physical training (jogging, drills, calisthenics, contact games, man-o-war) cause discomfort and pain in untrained young people. Usually, before the orientation camps winds up, corps members get use to the physical exercises characteristic of camp life and often look forward to it even after the leave the orientation camp.

There is also the challenge of enforcing regimentation in the camps. For the camps to function properly, there must be military style regimentation underscored by discipline, control, obedience and some form of control. Graduates who are usually exposed to the liberal ideas deregulated freedom often find it difficult to quickly adjust to this forms of regimentation that is an intrinsic part of camp life. Since the camps are usually partly under the control of military and paramilitary officials, there are usually instances of a clash of interests. We must add that these cases hardly pose any serious problem since corps members eventually adjust to the demands of regimentation in the final analysis. Another challenge worth mentioning is the tendency of some corps members to fake illness as a condition for exempting themselves from camp drills and other energy sapping

activities. By not participating in these activities, they usually stand the risk of being sanctioned by the camp officials who monitor keenly the behaviour of corps members. Usually the fear of such sanctions, compel compliance from corps members in camps and full adherence to camp rules and regulations.

## Conclusion

As shown above, the role of the Nigerian Army in the NYSC scheme is basically to instil discipline and good leadership qualities as well as character building through regimentation and drills. Induction into the military culture during the orientation camp serves the purpose of reforming corps members who are required to revise their old understanding, skills, and values towards national integration and development, as well as selfless service to the nation. The NYSC therefore becomes a platform upon which members are drilled into a regimented environment. This is deliberately carried out through a sequence of planned learning experiences that include paramilitary training, endurance, fatigue, regimentation and improved discipline and self-denial. These factors combine to inculcate in the corps members some of the features of the army character.

## Chapter Six

# NYSC AND THE POLICY OF POSTING AND PRIMARY ASSIGNMENTS

*Patrick I. Ukase*

*Department of History and International Studies Kogi State University, Anyigba*

### Introduction

It is a fact that Nigeria's political and social landscape before 1973 was characterised by internal wrangling. This was occasioned by the nation's troubled journey since independence, coupled with the inability of the country to knit the spirit of oneness.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for this could be easily traced to the post 1945 political formations and intrigues in the country. This was worsened by the regional system of government practised prior to independence.<sup>2</sup> In as much as most of the existing literature were concerned with the tussle for power between the major regions and ethnic groups in the country, there also existed an unprecedented struggle for space among the minorities in the emergent state. This presupposes that Nigeria as a nation left the colonial era with a gulf in between the different regions.<sup>3</sup> Between 1960 and 1966, the newly independent nation was plagued by major political crises such as the Census Crisis, the

<sup>1</sup>. Ejela Emenako, (Ed.) (1986) *12 Years of National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria: 1973-1985*, National Youth Service Corps Directorate Headquarters, Lagos. p.5. Also see Ukase, P. I. "Governance, Separatist Agitations and the Survival of the Nigerian State", A lead paper presented at a Conference Organised by the Department of Political Science, Veritas University, Abuja, held on the 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2018, p.1

<sup>2</sup> Ineke Ugbede Joseph (2018) "Building Without Pillars: Nigeria and the Quagmire of Nation Building, 1966-1999" *Kashere Journal of Humanities, Management and Social Sciences*, Vol. 2 No. 1, p.34

<sup>3</sup> Adesina, O.C (1985), "Prelude to the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970", B.A. Long Essay, Department of History, University of Ife, June, 1985. Cited in Adesina, O.C (2015), *Nigeria's Imperfect Federation: The Case Against the Yoruba*. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Professor S.O. Arifalo Memorial Lecture, Department of History and International Studies, Akungba.

<sup>4</sup> Ukase, P.I (2008) "Nigeria's Post-Civil War Reconciliation Efforts and its Implications for the Stability of the Nigerian State in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" in M.A. Adejo, (ed) (2020), *The Nigerian*

Lagos Vice Chancellorship Crisis, the Action Group (AG) Crisis, the General Election Crisis, the Tiv Riot, the Western Election Crisis and the 1966 Coup de 'tat. These plethora of crisis along with its ethnic and sectional colourations, left a worrisome divide among the various groups in the country, which culminated into the Nigerian Civil War that lasted from 1967 to 1970.<sup>4</sup>

Although the bond among the various units in the country has been questioned by the post 1966 crisis, especially the events of January 15th and 29th July 1966 which left the country with a scary crack. It was this crack that informs Achebe's position that the feeling of togetherness and unity among Nigerians was already in shambles even before the actual commencement of the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970. The nation was in fact, in disarray and structurally disintegrated before the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War.<sup>5</sup> There is no gainsaying that in spite of the 'No Victor, No Vanquish' declaration by the General Yakubu Gowon's Government, the feeling of animosity amongst Nigerians continued unabated.<sup>6</sup> Shortly after the war, it was discovered that the creation or splitting of the country into 12 states at the eve of the Nigerian Civil War did little to put the menace of ethnocentrism in the country to an end.<sup>7</sup> What followed was a new twist in the power tussle among the various ethnic groups in the new state against the expectations of the architect of the splitting of the country into 12 states. This was as a result of the fact that the antecedent of the new states gave rise to a new majority versus minority struggle among the groups in the new enclaves.<sup>8</sup>

It was against the backdrop of these undercurrents in the post-Civil War Nigeria that the 3Rs (Reconstruction,

<sup>4</sup>Civil War: Forty Years After: What Lessons? A Publication of the Historical Society of Nigeria, pp.292-3

<sup>5</sup> Chinua Achebe (2012), *There Was A Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, The Penguin Press, New York. Pp. 61-72

<sup>6</sup> Obasa, P.K. (1995), *NYSC: A Nations Attempt at Mobilising the Youths*, MDL Consultants Marketers, Ilorin. Pp. 9-10

<sup>7</sup> Folayan Ojo (1977), *Evaluation Report on Four Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme*, NYSC Directorate Headquarters, Lagos. p.4

<sup>8</sup> Oral interview with Ojonuba Benson on 28-08-2020, a retired teacher and a second generation corps member.

Rehabilitation and Reconciliation) were instituted by General Gowon immediately after war. It should be noted that these policies epitomized the principal philosophy of the Nigerian Government in the Post-war era. Despite the spirit of the above philosophy, the *modus operandi* to be adopted in igniting the spirit of reintegration became problematic due to the massive migration of several Nigerians to their ethnic enclaves prior to the war and the psychological effects of the war on them, especially the defunct Biafrans.<sup>9</sup> Suffice to mention that the migration that ensued at the eve of the war was not only limited to the military personnel and artisans but civil servants and even academics. The accompanying effects of this was massive propaganda and stereotypes among the various groups in the country and this led to shortage of manpower in some parts of the country.<sup>10</sup> In an attempt to address these fundamental fault-lines the idea of the National Youth Service Corps was conceived, birthed and nurtured.<sup>11</sup>

The establishment of the National Youth Service Corps by Decree No. 24 on May 22nd 1973 was greeted with diverse reactions. Majority of the reactions were triggered by the existing stereotypes in the country as a result of the pre and post-civil war Nigerian politics and agitations for space by the leading ethnic groups. The scheme was however, able to stand off its major critics and pursue its principal objectives which revolves around the nurturing of a strong sense of belonging and unity among the various youths in the country. It is important to mention that before the establishment of the scheme, Nigerian graduates were labelled as too elitist in nature and character. They were seen as youths who had little or no sense of the realities in the rural settings in most parts of the countryside. According to Ojih John, despite the fact that majority of the graduates in the country were drawn from the rural areas prior

<sup>9</sup>. Oral interview with Michael Ugboja, a retired army officer in Egume on 15 July, 2020, age 70+

<sup>10</sup>. NYSC Hand Book, Revised in 1995. p.6

<sup>11</sup>. Folayan Ojo. (1977), *Evaluation Report on Four Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme*, NYSC Directorate Headquarters, Lagos. p.4

to the establishment of the scheme, most of them found it difficult to return to the rural area upon their graduation.<sup>12</sup> He opined that this could be as a result of the training and treatment they received during their education, and the fact that the country was faced with acute shortage of manpower in urban centres. This shortcoming inherent in the Nigerian educational system was highlighted in the NYSC Hand Book in 1995. The Scheme's Handbook advanced that the:

Universities and other institutions of higher learning are expected to be the training ground for future leaders, except that, these institutions are first and foremost committed to the advancement of learning and knowledge, training of people for good citizenship. Hence, the products of these institutions have been accused of being too elitist in their outlook, of not identifying with the plight of common man, and of inability to appropriate predicament of the vast majority of our people who live in the rural areas. Hence, was the need to look beyond the immediate present and to think of the future leadership of the country that necessitated the mobilization of certain categories of our youths through the National Youth Service Corps scheme.<sup>13</sup>

Aside the integrative objective of the scheme, its mission and vision was further given the necessary impetus by the structural imbalance in the distribution of high level skill personnel in the country. According to the National Manpower Board, as early as the 1960s, about 40% of the country's 57,000 high-level manpower (excluding teachers) were employed in Lagos.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, about 70% of the nation's medical and para-medical

<sup>12</sup>. Oral interview with Ojih John on 4-09-2020, a retired teacher and a second generation corps member held at Idah-Kogi State.

<sup>13</sup>. NYSC Hand Book, Revised in 1995. P.7

<sup>14</sup>. See the National Manpower Board, (1964). High-Level Manpower 1963-70, Manpower Studies No. 2, cited in Folayan Ojo. (1977), *Evaluation Report on Four Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme*, NYSC Directorate Headquarters, Lagos. p.4

personnel were employed in few urban areas especially university areas and state capitals. The limited number of graduates in the country during the first two decades of its independence and the expanding status of some cities such as Lagos, Kaduna, Kano, Ibadan, to mention a few were responsible for the concentration of graduates in the urban centres resulting to an uneven distribution of manpower in many parts of the country. This situation was further complicated by the stereotype about the rural areas as uninhabitable places for civilized people among many educated Nigerians.<sup>15</sup> These attitudes and stereotypes has continue to trouble the country. At the dawn of the 1970, it became evident that the quagmire of ethnic dislike, uneven distribution of manpower across the country and the existing stereotypes about the rural communities will go un- remedied in the absence of a strong approach by the government.<sup>16</sup> It was against this background that the NYSC scheme was put in place to pursue one of the 3Rs - the policy of Reintegration.<sup>17</sup>

The scheme, unlike the Government's policy of reintegration, came on board with a workable guideline on how skilled manpower could be distributed across the country and how Nigerian youths could as well be redistributed to areas where they have little or no knowledge about the country. All these were to be implemented and achieved through the scheme's posting policy. Unlike other national service schemes in other parts of the globe that predated the NYSC in Nigeria like the American Peace Corps, the British Voluntary Service Overseas,<sup>18</sup> the Young Pioneers of Malawi, the Work Camps of Mali, the Youth Corps of Guyana, the National Youth Service of Kenya;<sup>19</sup> the scheme in Nigeria was structured to ignite the spirit

<sup>15</sup>. Oral interview with Etugho Emmanuel on 4-09-2020, a retired teacher and a second generation corps member.

<sup>16</sup>. NYSC Hand Book, Revised in 1995. p.6

<sup>17</sup>. Samuel O. Asein, (1993), *Call to Service: Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme: 1973-993*. Sam Bookman, Ibadan. p.16

<sup>18</sup> Samuel O. Asein, (1993), *Call to Service: Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme: 1973-993*. Sam Bookman, Ibadan. p.16

<sup>19</sup>. Chioma Onwere, (1992), "National Youth Service Corps Programme and National Integration in Nigeria". Thesis. PhD. Department of International and Comparative Education, Institute of Education, University of London. p.103

of brotherhood among the youths in Nigeria, irrespective of ethnic and religious background following the chronic ethnic intolerance, political polarization and the ruthless power struggle occasioned by colonial rule in the country, and the first two decades of the country's postcolonial history.<sup>20</sup>

The youths became the target of the scheme due to their roles in the struggle for the country's independence and obviously because they could be veritable instruments for national integration.<sup>21</sup> The restriction of most Nigerians, especially the youths to their geographical and ethnic enclave prior to the establishment of the NYSC scheme was brought to the fore by Ejela Emenako in a study on the scheme in 1986. The study revealed that 62 per cent of the corps members had not visited their places of deployment and primary assignment before their service year.<sup>22</sup> This posed untoward consequences for the unity, stability and development of the country, since it was obvious the youths did not know their own country well.

### NYSC Posting (Deployment) Policy

The NYSC Posting Policy is one of the major integrative tools of the scheme which has over the years made it possible for the distribution of Nigerian youths across the country.<sup>23</sup> There is no gainsaying that the posting policy of the scheme is nothing less than the engine room of the scheme.<sup>24</sup>. Oral interview with Omachonu Samuel an ex-corps member in Delta state.

<sup>20</sup>. NYSC Hand Book, Revised in 1995. p. 6. Also see Chioma Onwere, (1992), "National Youth Service Corps Programme and National Integration in Nigeria". Thesis. PhD. Department of International and Comparative Education, Institute of Education, University of London. p.16

<sup>21</sup>. Samuel O. Asein, (1993), *Call to Service: Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme: 1973-993*. Sam Bookman, Ibadan. p.16

<sup>22</sup>. Ejela Emenako (Ed.), (1986), *12 Years of National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria: 1973-1985*, National Youth Service Corps Directorate Headquarters, Lagos. P.44

<sup>23</sup>. *National Youth Service Corps Act, CAP N84 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004*. 11, also see *Annual Volume of the Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Containing Decrees and Subsidiary Legislation Made in the Year 1973* (1974). Federal Ministry of Information, Printing Division, Lagos. A 505

<sup>24</sup>. Oral interview with Omachonu Samuel an ex-corps member in Delta state

This is premised on the fact that, it is this policy that drives and enables the implementation of the scheme's the principal aim of the scheme which is centred on the propagation, development and encouragement of ties among Nigerian youths and the promotion of national unity,<sup>25</sup> and the entire objectives of the scheme. According to the National Youth Service Corps Decree 1973, the objectives of the scheme *inter alia* includes:

- i. To inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work, and of patriotic and loyal service to the nation in any situation they may find themselves;
- ii. To raise their moral sense by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement and social and cultural improvement;
- iii. To develop in them attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilisation in the national interests;
- iv. To develop common ties among them and promote national unity by ensuring that:
- v. As far as possible youths are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin;
- vi. Each group, assigned to work together, is as representative of the country as possible;
- vii. The youths are exposed to the modes of
- viii. living of people in different parts of the country with a view to removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance, and confirming at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups;
- ix. To encourage members of the service corps to seek, at the end of their corps service, career employment all over the country thus promoting the free movement of labour;

<sup>25</sup>. Annual Volume of the Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Containing Decrees and Subsidiary Legislation Made in the Year 1973. (1974), Federal Ministry of Information, Printing Division, Lagos. A 505

- x. To induce employers partly through their experience with members of the service corps, to employ more readily qualified Nigerians irrespective of their States of origin; and
- xi. To enable Nigerian youths to acquire the spirit of self-reliance.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, the objective of the scheme was further elaborated by Decree No.51 of 16th June 1993, where it was mandated to instil in corps members, the zeal to contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy; and to develop a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of Nigeria.<sup>27</sup> The 1993 Decree added that corps members are to be encouraged to eschew religious intolerance by accommodating religious differences.

According to the NYSC Decree of 1973, Nigerian youths upon their graduation are to serve in the service corps for a period of one year as from the date specified in their call-up letters and are to make themselves available for service and shall present themselves at their posting places or authority as may be specified in their posting letter.<sup>28</sup> The Decree specifies that corps members are to be deployed to hospitals, road construction, farming, water schemes, surveying and mapping, social and economic services, teaching, food storage and eradication of pest. Other areas include rehabilitation of destitute, development of sports, all government departments and statutory corporations suitable for new graduates, development projects of local councils, the private sector of the Nigerian economy and such other undertakings and projects of the Federal Military Government. The decree further stipulates that before placing corps members in any of the undertakings or projects approved by the scheme, the Directorate is to take into

<sup>26</sup> Annual Volume of the Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Containing Decrees and Subsidiary Legislation Made in the Year 1973. (1974), Federal Ministry of Information, Printing Division, Lagos. A 506

<sup>27</sup> NYSC Hand Book, Revised in 1995. P.8

<sup>28</sup> Annual Volume of the Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Containing Decrees and Subsidiary Legislation Made in the Year 1973. (1974), Federal Ministry of Information, Printing Division, Lagos. A 506

cognizance the qualification of each member and existing vacancies, and the directorate shall not be compelled to deploy a member only to a particular undertaking or project.<sup>29</sup> In addition, Okafor Chukwumeka and Ani Johnmary K. in a study outlined other factors that guide the scheme's posting or deployment policy.<sup>30</sup> To them, the basic criteria for the deployment of corps members are:

- a. The equality of states;
- b. The ability of states to absorb the services of the corps members;
- c. Posting on concessional ground;
- d. Posting on demand from various Federal Government establishments;
- e. Posting of in-service trainees;
- f. The supportive role of a government is also increasingly become a factor in the placement of corps members;
- g. Deployment if affected by the academic and discipline of participant; and
- h. The deployment of corps members has retained its traditional hue-with the majority of corps members going to the classrooms.<sup>31</sup>

It is, however, in pursuance of the objectives of the programme that the posting policy of the scheme is structured in order to avoid postings that would result in wastage of human resources, and that corps members are as much as possible posted to areas relevant to their disciplines; although sometimes national need may override this consideration.<sup>32</sup> It is thus

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<sup>29</sup>. Annual Volume of the Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Containing Decrees and Subsidiary Legislation Made in the Year 1973. (1974), Federal Ministry of Information, Printing Division, Lagos. A 509

<sup>30</sup>. Okafor Chukwuemeka and Ani Johnmary K. (2014), (The National Youth Service Corps Programme and Growing Security Threat in Nigeria), *Africa's Public Service Delivery & Performance Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2014. p. 151

<sup>31</sup>. Okafor Chukwuemeka and Ani Johnmary K. (2014), (The National Youth Service Corps Programme and Growing Security Threats in Nigeria), *Africa's Public Service Delivery & Performance Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2014. P. 151

<sup>32</sup>. NYSC Hand Book, Revised in 1995. p. 17

cardinal that corps members are posted to areas that are different from their states of origin in an attempt to achieve national unity through the mobilisation of the Youths of Nigeria, by exposing them to life in other parts of the country and to learn at first hand the many similarities and diversities of culture and traditions of the various ethnic groups in the country, with the view of eliminating any inherent prejudices. In this connection, corps members are to have no choice of where they would be posted to serve.<sup>33</sup>

The scheme reserves the right to grant corps members Concessional Posting. This is an exception to the posting policy of the scheme granted based on health, marriage and extreme but compassionate reasons.<sup>34<sup>35</sup></sup> National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Hand Book (Revised), (1999). p.13

The scheme in an attempt to avoid abuse of the privilege of preferential posting, tight procedures for screening those entitled to such posting were put in place. For instance, in order to enjoy the privileges of concessional posting, prospective corps members with medical issues are to submit medical reports from the institution's Medical Centre or University Teaching Hospital, General Hospitals, Military or Mission Hospitals and such a report must be signed by the Chief Medical or Health Officer.<sup>35</sup> In addition, corps members seeking to redeploy from their state of service are to address their application to the Director-General through the State Coordinator of the State of Service, attaching necessary documentary evidence to support the request.<sup>36</sup> For example, a married corps member, Mnena Faasema, was originally posted and mobilized to serve in Ondo State. According to her, during her two-week orientation activities, she applied for redeployment to Benue State, where she originally resides with her husband, and her requested was

<sup>33</sup>. NYSC Hand Book, Revised in 1995. P.25; also, it should be noted that the scheme in an attempt to give every Nigerian graduate the opportunity to partake in the scheme, incorporated Nigerian foreign graduates into the scheme in 1977.

<sup>34</sup>. National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Hand Book (Revised), (1999). p.13

<sup>35</sup>. National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Hand Book (Revised), (1999). p.14

<sup>36</sup>. National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Hand Book (Revised), (1999). p.16

granted, This was after she attached her marriage certificates, evidence of change of name in a national daily and other accompanying documents.<sup>37</sup> This was similar to the case of Uyo Joy Etila redeployed from Enugu state to Delta state due to her pregnancy and marital status.<sup>38</sup> Other Youth Corps members interviewed also confirmed that the same approach was used in their orientation camps to seek redeployment to their home States to enable them re-unite with their husbands.<sup>39</sup> Several others were redeployed on health grounds. For example, Cecilia Nwachuku, who was originally deployed to Kaduna state in 2019 was redeployed to Enugu state on concessional ground, after meeting the necessary requirements due to her health complications.<sup>40</sup> It was, however, discovered that Cecilia was not initially disposed to applying for a redeployment but was encouraged by the medical team at the orientation camp to apply for redeployment and stay closer to her Doctor due to her incessant illness during the stipulated 21 days camping in Kaduna state.

By the dawn of the 1980s and 1990, the Scheme through its posting policy had proved its pre-eminent status as a binding factor of national integration and growth.<sup>41</sup> By this time (the 1990), it had come a long way and in no small measure proved all those hitherto in doubt that it has the capacity to promote national unity and integration. This is premised on the fact that the scheme through its posting policy has grown and become the most enduring and goal oriented institution since the end of the Nigerian Civil War.<sup>42</sup> This is because as the years went by, the relationship between youth corps members and their hosts

<sup>37</sup>. Oral interview with Patience Mnenia in Benue State on 14-09-2020, age 28

<sup>38</sup>. Oral interview with Uyo Joy Etila an ex-corps member in Delta state on 13-09-2020

<sup>39</sup>. Oral interview with the following ex-corps members: Ufedo Akowe, Amuche Ezedinma Amina Ibrahim, Grace Edime, Isah Jennifer, Loveth Kanu, Achor Monica, Faith Ayodele and Ojoma Egwuiche.

<sup>40</sup>. Oral interview with Cecilia Nwachuku, an ex-corps member in Kaduna State. Cecilia was interviewed via skype on 18-09-2020

<sup>41</sup>. Samuel O. Asein, (1993), *Call to Service: Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme: 1973-993*. Sam Bookman, Ibadan, p.5

<sup>42</sup>. Samuel O. Asein, (1993), *Call to Service: Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme: 1973-993*. Sam Bookman, Ibadan, p.15

states and communities began to improve with greater enlightenment and understanding of the purpose of the scheme. This triggered a steady normalization of relationships due to the efforts of the various Head of States, directors of the schemes as well as media men. The effect of the scheme was felt much more in the rural areas and among the illiterate communities.<sup>43</sup>

Towards the eve of the 1990, for instance, majority of rural dwellers in the country began to witness several social benefits associated with the scheme, and hence, began to see the scheme as a blessing rather than a curse.<sup>44</sup> From the interviews conducted across the country, there is a high degree of consistency in the responses of the interviewees that the orientation of many parents and people in areas such as Yola, Gboko, Zaria, Kano, Obubra, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Ogbomosho and Anyigba that the presence of corps members has over the years transformed their communities.<sup>45</sup> According to Achem Itodo, the above was principally influenced by the safe return of ex-corps members to their parents in the urban centres contrary to the initial fear that some harm may befall them.<sup>46</sup> He further revealed that this was responsible for the reciprocal attitude to other parents in urban centres who began to provide free accommodation for corps members in their respective family houses around Ibadan, Akure, Lagos, just to mention but a few places.

It is very important to mention that by 1990, the feeling of insecurity on the part of corps members in their host communities or states of mobilization had virtually

<sup>43</sup> Samuel O, Asein, (1993), *Call to Service: Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme: 1973-993*. Sam Bookman, Ibadan. P. 82

<sup>44</sup> Oral interview with Ichaba Emmanuel, a second generation corps member and a lecturer at in the Department of History and International Studies, Kogi State University, Anyigba, he was interviewed on 01-09-2020

<sup>45</sup> The view was expressed by the following through selected oral interview: Ochuma Adegbie, aged 85, a community leader in Anyigba; Pedro Johnson, aged 67 a retired civil servant in Obubra (Cross River); Shettima Audu, aged 60+, a retired Civil Servant in Sokoto State, Yemi Olaniyi aged 50+ in Oyo town, Hassan Jibo aged 60+ in Kaduna and Shehu Bala in Kano. They were all interviewed in July 2020

<sup>46</sup> Oral interview with Achem Itodo a retired teacher in Oyo State, age 78

disappeared. Consequently, there were only few isolated cases as seen in the limited number of the request for redeployment.<sup>47</sup> The above was further elaborated by Elder Sunday Alikali, who opined that his deployment to Calabar as a corps members was critical in sidestepping his suspicion and stereotypes about the people in the area. He further revealed that he was deeply integrated into the Calabar community to the extent that he got married to an Efik lady at the tail end of his service year.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, with the virtue of the workings of the NYSC posting and policy of primary assignment, it became mandatory for virtually all corps members to experience life in rural settings. This posting policy exposed corps members to the challenges of rural settings and their state of deployment. Through the posting policy, corps members in the rural communities usually get involved in activities, which on the long run, engineer socio-cultural and economic reliability and transformation. It is, therefore, critical to mention that the Scheme's posting policy has largely be able to breed a high degree of religious tolerance among corps members, who have overtime found themselves in communities with different religious beliefs.<sup>49</sup> In Kogi state for instance, a Christian corps member has in the time past, demonstrated the above by providing resources to his host (Muslim) community. The case of Alexander Etini Gideon in Koto Karfe will suffice at this point. According to His Royal Highness Abdulrazak Isakoto, the Emir of Koto Karfi, Alexander Etini, a Christian corps member in the area built a conducive restroom for the Central Mosque in the community to the amazement of the Muslim community in the area despite the fact that he was a Christian.<sup>50</sup> The Emir averred

<sup>47</sup> Samuel O, Asein, (1993), *Call to Service: Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme: 1973-993*. Sam Bookman, Ibadan. p.84

<sup>48</sup>. Elder Sunday Alikali is a second generation corps member who served in Calabar in 1983. He was interviewed in Ajekalaga in Kogi State in August, 2020. Elder Sunday Alikali is the current principal of the Ajekalaga community secondary School.

<sup>49</sup>. NYSC Half Hour on NTA, 29-09-2020

<sup>50</sup>. NYSC Half Hour on NTA, 29-09-2020

that Alexander's contribution to the mosque in spite of the fact that he is Christian showed that he was really integrated into the community and was determined to contribute meaningfully to the growth of Islam in the area. The contribution of Alexander to the community did not go unrewarded. In appreciation for his selfless service and religious tolerance, he was turbanned by the Emir and hence, he became the 4<sup>th</sup> person to be turbanned inside the palace in Koto Karfe.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, the current Chaplain of the Chapel of Restoration, Kogi State University Anyigba, Evangelist Tokumbo Salami was posted to Igalaland as a corps member in the early 1990s and since the expiration of his service year, he decided to stay back in the area and evangelize.<sup>52</sup> There is a consensus that the early history of the protestant movement and evangelism in Igalaland and particularly around Anyigba axis will not be complete without a mention of his name. This implies that since the early 1990s, Evangelist Salami has contributed to the growth of Christianity in the area, and rose to the position of the Chaplain in the University's Chapel of Restoration, due to the integrative mechanism and effectiveness of the NYSC's posting policy over the years.<sup>53</sup> Within the social sphere, the posting policy of the scheme has affected the movement of people other than the corps member, especially their relatives out of their immediate environment on visitations. This has broadened the knowledge of not just the corps members but their family members about other people's environment, culture, and religion in Nigeria. This has gone a long way in promoting national unity and integration - the main purpose for which the scheme was established.

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<sup>51</sup>. NYSC Half Hour on NTA, 29-09-2020

<sup>52</sup>. Oral interview with Joel Abah, a lecturer in the Department of History and International Studies, Kogi State University, Anyigba on 19-09-2020

<sup>53</sup>. Oral interview with Elder Engr Daniel Okolo Irieke on 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 at Egume, Kogi State. Elder Daniel is more than 80 years old.

## The NYSC Policy of Primary Assignments

The deployment of corps members to their various Places of Primary Assignments (PPA) is the second aspect or arm of the scheme's posting policy. This policy enables the scheme to send corps members to various government and private offices within the state of deployment within the service year. It is, however, through this posting that corps members get to meet and interact with natives of various communities and other Nigerians in their respective states of service.<sup>54</sup> According to the NYSC Year Book, the posting of corps members to their PPA gives them the opportunity to contribute their own quota to the national development process in four critical sectors of the economy - education, health, infrastructure and agriculture.<sup>55</sup> This implies that between 1973 and 2012, the scheme's policy on PPA was limited to the posting of corps members to the aforementioned sectors. This policy is principally guided by two basic considerations. These are posting to areas of need; and posting with relevance to corps members field of capacity.<sup>56</sup> In the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), for instance, corps members are posted to the various offices and units: hospitals, road construction sites, farms, water schemes, surveying and mapping, social and economic services, teaching, food storage and eradication of pest, rehabilitation of destitute and disabled, development of sport and the private sector for their primary assignment.<sup>57</sup>

The primary assignments of the scheme is reinforced by its Community Development Programme and activities, which has helped a lot in the promotion of learning, tourism, health care and agricultural development. Ebenezer Obadare puts it more succinctly:

<sup>54</sup>. Oral interview with Udeh Erim, aged 70+, a third generation corps member from Delta state.

<sup>55</sup>. *National Youth Service Corps Year Book: 45 Anniversary*. (2018), p.17

<sup>56</sup>. *Report of the Committee on the Effective Utilization of Corps Members*, (1984), p.8

<sup>57</sup>. Corps Mobilisation Department. Retrieved from <https://www.nysc.gov.ng/mob.html#>, accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2020

The NYSC has facilitated the regular and effective distribution of skilled manpower, steady breaking of social and cultural barriers as well as the building of friendly bridges across ethno-linguistic boundaries. It has promoted the values of national unity and development, rekindled interest in neglected but vital areas of national development like agriculture and promoted leadership qualities in the youths.<sup>58</sup>

For instance, the posting policy of the scheme has over the years assisted many states in the country with deficient manpower in filling the void.<sup>59</sup> According to Ejela Emenako, both the urban and rural areas in Nigeria have benefited considerably from the contributions of corps members at their places of primary assignment.<sup>60</sup> From the manpower perspective for instance, the scheme before the early 2000 became more and more indispensable to states as a constant source of quality manpower for both government and private establishments, especially in schools.<sup>61</sup> For instance, the effect of the posting policy on government offices and schools has been critical to the functioning of most of the schools especially in the northern part of the country. One of the corps members in the 2010 Batch C Service 'year submits that majority of the public and private schools in the northern part of the country depend on the constant manpower supplied by the scheme to the area.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>. See Ebenazar Obadare, *Statism, Youth and Civic Imagination: A Critical Study of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme*, Centre for Social Development (CSD) Report, 2005, p,21

<sup>59</sup>. Oral interview with Atim Utene, a retired staff of the NYSC Office in Kaduna State, aged 70+.

<sup>60</sup>. Ejela Emenako (Ed.), (1986), *12 Years of National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria: 1973-1985*, National Youth Service Corps Directorate Headquarters, Lagos. p.82

<sup>61</sup>. Ejela Emenako (Ed.), (1986), *12 Years of National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria: 1973-1985*, National Youth Service Corps Directorate Headquarters, Lagos, p.82

<sup>62</sup>. Oral interview with Ocheme Mark Ugbedje, age 35 in Abuja on 02 September 2020.

The above statement was corroborated by Ademola Adesina, who averred that unlike other parts of Nigeria, northern Nigeria seems to be the only part of the country where corps members are mostly engaged in the primary school to teach pupils.<sup>63</sup> This trend is a testimony to the fact the northern part of the country is yet to remedy its manpower deficits, which predates the dawn of the year 2000.<sup>64</sup> In 1981 about 33 per cent of the corps members that served in Kano were offered permanent employment upon the completion of their service.<sup>65</sup>

This feat was also recorded in Oyo, Plateau and Lagos states. In the old Bendel state, for instance, many of the rural health schemes depended on the youth corps medical doctors and their teams for successful operation. In a study carried out by Colonel Obasa, it was discovered that more than seventeen mobile clinics in the rural communities in the state were manned exclusively in 1982/83 by the scheme's medical team.<sup>66</sup>

In Central Nigeria, the case is not quite different, between 2008 and 2015 for instance, it was reported that most private secondary schools in Kogi State were heavily dependent on the services on corps members for the smooth running of the school.<sup>67</sup> Omattah Paul as staff of SS Peters and Paul Academy, Egume in Kogi state submitted that at a time, the school used to have not less than 6 corps members.<sup>68</sup> He further stated that the school developed the habit of requesting the NYSC office to

<sup>63</sup>. Oral interview with Ademola Adesina, a former corps member in Kaduna on 02 September, 2020

<sup>64</sup>. The shortage of manpower in the northern part of the country specifically in Borno state was made evident in the Maiduguri Declaration in 1981. The Governor of the State, through the Declaration called on all the eight hundred corps members serving in the state to review their engagement with a note that they would be offered a permanent and pensionable employment after their service year. In spite of the Maiduguri Declaration, many of the corps members ignored the declaration and went back to their various state of origin. See Col. P.K. Obasa. *NYSC: A Nations Attempt at Mobilising the Youths*, 92

<sup>65</sup>. Obasa, P.K. (1995), *NYSC: A Nations Attempt at Mobilising the Youths*, MDL Consultants Marketers, Ilorin. p. 71

<sup>66</sup>. Obasa, P.K. (1995), *NYSC: A Nations Attempt at Mobilising the Youths*, MDL Consultants Marketers, Ilorin. Pp. 72-73

<sup>67</sup>. Oral interview with Paul Omattah, a teacher at SS Peter and Paul Academy, Egume on 02-09-2020

<sup>68</sup>. Oral interview with Paul Omattah, a teacher at SS Peter and Paul Academy, Egume on 02-09-2020

deploy corps members that could teach subjects like Mathematics, English Language, Physics and Chemistry. In order to lure corps members, the school built a conducive corps's lodge for its corps members. Jonathan Ijaja for instance, revealed that aside the bona fide corps members that are often posted to the school, it also engages the services of other corps members posted to the Government and Community secondary schools in the area.<sup>69</sup> This implies that the school could at times, have more than 9 corps members. These experiences were reported to be similar in several private secondary schools in central Nigeria.

In 2013, the NYSC had introduced another critical duty to Corps members while serving in their places of primary assignment and this had to do with election duty. The involvement of corps members in the electoral process has remained one of the most novel approach at improving the country's democratic process. To concretise this arrangement, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the NYSC in which the former agreed to use corps members for election duty. According to INEC, this MoU was sequel to the success achieved following the use of corps members in the conduct of bye-elections, re-run elections supplementary elections, and the 2011 general elections. In that MoU, the INEC resolved to forthwith engage corps members in election duty. Election duty herein include registration of voters, conduct of election and referendum.<sup>70</sup> Since then, corps members have played critical roles in the success of several electoral activities in the country. In fact, the success of the 2011 and particularly the 2015 elections were attributed to the patriotism and nationalism of corps members, who manned virtually all the polling booths in the country either as presiding officers or returning officers.

<sup>69</sup>. Oral interview with Jonathan Ijaja, a teacher at SS Peter and Paul Academy, Egume on 02-09-2020

<sup>70</sup>. See Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the NYSC and The INEC signed on the 24<sup>th</sup> September, 2013.

Contrary to the early records and success of the scheme, the elements of religious unrest in the northern part of the country in the early 1980s as witnessed during the Maitatsine crisis created several divides in the minds of many of the serving and prospective corps members during the period.<sup>71</sup> This information was corroborated by Jerome Andohol, who stressed that the religious unrest in the north was the principal factor that influenced the refusal of many of the corps members to accept the automatic employment offer of the Borno and Sokoto states governments after the successful completion of their service year.<sup>72</sup> It should be noted that in 1983, for instance, the Sokoto State government offered 250 ex-corps members' permanent jobs, which only five accepted. This was attributed to the elements of distrust uncertainty and fear among majority of the corps members and the fact that most of the jobs were in the classroom.<sup>73</sup>

Since this period down to 1999, the NYSC posting policy has been subjected to different abuses to the extent that there has been a growing opinion among Nigerians that the scheme has outlived its relevance and should therefore be scrapped.

## **Changes and Continuities in the Policy of Posting and Primary Assignments**

Since the latter part of the 1990, especially between 1995 and 2010, the political and religious tempo of the country was really charged and tensed. This period experienced diverse political violence and ethno-religious crisis, among which were the June 12 election controversy, the hanging of the Ogoni Nine, the rise in the advocacy for sharia, and the emergence of ethnic militia and terrorist groups across the country. The antecedents of these menaces gradually affected the willingness of most Nigerian

<sup>71</sup>. Oral interview with Bello Ojonuba, a former corps member in Borno State in 1981, age 50+

<sup>72</sup>. Oral interview with Jerome Andohol, a former corps member in Sokoto State in 1996, age 50+

<sup>73</sup>. Obasa, P.K. (1995), *NYSC: A Nations Attempt at Mobilising the Youths*, MDL Consultants Marketers, Ilorin. p. 96

youths to oblige and adhere to the spirit of the NYSC. There is no gainsaying that the rate of ethnic, political and religious intolerance in the country was akin to the boiling ethnic dislike and tussle for space witnessed within the first decade of self-rule in Nigeria. This sudden reverse to the old tradition has had a very serious implication on the objective and implementation of the goals of the NYSC Scheme. One of such implications has been the constant neglect of some states in the country by corps members due to one security reason or the other.<sup>74</sup> This has been attributed to the sense of insecurity that swept through the country in the early 2000.

For instance, between 2002 and 2006, there were intelligent reports that *Boko Haram* had its members trained outside the shores of Nigeria with a view to terrorizing the entire nation. Within the same period, the Odua People's Congress (OPC) youth wing had become hostile to Hausa communities in some of the Yoruba states; in the east, there were re-emerging calls for the establishment of the State of Biafra, while in the Niger Delta, the militants had already created an uneasy atmosphere. Historically, it should be recalled that the ill-feelings toward moving to other parts of the country to work or serve under the National Youth Service Corps scheme started with the outbreak of the *Maitatsine* crisis in northern Nigeria. The refusal of majority of the ex-corps members to accept the offer of automatic pensionable employment in Borno and Sokoto states in the early 1980s should not be taken as a coincidence but a resurgence of ethnic cum religious distrust. According to Ishaq Abdullahi, the driving interest of the NYSC scheme was greatly affected by the psychological effect of the crisis.<sup>75</sup> He posited that during the period, many Yoruba and Igbo youths declined to report for the mandatory national service, due to the fear of insecurity. In as much as the *Maitatsine* crisis dealt a blow on the willingness of many Nigerians to be deployed to the northern part of the

<sup>74</sup>. Oral interview with Badamus Usman, a researcher in Abuja on 27-08-2020

<sup>75</sup>. Oral interview with Ishaq Abdullahi, a retired staff of the NYSC on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2020 in Lokoja, age 70+

country, its effect did not last due to the swift response of the Nigerian state in quelling the crisis.

Since the *Maitatsine* crisis, another major issues that has seriously challenged the posting policy of the NYSC scheme has been the recurring flashes of ethnic cum religious clashes experienced in the country between 1999 and 2009. In spite of these skirmishes, the scheme continued with its posting policy until events of the post 2011 General Election in Nigeria and the *Boko Haram* terrorism in certain parts of the country.<sup>76</sup> The killing and maiming of Nigerians in northern Nigeria after the declaration of President Goodluck Jonathan as the winner of the 2011 presidential election, triggered a massive movement and redeployment of corps members of southern and western origins from majority of the troubled states to other states that were considered not to be conflict flashpoints, and close to their states of origins.<sup>77</sup> This was responsible for the redeployment of majority of the corps members from Borno, Katsina, Kaduna, Bauchi, Kano, to mention just but a few, to places like Abuja, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Ondo, Lagos, Oyo and many other states in the country. As a matter of fact, between 2011 and 2015, many local government areas in Borno and Yobe states were without active corps members.

It is however, in line with the above, that the Federal Government approved the new NYSC Posting Policy in 2012. The new policy was targeted at the addressing the increasing abuse of the posting policy of the scheme by top government officials and politician. The new policy limited the posting of corps members to Rural Health, Primary and Secondary Education, Rural Infrastructural Development and Agricultural Development.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup>. Oral interview with P.O. Egwemi, a lecturer and ex-corps member in Kogi State University, Anyigba.

<sup>77</sup>. Oral interview with Ishaq Abdullahi, a retired staff of the NYSC on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2020 in Lokoja, age 70+

<sup>78</sup>. Sahara Reporters, 01, 2012. Federal Government Announces New NYSC Posting Policy. Retrieved from <http://saharareporters.com/2012/03/01/federal-government-announces-new-nysc-posting-policy>, accessed on 19-09-2020

According to the government, its interest was to restore national integration and youth empowerment which had been a core objective of the scheme but had been distorted and abused and thereby defeating national integration and the associated ideas behind participating in the scheme by corps members.<sup>79</sup> It was felt that the new policy will go a long way to checkmate the inequitable posting of corps members which has over the years led to the over-crowding at NYSC Camps in states such as Lagos, Abuja, Rivers, etc.<sup>80</sup> In spite of the government's new policy and emphasis on rural development and posting of corps members, the situation has gone unabated.

The growing waves of kidnapping, banditry and violent clashes between armed groups in the country have further complicated the matter. More than ever before, there is growing anxiety and panic, as many Nigerians especially those from the western and southern regions are reluctant to move outside their states to other states for national assignment or greener pastures while several northerners especially the Hausa-Fulani are reluctant to move out of their region. The implication of the foregoing is that several youths and parents are gradually losing interest in the scheme due to the intermittent and endemic state of insecurity. This problem has revealed that there cannot be any meaningful integration in the absence of security. This implies that the gains achieved by the scheme in its first 20 years were majorly influenced by the existence of relative security in the country.

The storms that have continued to bedevil the posting and primary assignment policy of the National Youth Service Corps is not limited to the increasing ethnic and religious tensions and insecurity alone but corruption. Corruption has played a major

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<sup>79</sup>. Sahara Reporters, 01, 2012. Federal Government Announces New NYSC Posting Policy. Retrieved from <http://saharareporters.com/2012/03/01/federal-government-announces-new-nysc-posting-policy>, accessed on 19-09-2020

<sup>80</sup>. Caleb Ayansina, February 1, 2012, FG Approves New Posting Policy for NYSC on February 1, 2020. Vanguard Online Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/02/federal-govt-approves-new-posting-policy-nysc/>, accessed on 19-09-2020

role in compromising the policy and spirit of the scheme long before the dawn of year 2000.<sup>81</sup> As early as 1991, it was observed that the NYSC Decree that stipulates that youth should be assigned to jobs in states other than their own was increasingly violated. This is in addition to false declaration of age and the falsification of results in order to be mobilized.<sup>82</sup> All these problems, in addition to the influence of politicians and top government and military officials in the country, who are bent on having their children posted to state capitals and offices of their choice, appear to have weakened the scheme's posting policy and that of primary assignment.

### **Conclusion: Towards Strengthening the Scheme's Policy of Posting and Primary Assignment**

There is no gainsaying that the NYSC scheme has contributed immensely towards improving the tie among the various youths in Nigeria, especially in the post-Civil War era down to the early 1990s. As discussed in this chapter, the scheme remains one of government's integrative policies that was vigorously pursued after the Civil War, which has yielded the desired results. The success of the scheme in its early years could be attributed to the commitment of the Nigerian Government to remedy the ills of ethnic suspicion that existed in the country and the government's understanding of the depth of the menace. Since the mid-1990s, questions have continued to be asked about the relevance of the scheme sequel to the re-emergence of the ills it was meant to tackle.<sup>83</sup> The growing influence of insecurity, corruption and the attitude of Nigerian youths has created the opinion that the scheme has outlived its relevance and would need to redefine its focus if it is to continue to contribute meaningfully to national integration.

<sup>81</sup>. Minutes of Meeting, No.1/1991 of the National Director with Directors and Assistant Directors of NYSC, held from 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> March, 1991 at Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja. p.3

<sup>82</sup>. Oral interview with Ogacheko Romanus an ex-corps member in Abuja on 29-08-2020

<sup>83</sup> See Retooling Nigeria's Youth Service Corps to Drive National Transformation. Policy Recommendation. Retrieved from <https://gga.org/retooling-nigerias-youth-service-corps-to-drive-national-transformation/> accessed on 22-09-2020

Arising from the above, the following measures are suggested to strengthen the scheme's policy of posting and primary assignment:

- (i) The scheme should rethink its continuous posting of engineers to the secondary schools in order to avert the problem of underutilization of corps members.
- (ii) The scheme should expose corps members that will be posted to the primary and secondary schools to basic teaching skills. This is premised on the fact that majority of the corps members are without the basic teaching skills and education and training. This could be addressed by exposing corps members to the necessary teaching and education training during the course of 21 days orientation camping exercise or selected corps members that will go into the classrooms to teach should be made to undergo special teaching seminars after the 21 days orientation camp.
- (iii) The scheme, if properly readjusted, can revamp the dwindling agricultural sector in Nigeria. This can be done by the establishment of special farms and the engagement of corps members from the faculty of agriculture as extension workers.
- (iv) With the increasing centralization of the employment by both the Federal and State Governments, it has become very challenging for offices to retain corps members. This has contributed to the growing number of the unemployed in the country. The government can further expand the scope of scheme to empower corps members by opening special projects in different states of the federation where corps members could gainfully be empowered with the basic skills to cope with the post service years.
- (iv) There is need for government to introduce a special package for corps members after their service year to enable them start a business. This will definitely ease the pressure of unemployment on the government.

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**Table 3: List of Informants**

S/No	Name	Date	Place	Age	Occupation
1	Atim Utene	02-08-2020	Kaduna	70+	A retiree from NYSC
2	Ocheme Ugbede, M	02-09-2020	Abuja	35	Photographer
3	Omachonu Samuel	02-09-2020	Abuja	40	Solar installer
4	Micheal Ugboja	15-08-2020	Egume	70+	Retired Army officer
5	Ojonuba Benson	28-08-2020	Makurdi	65+	Retired Teacher
6	John Ojih	04-09-2020	Idah	80+	Retired teacher
7	Ajibode Moturayo	19-09-2020	Skype	33+	Humanitarian worker
8	Badamus Usman	27-08-2020	Abuja	45	Researcher
9	Ishaq Abdullahi	04-09-2020	Lokoja	70+	NYSC Retiree
10	P.O. Egwuemi	21-09-2020	Anygiba	50	Lecturer
11	Daniel Adeigba	03-04-2020	Telephone	40+	Radio Presenter
12	Paul Omattah	02-09-2020	Egume	39	Teacher
13	Jonathan Ijaja	02-09-2020	Egume	40+	Teacher
14	Bello Ojunuba	10-08-2020	Lagos	65	Engineer
15	Ademola Adesina	02-09-2020	Kano	55+	Accountant
16	Joel Abah	22-09-2020	Anygiba	34	Lecturer
17	Elder Daniel Ineke O	30-08-2020	Dekina LGA	80+	Retiree
18	Udeh Erim	17-09-2020	Online interaction	70+	Retiree
19	Elder Sunday Alikali	13-09-2020	Ajekalaga	50+	Principal
20	Patience Mnena	14-09-2020	Benue State	28	Corps Member
21	Ufedo Akowe	04-09-2020	Telephone	29+	Corps member
22	Amuche Ezedinma	04-09-2020	Telephone	30	Corps member
23	Amina Ibrahim	04-09-2020	Telephone	27	Corps member
24	Grace Edime	04-09-2020	Benue State	30	Corps member
25	Isah Jennifer	06-09-2020	Otukpo	27	Corps member
26	Loveth Kanu	04-09-2020	Whatsapp	29	Corps member
27	Achor Monica	04-09-2020	Whatsapp	30	Corps member
28	Faith Ayodele	04-09-2020	Whatsapp	30	Corps member
29	Ojoma Egwuche	15-09-2020	Naka	31	Corps member
30	Etugho Emmanuel	04-09-2020	Messenger	70+	Retiree
31	Ebuka Eze	18-09-2020	Kaduna	37+	Ex-corps member
32	Ichaba Emmanuel	01-09-2020	KSU	60+	Lecturer
33	Ochuma Adegbé	July 2020	Jos	70+	Community leader
34	Pedro Johnson	July 2020	Messenger	60	Academic
35	Yakubu Ochefu	July 2020	Telephone	60+	Academic
36	Yemi Olaniyi	July 2020	Telephone	64	Business tycoon
37	Hassan Jibo	July 2020	Telephone	60	Academic
38	Achem Itodo	August 2020	Otukpo	60+	Teacher
39	Romanus O	30-08-2020	Mararaba	32	Corps member
40	Saaoud Gber	7-8-2020			

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## Chapter Seven

# PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES OF NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS

*Ayodele Samuel Abolorunde*

*Department of History University of Ibadan  
Ibadan, Nigeria*

### Introduction

The need for the formulation and implementation of youth oriented programmes remains one of the objectives of all governments globally. This is necessary when one considers the role of young people in the nation-building project. This importance, without any doubt, determines the extent of success a nation will attain in the midst of myriads of challenges which accompany the building of a nation. Since nation-building project is an unending adventure, nations all over the world understand the significance of the inputs youths, in their respective nations, can inject to the advancement of their countries in their quest to assume important positions within the committee of nations. Keen observers of Nigeria's social history have argued that the formation of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in 1973 after the Nigerian civil war was a novel idea which took the African continent and the world at large by storm. They contend that the deployment of the officials of the American Peace Corps and British Overseas Voluntary Service to Nigeria for the development of the country's educational sector during the first decade of Nigeria's independence<sup>1</sup> reveals the noble role youths can play beyond the frontiers of their nations. In Africa, the positioning of youths in strategic positions for viable nation-building project was not new prior to the

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<sup>1</sup> Asein, S.O. 1993. *Call to Service Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme 1973-1993* Ibadan: Sam Bookman p.15

formation of Nigeria's NYSC in 1973. In Tanzania, for instance, the TANU Youth League started its campaign from 1962 for the formation of Youth Service until the National Service was established on 10th July, 1963.<sup>2</sup>

While one is tempted to agree with the assertion that the formation of NYSC was a novel one, one can easily discern the novelty which enveloped the formation of Nigeria's NYSC in 1973 from two perspectives. First, while the formation of NYSC was designed to facilitate national integration, that of the British and the Americans were designed as instruments of imperialists' penetration of the newly independent African States. Second, the Tanzanian National Service served the purpose of Cold War ideology while that of Nigeria was embedded in the post-civil war reconstruction of the country. These two scenarios reveal the uniqueness of NYSC as the stabilizing factor of the Nigerian project. This argument aligns with Asein's position that the American and the British Youth Service penetrated the African continent in order to register their presence in the newly independent states of Africa.<sup>3</sup> Although studies on the NYSC are quite diverse<sup>4</sup>, apart from Obasa and Itumo's works which examine the mobilization of youths in relation to nation building, much of these studies have not comprehensively interrogated the impact of the NYSC programmes and activities on Nigeria's nation-building prospect.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Kila F. 1980. "Youth Mobilization for National Development: The Tanzanian Experience" in National Service for the 80s Report on the Proceedings of the Workshop on the National Youth Service Corps Scheme Kano, Kano State. 26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> May, 1980, pp.34-35

<sup>3</sup> Asein, S.O. 1993. *Call to Service Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme 19731993...* p.15

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Asein, S.O. 1993. *Call to Service Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme 19731993...* p.15; Olomajeye, J. 1980. "The National Youth Service Scheme and the Fourth National Development Plan", in National Service for the 80s Report on the Proceedings of the Workshop on the National Youth Service Corps Scheme Kano, Kano State. 26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> May, 1980, pp.16-19; Emenako, G. Ed. 1986. *12 Years of National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria: 1973-1985* Lagos: National Youth Service Corps Directorate Headquarters; Momoh H.B. 1992. *Imperatives of National Service in the 90s. A Collection of Speeches Vol. 1* Abuja: National Directorate Headquarters National Youth Service Corps; Enegwea G and Umoden, G. 1993. *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service* Abuja and Lagos: National Youth Service Corps Directorate Headquarters and Gbajumo Publishing Company Limited, 1993; And Asein, S.O. 1993. *Call to Service Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme 19731993...*

This is important because a focused enquiry into the activities and programmes of the scheme will x-ray how impactful the scheme's roles have been on the Nigerian state as well as the relevance of the scheme in the midst of myriad of challenges confronting contemporary Nigeria. This chapter makes a vital contribution to social history of Nigeria and moves discussion on Nigeria's social history in new directions. The chapter is divided into six sections which include the introduction, the Nigerian state and post-independence crises, 1960-1970, relevance of NYSC programmes and activities to the stability of Nigeria, 1973-2003, the impact of NYSC programmes on national development, 1980- 2010, the contemporary realities of the Nigerian state and challenges of NYSC programme implementation, 2011-2018 and conclusion.

### **The Nigerian State and Post-Independence Crises, 1960-1970**

The eventual amalgamation of the Nigerian state by the British in 1914 was a product of the lumping together of all ethnic groups that were in the territory that later became Nigeria. These various ethnic groups with their high degree of autonomy co-existed among themselves before contact was made with Europe. This co- existence was marked by sovereignty and non-interference in their economic and political decisions. The British imperialists blatantly disregarded the socio-cultural differences of these various ethnic groups by failing to create a channel for cultural, social and political interactions among the people of a territory they claimed to have amalgamated.<sup>6</sup> This conscious effort to keep the country apart along ethnic lines shows that the British only embarked on the administrative amalgamation of Nigeria to support their imperial presence in the country.

The end of the Second World War in 1945 and subsequent pressure on the colonialists by the nationalists to grant the country its independence was accompanied by ethnic suspicion

<sup>5</sup> Obasa, P.K. 1995. *NYSC A Nation's Attempt at Mobilizing the Youths* Ilorin: Market Development Service Limited; And Itumo, V.N. 2003. *NYSC, Corps Members The Hope of the Nation A Book on NYSC, Youths and Nation Building* Abuja: Kaylor International Limited.

<sup>6</sup>Agu, U. 1995. *NYSC and the Nigerian Unity A Critical Appraisal* Enugu: Acena Publishers

among the various groups that make up Nigeria. This lack of ethnic affinity in colonial Nigeria made the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo to assert that amalgamation had failed to bring Nigerians together without any sense of citizenship that sustained togetherness of Nigerians unlike that of the Europeans.<sup>7</sup> The seed of mutual suspicion sowed by the imperialists through amalgamation of the Nigerian peoples without consultation further aggravated the tension on the eve of the country's independence. One of such scenarios was the divergent opinion of the country's nationalist in 1953 during a debate at the Federal House of Representatives in Lagos, where Anthony Enahoro, Action Group representative in the House, moved a motion that the country should assume the status of self-government by 1956.<sup>8</sup>

The motion which met stiff the opposition of northern delegates in the House snowballed into Kano riots of 1953 against the visiting A.G politicians from the South as these riots almost led to the complete polarization of North and South even before the country's independence.<sup>9</sup> After the attainment of independence in 1960, the country lacked the semblance of unity and sustained nationhood. These ethnic divisions crept into the political space as the three major political parties such as Northern Peoples Congress (N.P.C.), National Council for Nigerian Citizens (N.C.N.C) and Action Group (A.G.) were formed along ethnic lines without any emblem of pan-Nigeria outlook.<sup>10</sup> By 1964, the federal elections conducted were

<sup>7</sup> Awolowo, O. *Path to Nigerian Freedom* London: Cited in Fwatshak , S.U and Ayuba, J.M. 2014. 'Amalgamation Discourses in the "Lugardian House" During Nigeria's First Centenary'

S.U. Fwatshak and O. Akinwumi Eds. *The House that "Lugard Built" Perspectives on Nigeria's First Centenary: The Pains, the Gains and the Agenda for the Future* Jos: Historical Society of Nigeria and Jos University Press Limited, p.5

<sup>8</sup> Fwatshak , S.U and Ayuba, J.M. 2014. 'Amalgamation Discourses in the "Lugardian House"...pp.7-8

<sup>9</sup> Fwatshak , S.U and Ayuba, J.M. 2014. 'Amalgamation Discourses in the "Lugardian House"...p.8

<sup>10</sup> See, Sklar, R.L, 'Contradictions in Nigerian Political System' *Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol.3, No.2, 1965, pp.201-213. See also, Sklar, R.L. 1963. *Nigerian Political Parties* Princeton: N.J. Princeton University Press. These two works were cited from Fafowora, O. 1990. *Pressure Group and Foreign Policy A Comparative Study of the British Attitudes and Policy Towards Secessionist Moves in Congo (1960-1963) and Nigeria (1966-1969)* Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Limited.

accompanied by political crises caused by perceived unequal distribution of power and resources among the political parties which represented southern and northern Nigeria.<sup>11</sup>

The political imbroglio of the First Republic especially in 1964 prepared the ground for the military intervention in the country's politics on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, 1966. The January, 1966 coup was given ethnic interpretation and was called Igbo coup. This was because the leaders of the coup were officers of Igbo extraction while the victims such as Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto, Tafawa Balewa, the country's Prime Minister and other affected politicians were both of northern, south-south and south-west extractions. This interpretation cannot be dismissed with a wave of hand because some of the victims of the January coup were southerners of non-Igbo extraction. For instance, Chief S.L. Akintola, Western Region Premier and Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, the then Finance Minister of the country were all affected. It is plausible to state that this interpretation that the coup was an Igbo coup was a product of seed of discord sown into the Nigerian project through the amalgamation of various ethnic groups of an area that later became Nigeria. This burden of mutual suspicion became an albatross for the country in its post-independence history.

The tension necessitated by the coup was further exacerbated by the emergence of General Aguyi Ironsi, the most senior officer in the Nigerian Army at that time and who was of Igbo extraction.<sup>12</sup> The January 1966 coup created a feeling of hysteria in the North, a feeling which precipitated the July, 1966 coup that led to the gruesome murder of General Ironsi, the country's Head of State and Col. Adekunle Fajuyi, Governor of the Western Region at the latter's official residence in Ibadan.<sup>13</sup> With the murder of the Western Region Governor and the Head

<sup>11</sup> Fafowora, O. 1990. *Pressure Group and Foreign Policy A Comparative Study of the British Attitudes and Policy Towards Secessionist Moves in Congo (1960-1963) and Nigeria (1966-1969)* Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Limited. pp.18-19.

<sup>12</sup> Ayodele, S. Abolorunde. 2019. 'Nigerian Civil War and Britain's Peace Initiative, 1967-1970'

*West Bohemian Historical Review* Vol. IX No 1 2019, p.94.

<sup>13</sup> Ayodele, S. Abolorunde .2019. 'Nigerian Civil War and Britain's Peace Initiative, 1967-1970'...p.94

of State, General Yakubu Gowon, a northerner emerged as the Head of State as this made the political atmosphere in the country to be sufficiently charged such that lives and properties of the Igbo people in the North were destroyed while some reprisal attacks took place in the East.<sup>14</sup>

As tension continued to mount between the eastern and northern regions of the country on the one hand, personality clash continued between General Yakubu Gowon, the Head of State and Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Eastern Region Governor, who saw himself as the defender of the people of eastern region, on the other hand. Security situation in the country deteriorated such that Ojukwu's plan of secession from the rest of the country was stifled by the creation of twelve states based on the initiative of the Gowon regime in May, 1967. The creation of twelve states left Ojukwu with no choice than to declare the Republic of Biafra as a secessionist region on 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1967. The declarations by these two gladiators led to the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war in 1967. Efforts to bring the war to an end in 1968 was spearheaded by Britain as the British government sent a powerful delegation which comprised of Lord Fenner Brockway, a member of the British Parliament, and James Griffiths, a former Colonial Secretary for possible ceasefire by December, 1968.<sup>15</sup> By 1969, the British leadership thought of creating a platform for meaningful negotiation that would bring peace to Nigeria.<sup>16</sup> The success of the initiative further propelled the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson to take over the peace initiative between Gowon and Ojukwu in March 1969.<sup>17</sup> Despite the accusation of genocidal activities

<sup>14</sup> Okoro, I. 2014. 'Ndi Igbo of the South-East: Centenary Glimpses' S.U. Fwatshak and O. Akinwumi Eds. *The House that 'Lugard Built' Perspectives on Nigeria's First Centenary: The Pains, the Gains and the Agenda for the Future* Jos: Jos University Press, p.94

<sup>15</sup> Anon: UK MPs to See Gowon, *Daily Times* of December 20, 1968, p.16 as cited in Abolorunde.

A.S. 2019. Nigerian Civil War and Britain's Peace Initiative, 1967-1970'...

<sup>16</sup> Anon: Shepherded Tells UK House of Lords *Daily Times* of February, 1969, p.12 as cited in Abolorunde. A.S. 2019. Nigerian Civil War and Britain's Peace Initiative, 1967-1970'... <sup>17</sup> Anon: Wilson Ends Final Talks *New Nigerian* of March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1969, p.1 as cited in Abolorunde.

A.S. 2019. Nigerian Civil War and Britain's Peace Initiative, 1967-1970'...

against the Nigerian government through the Biafran propaganda and foreign commentators, the Nigerian government, based on its quest for peace, yielded to pressure from Britain as it allowed a team of international observers to investigate the state of things in the country.<sup>18</sup>

In order to ensure the success of their peace efforts, both the defunct Organization of African Unity (O.A.U) and Britain intensified their pressure on the warring factions for peace.<sup>19</sup> The peace effort later yielded result when the Nigerian government assured the British and other international stakeholders that the Igbos will be given the same right and privileges as it had been granting to other Nigerians provided the secessionists were ready for peace without prior conditions.<sup>20</sup> The readiness of both the Nigerian state and Biafra to embrace peace necessitated the eventual surrender of the Biafran troops on 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1970 as the Nigerian government declared the slogan of 'No victor no vanquish'.

## **Relevance of NYSC Programmes and Activities to the Stability of Nigeria, 1973-2003**

The emergence of the NYSC as a scheme cannot be insulated from the history of the Nigerian civil war which lasted for 30 months. The end of the war further entrenched ethnic suspicion, unhealthy rivalry, mutual distrust, religious bigotry and tribal intolerance.<sup>21</sup> This unhealthy socio-political atmosphere was one of the factors that compelled the federal military government to sustain its slogan of 'no victor no vanquish' through the policy of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation, the three (Rs). The whole essence of this was to foster unity which, in the

<sup>18</sup> See, Smith K.E. 2014. *The UK and Genocide Research* as cited in Ayodele, S. Abolorunde . 2019. Nigerian Civil War and Britain's Peace Initiative, 1967-1970'...

<sup>19</sup> See, Anon: Ojukwu Turned Down Wilson's Invitation *Daily Sketch* of 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1969, p.1. See also, Anon: Wilson's Second Note to Ojukwu *New Nigerian* of 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1969. Both papers were cited from Ayodele, S. Abolorunde . 2019. Nigerian Civil War and Britain's Peace Initiative, 1967-1970'...

<sup>20</sup> Anon: Wilson Report Back to Commons *Morning Post* of 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1969, p.1 cited in Ayodele,

S. Abolorunde . 2019. Nigerian Civil War and Britain's Peace Initiative 1967-1970'...

<sup>21</sup> NYSC Year Book 1991 as extracted from NYSC Archives Directorate Headquarters, Abuja Lagos: Gbajumo Publishing Company Limited, p.23

estimation of the military, was capable of ensuring developmental strides in the country.<sup>22</sup> One of the strategies adopted to sustain the three (Rs) was the muting of an idea of youth scheme that would sustain unity among Nigerians of the post-civil war era and future generations. The activation of this intention was first demonstrated by the Gowon regime during the 1972 National Day Broadcast where Gowon stated that:

The Federal Military Government recognises that the future of this country lies in the hands of the youth of today. It is, therefore, prepared to ensure that it provides the physical, mental and spiritual environment in which those young persons can grow up to be worthy citizens of this great Nation. The government proposes to establish a compulsory National Youth Service Corps, the aim of which is to bring together our qualified young men and women and to inculcate them a sense of discipline, dedication, national pride and consciousness through nationally directed disciplined training, not necessarily in the Armed Forces but serving the nation in any way and capacity for a short period in their life time before settling down to their chosen career.<sup>23</sup>

The intention of the Federal Military Government to actualise the dream of fostering post-war unity in the country was further demonstrated at an academic gathering during the 8<sup>th</sup> Convocation Ceremony of Ahmadu Bello University in December, 1972, where the Head of State articulated the

<sup>22</sup> See the interview granted by the former military Governor of Ogun State, Navy Captain Oladeinde Joseph to *Sunday Times* of October 20, 1991, p.11 Extract from National Day Broadcast of General Yakubu Gowon, Head of State and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Culled from the Daily Sketch of October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1972, p.4.

<sup>23</sup> Extract from National Day Broadcast of General Yakubu Gowon, Head of State and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Culled from the Daily Sketch of October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1972, p.4.

The Extract was lifted from Asein, O.1993, Call to Service a book extracted from NYSC Archives, Abuja, p.21

intention to mobilize Nigerian youths for national service.<sup>24</sup> In order to actualise the formation of the NYSC, the Federal Government in 1972 further deepened its relationship with the Committee of Vice Chancellors which had earlier called for a one-year national service scheme for Nigerian undergraduates in 1969.<sup>25</sup> By May 22, 1973, just six weeks before the call up date of July 2, 1973, the Federal Government enacted a decree which endorsed the formation of NYSC.<sup>26</sup>

The decree stated that:

The Federal Military Government hereby decree as follows:

There is hereby established a scheme to be known as the National Youth Service Corps with a view to the proper encouragement and development of communities among youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity the service corps shall be charged with all such functions as pertain to the objectives of the service corps.<sup>27</sup>

From the above, it was clear that the decree mandated all Nigerian graduates to participate in a one year national service. The decree which established the scheme initially covered only Nigerian youths not more than 30 years of age and who were graduates of Nigerian Universities, while those Nigerian graduates more than 30 years of age and Nigerian graduates from the Universities abroad were excluded from the scheme which called up about 2, 757 corps members from the existing five Universities at that time, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University O.A.U), Ahmadu Bello University, University of Lagos, University of Ibadan and University of

<sup>24</sup> Asein, O. 1993. *Call to Service*...p.21

Enegwea, G and Umoden, G.1993. *NYSC Twenty Years of National Service* Lagos: Gbajumo Publishing Company Limited p.9

<sup>25</sup> Enegwea, G and Umoden, G.1993. *NYSC Twenty Years of National Service*...p.17

<sup>26</sup> Agu, U. 1995. *NYSC and the Nigerian Unity A Critical Appraisal*...p.30

<sup>27</sup> Enegwea, G and Umoden, G.1993. *NYSC Twenty Years of National Service*...p.17

Nigeria, Nsukka.<sup>28</sup> A total amount of six million naira was earmarked for the take-off of the scheme in 1973.<sup>29</sup>

When the formation of the scheme came into the public domain, Nigerians, especially prospective graduates of 1972/73 session and undergraduates across the country's universities, protested against the scheme as they saw it as a strategy capable of preventing them from settling down early enough to their chosen careers and this in their estimation delayed the anticipated glorious future.<sup>30</sup> As the federal government faced intensified opposition against the scheme, it was able to demonstrate the readiness to kick start it with the aim of rebuilding the country's unity that was shattered by the post-independence crises which the civil war was part of. The plausibility of the scheme in the estimation of the Gowon regime was to correct the foundational problem of ethnic suspicion and disunity which accompanied the emergence of the Nigerian state as construed by the colonialists. It is salient to state that the NYSC programmes and activities are anchored upon four major pillars, namely: (i) The mobilization and three-week orientation of corps members. (ii) The Place of Primary Assignment (PPA); (iii) Community Development Scheme (CDS); and (iv) Passing out Parade (PP).

Despite the huge logistical burden placed on the shoulders of the federal government in mobilizing the graduates, huge population of Nigerian graduates who were ready to participate in the scheme after the removal of age restriction did not discourage the Nigerian government from shouldering the scheme's huge financial burden. Nigerian graduates within and outside Nigeria were graciously allowed to participate in the scheme as the huge financial commitment used in sustaining the scheme continued unabated. For instance, the annual increase of

<sup>28</sup> Agu, U. 1995. *NYSC and the Nigerian Unity A Critical Appraisal...* pp.29-30

<sup>29</sup> Ojo, F. 1977. *Evaluation Report on Four Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme* as documented by National Youth Service Corps Directorate Headquarters Lagos, p.11. Report Retrieved from the NYSC Directories Archives Abuja, p.6.

<sup>30</sup> Agu, U. 1995. *NYSC and the Nigerian Unity A Critical Appraisal...* p.31

those mobilized for the orientation programmes increased from 25.5 percent in 1974 to 40.3 percent in 1977.<sup>31</sup>

The shouldering of this financial burden by the Federal Military Government reveals the extent of its commitment to the country's unity. The swearing-in ceremony was usually followed by orientation course organised by the State Coordinator, Camp Director, Camp Commandant and other experts in various fields.<sup>32</sup> Orientation courses organized for the mobilized graduates include drill, Man 'O' War activities, physical training, language study, cultural activities, lectures, religious activities etc.<sup>33</sup> The drills were usually handled by military and police instructors while instructors for the leadership training took care of non-drill activities. By the 1980s, the orientation programme was organized such that camp commandants were invited to pre-orientation course briefings while the contents were also adjusted to address the emerging problems inherent in the orientation programme.<sup>34</sup> During the 1980s, the scheme, in its bid to surmount the myriad of problems confronting it, further organized workshops and paper presentations by scholars, experts, policy analysts and bureaucrats that cut across various fields.<sup>35</sup>

This strategy had far reaching impact on the orientation programmes in the 1980s as the NYSC Directorate earmarked one out of the three-week orientation for professional orientation for the categories of corps members who served as teachers, doctors, lawyers, pharmacists and engineers with great emphasis on teaching.<sup>36</sup> The whole essence of this strategy, in the 1980s, was to equip the corps members with ideas through

<sup>31</sup> Emanako, G.E Ed. 1986. *12 Years of National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria, 1973-1985* Lagos: National Youth Service Corps Directorate Headquarters, p.32. Book extracted from NYSC Directorate, Abuja.

<sup>32</sup> Ojo, F. 1977. *Evaluation Report on Four Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme*...p.6

<sup>33</sup> See, Composite Policy Document of NYSC Directorate Headquarters, Abuja, 2013, p.40

<sup>34</sup> See, General Policy Guideline for NYSC Orientation Courses as Prepared by Planning Research and Statistics Department, Directorate Headquarters, Abuja, p.17.

<sup>35</sup> See, Report on the Proceedings of the Workshop on the National Youth Service Corps Scheme in the 80s Kano, Kano State. 26-28<sup>th</sup> May 1980.

<sup>36</sup> See, Report on the Proceedings of the Workshop on the National Youth Service Corps Scheme in the 80s Kano, Kano State. 26-28<sup>th</sup> May 1980.

workshop and orientation programmes with the aim of enhancing service delivery during their period of one year service to the nation. The huge commitment of the scheme through the orientation programmes of corps members, was, however, stifled by the economic difficulties which emanated from the collapse of crude oil prices in the 1980s as income generated from crude oil export fell from 15 billion naira in 1980 to 5.1 billion in 1982 with huge debt and depleted foreign reserves during this period.<sup>37</sup> Due to the economic difficulties of the 1980s, the burden of mobilizing the Nigerian graduates in 1983/84 session was reduced through the restoration of age limit while holders of N.C.E and those who had previously served in the military and paramilitary were exempted.<sup>38</sup>

As policies and programmes of youth mobilization into the NYSC were positioned in the 1980s due to economic hardship which also affected the economic well-being of the Nigerian graduates after service year, the federal government, through NYSC, devised a strategy of ameliorating the high rate of unemployment in that decade through the injection of Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) into the three weeks' orientation programme of the mobilization exercise.<sup>39</sup> The EDP was further strengthened when in 1986 the scheme established a synergy with National Directorate of Employment (N.D.E). This institutional collaboration with N.D.E created awareness for corps members on the need for self-employment after service year.<sup>40</sup> Due to the perennial economic difficulties of the 1990s, the scheme abrogated the provision of

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<sup>37</sup> See Handbook for Corps Members on Teaching Assignments Orientation Lecture Series 1980-1984 as extracted from NYSC Archives Abuja.

<sup>38</sup> See, Olukoshi, A. 1995. 'The Political Economy of Structural Adjustment Programme' in S. Adejumobi and A. Momoh. Eds. *The Political Economy of Nigeria Under Military Rule, 1984- 1993* Harare: Civil Liberty Organization See also, Ayodele, S. Aborisade (now Abolorunde)..2018. 'Nigeria's Foreign Reserves and the Challenges of Development, 1960- 2010' *West Bohemian Historical Review* Vol. VIII No1.

<sup>39</sup> Agu, U. 1995. *NYSC and the Nigerian Unity A Critical Appraisal...* p.31

<sup>40</sup> Momoh, H.B. 1992. *Imperatives of the National Service in the 90s A Collection of Speeches* Vol.

housing for some of its staff, while officers from level 12 and above were allowed to have access to housing facilities.<sup>41</sup> The housing policy of the 1990s compelled State Directors to explore the possibility of acquiring quarters for eligible officers from various state governments as well as the Federal Ministry of Works.<sup>42</sup>

In his speech, *Towards Effective Corps Mobilization-Guidelines for the 1990s*, Col. Hafiz, the then Director General of the Scheme, argues that the scheme in the 1990s had put in place a new strategy of mobilization and deployment which enhanced the mobilization process through proper restructuring of the NYSC bureaucracy.<sup>43</sup> At the dawn of the new millennium, the duration for the orientation exercise which followed the mobilization was adjusted to a period of four weeks depending on how much was available for the entire exercise.<sup>44</sup>

The scenario of the orientation programme marked a departure from the hitherto rigid three weeks orientation. The new millennium ushered in a flexible policy position of 2-4 weeks' orientation exercise. The reason for this flexibility was unconnected with the emerging challenges which confronted the scheme and the need to confront these challenges through additional programmes during the orientation exercise warranted the adjustment. This strategy became necessary in 2003 the year the NYSC clocked 30 years when the scheme discovered that corps members faintly implement what they were taught during and after the service year.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Okhaikhabor, A. 2002. *NYSC Priority Redefined* Okigwe: jane-mos Communication A Division of Softlinks Organisation p.13

<sup>42</sup> Itumo, V.N. 2003. *NYSC, Corps Members The Hope of the Nation A Book on NYSC, Youths and Nation Building*...p.3

<sup>43</sup> See, Government Publication as extracted from NYSC Archives, Abuja on the Report on the Post-Orientation Course Service Year 1973-74 Lagos: National Youth Service Corps Cabinet Office, Lagos, 1974, p.10

<sup>44</sup> Obasa, P.K. 1980. 'The Concept of Motivating the Youths' in National Service for the 80s Report on the Proceedings of the Workshop on the National Youth Service Corps Scheme Kano, Kano State. 26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> May, 1980, p.14.

<sup>45</sup> Obasa, P.K. 1980. 'The Concept of Motivating the Youths' ... p.14

The three-week orientation programme was usually followed by primary assignments for the corps members. Since 1973 when the scheme commenced, corps members were always mandated to carry out their primary assignments in several governments departments, corporations, schools and few private firms as largely determined by the requests of these institutions.<sup>46</sup> The primary assignment for corps members has never been optional due to its legal backing as enshrined in decree 24 of 1973 which mandated the NYSC Directorate to take into consideration the qualifications of corps members before posting them to places of primary assignments. As expected, corps members, right from the inception of the scheme in 1973, indulge in lobbying for deployment to preferred location, although this is hardly granted by the Directorate, which always ensures that corps members were treated well by their employers.

To further strengthen this policy, the 1980s, the scheme put in place rigid structures of discipline which mandates corps members to comport themselves in their places of primary assignments as well as their host communities.<sup>47</sup> One noticeable change in the primary assignment programme of the 1980s was the readiness of the Directorate of the scheme to award prizes to corps members who distinguish themselves in their places of primary assignments, as well as their host communities.<sup>48</sup> Parts of the discipline which attracted commendation during that period was the demonstration of readiness by corps members to remain in their places of primary assignments and can only leave with the permission of their employer while defaulters were denied their monthly allowance, in addition to other sanctions.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Obasa, P.K. 1995. 'Attempt at Mobilizing the Youths' ...p.55

<sup>47</sup> Momoh, H.B. 1992. *Imperatives of the National Service in the 90s A Collection of Speeches Vol. 1...p.27*

<sup>48</sup> See, Momoh, H.B. 1992. *Imperatives of the National Service in the 90s A Collection of Speeches Vol. 1...p.29*. See also, *Publications of National Youth Service Corps Inspectors Manual Abuja: National Directorate Headquarters, Abuja, 1998*, p.64

<sup>49</sup> Agunbiade, S.A. 1993. *The National Youth Service Corps: A Challenge to Government, Youths and the Nigerian Society A Study for the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research NISER, Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria*, p.39

By 1991, Corps Members' Forum was established as a platform for corps members to meet regularly and discuss issues affecting them as well as map out strategies for national development and their resolutions were transmitted to the three tiers of governments through the support of the NYSC Directorate Headquarters.<sup>50</sup> The scheme also made NYSC Presidential Honours and Award an annual exercise in December 1992 while the then Head of State, General Ibrahim Gbadamosi Babangida directed that winners should be selected purely on merit rather than on state basis.<sup>51</sup>

The annual award strategy by the scheme further enhanced the quality of service delivery of the corps members in their places of primary assignments. Although the place of primary assignment of the scheme is compulsory for all corps members, the motivational strategies of the annual Presidential award ensured the corps members effectiveness in the discharge of their duties to the nation.<sup>52</sup> The annual Presidential award was not the only motivational strategy adopted by the scheme for corps members in the 1990s, the Directorate also intensified its monitoring and inspections of corps members' activities and their performances in their places of primary assignments. The leadership of the scheme also impressed it on the employers of corps members the importance of good working condition of young graduates serving their fatherland.<sup>53</sup>

The disciplinary procedure of the NYSC Directorate in the 1990s further promoted productivity among corps members in their places of primary assignments as the Directorate further placed emphasis on withholding the discharge certificate of erring corps members and the extension of period of service or other means depending on the nature of the offence committed

<sup>50</sup> Asein, S.O. 1993. *Call to Service Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme*...p.69

<sup>51</sup> Asein, S.O. 1993. *Call to Service Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme*...p.70

<sup>52</sup> See, National Youth Service Corps Composite Policy Document, 2013, p.55

<sup>53</sup> Agu, U. 1995. *NYSC and the Nigerian Unity A Critical Appraisal*...p.62

Anon: *Mobilization of Corps Members for Community Development* NYSC Year Book 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, 1973-1993.

by the corps member.<sup>54</sup> At the dawn of the millennium, the purpose of primary assignment as an important aspect of the scheme assumed greater importance as the inspection of corps members in their places of primary assignment was intensified through first, second, third and fourth quarters inspection. Inspection reports on corps members were usually forwarded to the Directorate Headquarters through the Inspectorate Department at Abuja.<sup>55</sup>

The most crucial aspect of the NYSC programmes which facilitates the stability of the Nigerian state in terms of unity is the Community Development Service (C.D.S). When the NYSC scheme started in 1973, the Community Development Service hitherto known as the secondary assignment usually took place for three weeks during Christmas holidays.<sup>56</sup> Towards the end of the 1970s, the secondary assignment as it was known then was renamed the Easter Community Development Exercise, while the programme was restructured from Community Development Programme to all year round Community Development Service by the Directorate in 1987.<sup>57</sup> From the 1980s, the CDS programme had expanded in scope beyond rural development as corps members were involved in health education and other social responsibilities thereby increasing the scope of interaction with the host communities.<sup>58</sup>

In the same vein, the CDS was extended to farming in line with the quest for self-sufficiency in food production since independence.<sup>59</sup> Corps members who wished to take to farming after service year were encouraged through the farming programme.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Agu, U. 1995. *NYSC and the Nigerian Unity A Critical Appraisal...* pp.62-63

<sup>55</sup> Onwere, C. 1992. *National Youth Service Corps Programme and National Integration in Nigeria*, Being a PhD Submitted to the Department of International and Comparative Education Institute of Education, University of London, p.102

<sup>56</sup> Anon: *Mobilization of Corps Members for Community Development* NYSC Year Book 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, 1973-1993.

<sup>57</sup> Anon: *Mobilization of Corps Members for Community Development* NYSC Year Book 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, 1973-1993.

<sup>58</sup> Anon: *Mobilization of Corps Members for Community Development* NYSC Year Book 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, 1973-1993.

<sup>59</sup> Enegwea, G and Umoden, G.1993. *NYSC Twenty Years of National Service* , p.61

<sup>60</sup> See, National Youth Service Corps Inspectors Manual as extracted from the NYSC Archives, Abuja, Abuja: Corps Inspectorate Department, National Directorate Headquarters, Abuja, 1998, p.63

By the 1990s, the capacity of the scheme through its CDS programme was enhanced through the establishment of agro-based industries as well as feed mill industry in Ipaja, Lagos State and a Garri Processing Factory in Afon Kwara State.<sup>61</sup> The Rice Mill in Ezeiko, Anambra was also commissioned while a shoe factory was also established in Edo State. In the last quarters of 1992, tailoring factory was opened in Minna for corps members to produce their uniforms.<sup>62</sup> From the foregoing, it could be argued that the philosophical underpinnings of the CDS Programme which mandated corps members to interact with members of rural communities with the strategy of exposing them to customs, traditions and overall sociological orientations of the host communities also instilled in them orientation of self-sufficiency for the overall growth of the nation.<sup>63</sup> The whole essence was to transmute these cultural values to capacity building of the corps members who were positioned as major contributors to the country's socio-economic development. Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the CDS programme of the scheme introduced reward system. The reward system was coordinated by Zonal Inspectors who in the late 1990s collated the data on projects and services rendered in their Local Government Areas for processing by the State Secretariats and NYSC vetting committee at state level.<sup>64</sup> The State Committee was responsible for picking the best three CDS projects per state which were forwarded to the Directorate Headquarters in Abuja for final selection at the national level after thorough verification of physical projects which emanated from the CDS.<sup>65</sup>

At the dawn of the millennium, the CDS programme was divided into three: Traditional Community Development (TCD)

<sup>61</sup> See, Composite Policy Document of NYSC Directorate Headquarters, Abuja, 2013, pp.66-67

<sup>62</sup> Emenako, G.E Ed. 1986. *12 Years of National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria, 1973-1985...* p.19

<sup>63</sup> Obasa, P.K. 1995. *NYSC A Nations Attempt at Mobilizing the Youth...* p.60

<sup>64</sup> See, National Youth Service Corps Inspectors Manual as extracted from the NYSC Archives, Abuja. Abuja: Corps Inspectorate Department, National Directorate Headquarters, Abuja, 1998, p.37

<sup>65</sup> Interview granted by Roseline Uloma Eken, a former Corps Member who served in Ekpoma, Edo State via a telephone conversation in Lagos on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, 2020 23 Years

in which corps members were dedicated to the execution of projects and programmes that improved the living conditions of host communities; the Year Round Community Development (YRCD) which enabled corps members to embark on personal developmental projects in their host communities; and Collaborative Community Development Project (CCDP) which enabled the NYSC to collaborate with governmental and non-governmental organisations which had interests in the scheme through the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), where corps members were exposed to capacity building based on the projects executed through the collaboration.<sup>66</sup>

The Passing Out Parade (POP) is usually the last programme of the NYSC scheme. During the first two decades of the scheme, corps members were usually gathered for a passing out parade in order to receive the certificate for national service.<sup>67</sup> The POP, during the first two decades, commenced with debriefing of corps members as they were also allowed to narrate and assess what was gained during the service year. In the 1990s, the programmes of the POP were extended to encourage corps members to make suggestions to the Directorate on how best the scheme can be improved upon.<sup>68</sup>

During this period, the scheme further added candour to the POP through the taking of roll call of corps members who had successfully completed their service year.<sup>69</sup> The awards were given to outstanding corps members during the service year. Corps members who had impacted lives of the people of their host communities through the erection of an extra-ordinary projects were honoured at the state level while their names were

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<sup>66</sup> Interview granted by Roseline Uloma Ekeh, a former Corps Member who served in Ekpoma, Edo State via a telephone conversation in Lagos on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, 2020 23 Years

<sup>67</sup> Emenako, G.E Ed. 1986. *12 Years of National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria, 1973-1985...* p.19

<sup>68</sup> Interview by Dr Mohammed Hassan Mohammed, Senior Officer of Public Service Institute of Nigeria on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020. The Interviewee served in Taraba State during the 2005/2006 Session. 40+

<sup>69</sup> Interview granted by Mrs Bunmi Morgridge, Assistant Director Ministry of Information and Culture on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020 in Abuja. The Interviewee served in Anambra State during the 1985/1986 Session. Age: 50+

subsequently forwarded to the national secretariat for consideration for national award.

### The Impact of NYSC Programmes on National Development, 1980-2010

The impact of NYSC programmes and activities cannot be over emphasized. One fundamental impact of the scheme is the bringing together of Nigerian youths of various ethnic backgrounds. This facilitates cultural and linguistic integration on short and long term bases.<sup>70</sup> The short term basis of cultural and linguistic infusion emanates from fraternisation of corps members from different parts of the country during the few weeks of orientation exercise while the long term interaction emanates from the interaction of corps member posted to the same communities and places of primary assignments for over 10 months.<sup>71</sup> This explains why corps members across the federation formed 'Corpers' Association' in the 1980s at grassroots level for the purpose of mobilizing Nigerian youths across ethnic lines for unity of the entire nation through the scheme.<sup>72</sup> It has also been established that some marriages among Nigerians of various ethnic divide were consummated through the scheme. Long lasting relationships among Nigerians youths of various religious and ethnic background had been established and these to an extent, had entrenched unity and tranquillity among various groups that make up Nigeria.<sup>73</sup>

Beyond the issue of marriage, the scheme had further entrenched unity through the level of interactions of corps members who come from different ethnic groups of the country with the desire to learn from each other's culture<sup>74</sup>. Interview

<sup>70</sup> Agu, U. 1995. *NYSC and the Nigerian Unity A Critical Appraisal...* p.86

<sup>71</sup> In 2012 these collaborative efforts culminated into the scheme's SAED initiative which has continued to produce employers of labour across the nooks and crannies of the country.

<sup>72</sup> Osuola, J.O. Social Mobilization and Mass Poverty *The Punch*, Thursday, August 20, 1987, Osuola, J.O. Social Mobilization and Mass Poverty *The Punch*, Thursday, August 20, 1987. <sup>73</sup> Asein, S.O. 1993. *Call to Service Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme...* p.144. See also, Osuola, J.O. Social Mobilization and Mass Poverty *The Punch*, Thursday, August 20, 1987.

<sup>74</sup> Enegwea, G and Umoden, G. 1993. *NYSC Twenty Years of National Service...* p.166

granted by Mrs Bunmi Morgridge , Assistant Director, Ministry of Information and Culture on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020 in Abuja. The Interviewee served in Anambra State during the 1985/1986 Session. Age: 50+<sup>75</sup> Agu, U. 1995. *NYSC and the Nigerian Unity A Critical Appraisal...*p.86 as well as their host communities across the country. The cordial relationships were mostly experienced through the CDS projects some of the corps member undertook. For instance, an ex-corps member was installed as the "OLOROGUN" of Iyade in the former Bendel State as a retaliatory gesture for his inestimable contribution to the unity and development of Iyade town during his days as a corps member.<sup>76</sup> The traditional title was bestowed on him despite his state of origin. This was a manifestation of unity brought by the scheme.

It must be emphasized that the main aim of the scheme was to restore the unity of purpose lost on the eve of the civil war. This to an extent, was restored by the scheme in the 1980s. The unity of purpose brought by the scheme was not unconnected to the policy guidelines which emanated from the Directorate Headquarters as policy formulation and implementation across all the states of the federation were cloaked with the principle of uniformity.<sup>77</sup> The economic impact of the scheme cannot be underestimated either. Due to the high rate of unemployment in the 1980s, the scheme created the Job Permanent Unit (JPU) as an institutional reaction to acute unemployment rate in the country.<sup>78</sup> This was followed by the vigorous efforts of the scheme through its successive leadership for foster collaborative partnership with the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) through the establishment of Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) in 1986. The formation of EDP

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<sup>75</sup>National Youth Service Corp, *NYSC Year Book: 45th Commemorative Edition*, 2019.

<sup>76</sup>Odeh, G.O. 2019. *The Gambia's NYSS Partnership with International Organisation for Migration (IOM): Lessons for Nigeria's NYSC Scheme in the Twenty First Century* Being a Paper Presented at the Conference Organized by the University of Texas at Austin. The Paper was also Presented at Conference on Culture, Politics and Contemporary Issues in the Gambia Held at Paradise Suit Hotel, 3 Paradise Beach Place, off Berling Harding Highway (Kololi), Banjul, the Gambia, 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> December, 2019, p.9.

<sup>77</sup>See, The Composite Policy Document of NYSC Directorate Headquarters, Abuja, 2013, p.22.

<sup>78</sup>The Composite Policy Document of NYSC Directorate Headquarters, Abuja, 2013, p.82.

through the scheme helped greatly in ameliorating the problem of unemployment in the country because it helped in developing the entrepreneurs who started and managed small and medium scale industries. The implication of this was the boosting of the micro sector of the country's economy in the 1980s. By the 1990s, the impact of the scheme on the educational sector had become monumental. During this decade, more than 70% of 400,000 graduates mobilized for the scheme served in the educational institutions ranging from primary to tertiary levels with impressive performance.<sup>79</sup>

The contributions of the scheme to educational development could be seen in the way youth corps members were posted to various primary, secondary and tertiary institutions across the country. The impact of the scheme in the area of education was not only felt among the young people especially in the rural areas, the adult were also affected positively as corps members became tools of social mobilisation which engendered atmosphere of peace in the country.<sup>80</sup> This, in a way, has reduced the perennial shortage of manpower in the rural areas and some vital sectors in the country. The health sector also benefited immensely from the scheme through the mobilization of graduates and non-graduates of medicine for the improvement of primary and secondary health sectors especially in the rural areas of the country. In the 1990s, effective healthcare delivery was brought to the doorsteps of many rural communities through corps members who were mobilized for the enlightenment of rural dwellers, especially on the need to keep their environment clean for healthy living.<sup>81</sup> With the support of the federal government, the scheme, in the 1990s acquired over 7,000 hectares of farmland in all states of the federation

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<sup>79</sup> See, the Composite Policy Document of NYSC Directorate Headquarters, Abuja, 2013, p.82

<sup>80</sup> Thomas, D. NYSC: Time for Another Reflection *The Punch* of Thursday September 24, 1986.

<sup>81</sup> Mukhta, A. Kastina A. 2012. 'Nigeria's Security Challenges and Crisis of Development Towards a New Framework for Analysis' *International Journal of Developing Societies* Vol.1, No3, 2012, p.109

including Abuja for the cultivation of maize, rice, guinea corn and millet, cassava, pineapple, soya beans, sorghum and cowpea.<sup>82</sup> Since the year 2000, the scheme has systematically expanded these farms and is massively producing all kinds of food crops across Nigeria. In addition, the scheme contributes immensely to livestock production of the country through projects in places like Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Benue, Imo, Lagos, Enugu, Plateau, Kano, Bauchi, Sokoto and Kastina States.<sup>83</sup> Through such efforts, the NYSC is said to be contributing to the feeding of the country.

The scheme also assisted the country in the boosting of local production as it ventured into the establishment of a shoe factory in Benin-City, Edo State while a garment factory was also established in Minna, Niger State as these factories offered entrepreneurial training in fashion designing to a select group of corps members every year. The whole essence of this was to instill entrepreneurial skills in young graduates who were less likely to secure white collar jobs in the labour market due to the economic situation in Nigeria and as a result, the strategy of the scheme in this regard was laudable especially in the area of agricultural production where corps members were enjoined to contribute to the food basket of the nation through their CDS. By 1994 impact of the NYSC activities and programmes in Nigeria began to spread beyond the shores of the country as the scheme began to attract international attention. The recognition emanated from the country's hosting of 2<sup>nd</sup> Youth Global Conference in Abuja, the country's capital in 1994. Also, other countries, especially those within Africa, emulated Nigeria on the strategies of developing their countries through youth scheme.<sup>84</sup> One of such African countries was the Gambia as the country's delegation led by Mrs Amina Faal-Sanko, the then Gambian Minister of Youth, Sport and Culture used the occasion of the conference to study the critical areas of Nigeria's NYSC scheme.

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<sup>82</sup> Mukhta, A. Kastina . 2012. 'Nigeria's Security Challenges and Crisis of Development Towards a New Framework for Analysis' . p.114

The dawn of the millennium brought so many challenges to the activities and programmes implemented by the scheme since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of such challenges was the need to instill the culture of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into the formal and informal sectors of the country's economy. To this end, the scheme ensured that corps members who served the nation from the early 2000s keyed into the ICT infrastructure of the scheme through the teaching of ICT software solutions.<sup>85</sup> The rationale behind this ICT strategy was to further sharpen the ICT skills of the country's graduates who became active players of formal and informal sectors of the Nigerian economy. The implication of this initiative by the scheme was the generation of employment opportunities in the country's ICT sector through website designs and other forms of ICT driven-advertisements inherent in the country's cyber space.

This, somehow, had ameliorated the heavy burden of unemployment within the country's economy. The scheme at the dawn of the millennium had also keyed into the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The implication of this was the total revamping of the scheme's Entrepreneurship Development Programme in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through a strong partnership with the office of the United Nations MDGs in Nigeria.<sup>86</sup> This strategy of development since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century had led to the sensitization and mobilisation of 200,000 young graduates for skill acquisition annually in collaboration with Public-Private Partnership for the development of the country's entrepreneurial drive.<sup>87</sup> This has instilled into the minds of young graduates, the vision for self-reliance without the search for unavailable white-collar jobs within the public and private sectors of the Nigerian economy.

### Challenges of Programme Implementation

One of the current realities of the Nigerian state which poses threat to the programme implementation of the NYSC scheme is insecurity.<sup>88</sup> This has spiraled in the wake of Boko Haram and the rise in rural banditry across the country. The fear and

anxiety, insecurity generates implicates the capacity of the Directorate to mobilize corps members and keep them focused in the task of diligently serving the country. Indeed, perennial insecurity in the country poses a great challenge to the integrative strategies of the Nigerian state through the NYSC.<sup>89</sup>

Structural imbalances in the socio-economic conditions of the people have brought acute inequalities and poverty that generate conflicts. These conflicts according to Kastina, were created by conscious policy of social and political exclusion that heightens insecurity in Nigeria.<sup>90</sup> The high level of insecurity in the country can be described as a reactionary strategy of the excluded groups of individuals who see themselves as stakeholders of the Nigerian project. The manifestation of violence by these groups, known and unknown, has overstretched the resources, expertise and competence of Nigeria's security apparatus to the limit. This is because the security challenges are multifaceted and multi-dimensional as they range from political and electioneering conflicts, socio-economic agitations, ethno-religious crises, ethnic militias, criminality and other organised crimes.

The security challenge had somehow altered the process of cultural integration of the various ethnic groups that make up Nigeria as corps members were afraid of being killed. The implication of this unpleasant security situation are manifold. first, it has also whittled down the effectiveness of one of the most integrative tools, that is, the CDS.<sup>91</sup> The CDS, over the years, had played effective roles in the fusion of cultures of both the corps members from different parts of the country and their host communities. Secondly, it has made it difficult for corps members outside the geo-political zone of a particular community to serve in such a community. Third, it has contributed to the collapse of the country's social fabric in terms of morals. Another emerging challenges of the scheme has been perceived by stakeholders as both internal and external. Internally, it is generally believed that funds allocated to the scheme are inadequate. Following the steady increase in corps

members over the years, the scheme has grappled with teething operational challenges directly linked to paucity of funds. This problem is further compounded by the economic difficulties the nation has continued to contend. The down turn in the economy has diminished the relevance of the scheme.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the scheme through its programmes still serves as one of the most enduring institutions in postcolonial Nigeria. It is plausible to argue that though the security challenge hinders the effective implementation of the scheme's activities, the essential services corps members still render to the nation building project of the Nigerian state in the area of elections, education, health and other critical aspects of public and organised private sectors are germane to the socio-economic well-being of the nation. This shows that the programmes of the scheme have gone beyond national integration of various ethnic groups to providing essential services to the critical sectors of the country's socio-economic fabric. The scheme has also contributed to the establishment and development of similar social institutions in places like the Gambia, thereby contributing to the development of not just that country, but Africa.

## Conclusion

One may not be out of place to argue that the conception of the (NYSC) after the country's civil war in 1970 was an ingenious contraption to heal the wound created by the Nigerian civil war and to promote national unity in the country. The programmes instituted in the scheme conformed to the ideological underpinnings of NYSC as espoused by the founding fathers. The scheme rested on three major pillars – orientation, primary assignment and CDS. The challenges which confronted the scheme have been met with adequate response, ensuring its survival over the years. The problems of ethnic divisions and insecurity across Nigeria's territorial boundaries underscore the relevance of the NYSC scheme. Against the call for the complete

abandonment of the programme, it is plausible to contend that the overstretching of the scheme's capacity in pursuing its objectives beyond what was espoused in 1973 under the present circumstances of the Nigerian state calls for greater recognition and adaptation of the scheme to the country's nation building project through comprehensive reforms and sweeping changes to enhance its effectiveness.

By implication, these programmes contributed greatly to healing the wounds which the civil war brought upon the nation at least, during the first decade of the existence of the scheme. This, to an extent, conformed to the ideological underpinnings of NYSC as espoused by the founding fathers. However, the challenges which confronted the Nigerian state after the first decade of the scheme's existence necessitated its institutional response through various policies and programmes which to an extent, surmounted these challenges. As the Nigerian state continued to grapple with the challenges of ethnic divisions and insecurity across its territorial boundaries, the impact of the scheme's programmes and activities became saturated and this intensified the calls for its obliteration.

It should be noted that the overstretching of the scheme's programme has not completely made it irrelevant to the nation building project of the Nigerian state, on the contrary, the scheme has been able to respond to the country's nation building demands beyond cultural integration of various groups that make up the nation. The reason why the calls for the scheme's obliteration have been intensified in recent years is due to the limited objectives of cultural unity which the founding fathers of the scheme espoused at its formation. The founding fathers did not envisage the myriad of challenges currently confronting the Nigerian state at the formation of the scheme in 1973. It may not be out of place to contend that the overstretching of the scheme's capacity in pursuing its objectives beyond what was espoused in 1973 under the present circumstances of the Nigerian state calls for greater recognition and importance of the scheme to the

country's nation building project through a comprehensive reform and sweeping changes than the complete abandonment of it.

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**Table 4:** Interviews

S/N	NAME	SEX	AGE	OCCUPATION	DATE AND PLACE OF INTERVIEW
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2.	Bunmi Morgridge	Female	50+	Civil Servant	10 <sup>th</sup> of August, 2020 at Public Service Institute of Nigeria, Kubwa, Abuja.
3.	Obayanju Malaolu	Female	20+	Teaching and Trading	21 <sup>st</sup> of September, 2020 via a telephone interview from Abeokuta, Ogun State.
4.	Deola Oguntimehin	Female	20+	Private Firm Worker	22 <sup>nd</sup> of September, 2020 via a telephone interview from Lagos.
5.	Effetobor, Stephanie Effevottu	Female	20+	Ph.D. Student	25 <sup>th</sup> of September, 2020 via a telephone interview from Ibadan.
6.	Emeka Okoye-Chine	Male	40+	Businessman	24 <sup>th</sup> of September, 2020 via a telephone interview from Onitsha, Anambra State.
7	Issac Ediba	Male	40+	Lecturer	28 <sup>th</sup> of September, 2020 via a telephone interview from Gombe State, Nigeria.
8.	Mohammed Hassan Mohammed	Male	40+	Civil Servant	10 <sup>th</sup> of August, 2020 at Public Service Institute of Nigeria, Kubwa, Abuja.
9.	Oluwakemi Oguntimehin	Female	50+	Teacher Trading	21 <sup>st</sup> of September, 2020 at Ibafo, Ogun State.
10.	Roseline Eke Uloma	Female	23		18 <sup>th</sup> September, 2020 via a telephone interview from Lagos.

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## Chapter Eight

# GROUPS AND SOCIETIES IN THE NYSC SCHEME

***Umar Aminu Yandaki***

*Department of History,  
Uthman Fodio University,  
Sokoto*

### Introduction

Often viewed as an embodiment of a myriad technical and bureaucratic frameworks within which Nigerian youths/graduates are trained to be disciplined, self-reliant and patriotic, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme is not limitedly a herald of the country's national unity. It also symbolises Nigeria's national development project. The four cardinal programmes of the scheme's annual national service – i.e. Orientation, Primary Assignment, Community Development Service (CDS) and Winding Up and Passing Out – accentuate this; because, although marked by different priorities and agendas, they all have national 'unity' and 'development' as their common thread.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, throughout the one year mandatory national service scheme, the corps members' groups and societies are the only powerful platforms that consistently draw NYSC's 'unity' and 'development' ideals together. This chapter offers a critical assessment of the essentials of the corps members' groups and societies that operate under the aegis of the NYSC scheme. It holds that beyond the three readily noticeable annual programmes of the NYSC, i.e. orientation and camping, primary assignment and winding up and passing

<sup>1</sup>This is intelligible at least in the context of Arubayi's explanation of the NYSC and its four cardinal programmes. See D. O. Arubayi (2015), "Youths in Development: Understanding the Contributions of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to Nigeria's National Development", *PhD Thesis*, University of Manchester, pp. 83-91.

out,<sup>2</sup> corps members' CDS groups and religious societies constitute the strategic platforms that reinforce NYSC's unification ideals and animate the scheme as a development model through their direct engagement with the wider society.

Of course, quite important in imbuing them with the ideals of discipline and self-reliance, the drilling and regimentation that the corps members undergo during orientation, plus the theater for initiating cultural blending provided by the orientation camp, only last for three weeks. As for the primary assignment, it randomly distributes corps members across various working places and could keep most of them so busy to even contemplate reunion among themselves or with the NYSC officials after the orientation period. The winding up and passing out activities only reunite the corps members and the NYSC staff for few days, during which they would be permanently retiring from the scheme.<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, however, within the service year, the corps members' groups and societies provide platforms for continuity and sustenance of the connectivity among the corps members and between them and the NYSC officials, bound by the sole aim of achieving common national goals. For example, it is only the approved CDS groups (some of which are classified within the spectrum of 'clubs'), that provide 'national' platforms on which corps members from diverse ethnic and religious background meet weekly under the supervision of NYSC officials – such as Zonal Inspectors (ZIs), Local Inspectors (LIs) and CDS Schedule Officers – to deliberate and work together on issues concerning national development: not only are development projects communally undertaken by the corps members throughout the nooks and crannies of the country, but NYSC ideals are also consistently maintained through the constituency of these CDS groups.

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<sup>2</sup> The NYSC scheme is widely reputed for these three annual programmes because the activities of corps members' groups and societies within the society are often considered performed by the 'corps members' rather than their specific groups and societies. Careful observation reveals such.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Additionally, under the agency of the three approved religious societies – also known as 'associations' – corps members of different ethnic and regional backgrounds consistently unite under the supervision of NYSC officials to pursue common religious aspirations.

Essentially, corps members' groups and societies constitute the major framework within which the NYSC scheme is sustained after orientation camping. Apart from the corps members' CDS groups and religious societies, the NYSC scheme does not have any other long term sustainable programme or strategy that keeps the corps members together or also keep them keenly aligned to NYSC office/officials in order to achieve common national goals. These groups and societies, particularly the CDS groups, provide platforms that reduce the rather high and not easily controllable population of corps members into manageable categories, which – throughout the service year – ensure consistency in terms of collaboration and commitment to peaceful coexistence, unity and national development. These in turn constitute the *raison d'être* behind the establishment of the NYSC scheme by the Nigerian Military Government under General Yakubu Gowon in 1973 as part of the post-civil war reconciliation programmes that followed the end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970.

To be sure, despite their importance, the corps members' groups and societies are grossly understudied. They are poorly perceived by the general society, and their purposes scarcely understood even among the corps members.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, with examples drawn from various parts of Nigeria, this chapter offers an empirically grounded discourse on the nature, activities and impact of corps members' groups and societies. However, the following section briefly reviews the NYSC as a national service scheme in Nigeria.

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<sup>4</sup>National Youth Service Corps (2014), *ABC of Community Development and Special Project Department*, Abuja, National Youth Service Directorate Headquarters, p. 2.

## The Nigerian NYSC Scheme

NYSC is an agency under the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Youths and Sports, which mobilises Nigerian youths for national service.<sup>5</sup> Broadly viewed, national service is itself, "an organised period of substantial engagement and contribution to local, national or world community, recognised and valued by the society with minimal monetary compensation to the participant".<sup>6</sup> The philosophy behind the establishment of the NYSC, as well as the national service it manages, is deeply rooted in the need to solve the contradictions shrouding the Nigerian federal system. Such contradictions could be best understood when the history of societal composition and administrative structure of Nigeria are reviewed. A federal State, Nigeria is comprised of thirty-six states and the federal capital territory, Abuja. These are in turn, made up of seven hundred and seventy-four local government areas (LGAs). Even then, Nigeria – the most populous country in Africa with a population of over 170 million people – is profusely pluralistic: it has over two hundred and fifty ethnicities, with Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo as the majors. There are also ethnic minorities, mainly found in the Middle Belt areas of northern Nigeria and the Niger Delta region of the south. Being the products of protracted historical processes, these ethnicities, in varying formations and degrees, made up several autonomous political units at various times during the pre-colonial period (the period up to 1900).<sup>7</sup>

Although, history has acknowledged interrelations among the various ethnicities that existed in the Nigerian area during the pre-colonial period, it also acknowledged the wide cultural

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Abdulwahab Lawal Rafindadi (1<sup>st</sup> Sept, 2020), ex-corps member & former president of Road Safety CDS Group, at Rafindadi Primary School, Katsina State.

<sup>6</sup> Sherraden cited in G. O. Oneh (2018), "NYSC's Engagement in the Development of Abuja, 1982-2011", *Rima International Journal of Historical Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1.

<sup>7</sup> S. Suleiman (2015), "The Nigerian History Machine and the Production of Middle Belt Historiography". *PhD Thesis*, Dept. of Historical Studies, University of Cape Town, pp. 11-12.

differences among some of them.<sup>8</sup> These cultural variations were in some instances furthered, and in others cemented, by the religious mapping of the ethnic groups in the Nigerian area, which was largely influenced by the history of their respective contacts with the wider world.<sup>9</sup> As such, while the northern part of the country houses a predominantly Muslim population, with a considerable population of Christians in its Middle Belt region, the South-East and Niger Delta are predominantly Christians; and the South-West, mainly Muslims and Christians. There were, however, pockets of traditional religions adept throughout the Nigerian area.<sup>10</sup> Despite the long history of interrelations among these ethnicities, the first instance of their assemblage to make up the federal political entity known as Nigeria was a British colonial initiative. It was a colonial project that was initiated in the 1880s, which having undergone a series of amalgamations, eventually matured in 1914, when the wide range of the areas/autonomous political units that made up the present Nigerian State were finally amalgamated to establish the colonial entity of *Nigeria*. Following the amalgamations, the colonial administrators artificially divided Nigeria into provinces, each administered by a Resident Officer. Here, with

<sup>8</sup> While there was a long history of interactions among Nigerian ethnicities to the extent that some of them share linguistic analogies, e.g. the Hausa and Fulani of Northern Nigeria, there were some others that were culturally unrelated. A good example could be cited with Hausa/Igbo ethnic groups. See O. Akinwunmi *et. al.* (eds.) (2006), *Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Markurdi, Aboki Publishers.

<sup>9</sup> Coming from the Middle East through North Africa, Islam appeared among various ethnicities in parts of northern Nigeria, particularly Borno and Hausaland since around the 11<sup>th</sup> Century. It continued to expand over the centuries and became well established after the successful execution of the Islamic Revolution led by Shehu Usman Danfodiyo, and the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. At its peak, Islam reached up to some parts of Yorubaland. Its present was, however limited among the various ethnicities in the Middle Belt area. As for Christianity, it came to dominate most of Southern Nigeria and the Middle Belt area as a result of missionary activities, spreading to the hinterland from the coastal areas, starting from the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. While religious differences accentuated the already existing cultural differences among some ethnic groups, it became an umbrella under which some others became assembled. For example, "The Middle Belt", observed Suleiman, "is one of the areas of greatest cultural and linguistic diversity in the whole West Africa... in the absence of a strong history of cohesion, the non-Muslim communities resorted to religion in search of a common cultural denominator". See S. Suleiman (2012), "Exhuming Passions: Religion and the Emergence of the Middle Belt Struggle in Nigeria" *Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, Issue No. 11, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> See S. Suleiman (2015), "The Nigerian History Machine.", pp. 12-14.

little regard to the pre-colonial social, religious and political formations, the various ethnicities were incorporated into the new colonial administrative superstructure.<sup>11</sup> Impliedly, many ethnicities were cruelly dislocated, “leaving some of the people on one side, some on the other”.<sup>12</sup>Indeed, as Suleiman rightly posited,

The foundations of the contradictions in Nigeria's federal system were laid during the colonial period through various arbitrary practices and regimes of governance and geography, which accentuated cultural differences, and entrench communal cleavages.<sup>13</sup>

Having realised the toxicity of these administrative and geographic reshufflings wither Nigerian cultural diversity, the colonial State in Nigeria strove to salvage the situation through the introduction of a regional system of government in 1946. The introduction of the quasi-federal structure, which saw the establishment of the Northern, Western and Eastern Regions, was aimed at promoting national unity and providing opportunity for the individual units to pursue their separate cultural aspirations.<sup>14</sup>Unfortunately, however, the situation was only worsened. Eventually, it was the unhealthy regional politics of federalism that followed independence, coupled with the existing contradictions in the quasi-federal system – marked by mutual ethic and regional distrusts – that fuelled the January and July 1966 Military Coups in Nigeria. These subsequently threw the nation into thirty months Civil War, which began in 1967, only to end in 1970. Not only did the civil war cost people's lives and properties, it echoed multiple versions prejudicial narratives of dissent, which the various ethnicities and regions

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<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup>Madani quoted, *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

use to traduce one another.<sup>15</sup>

Following the civil war, therefore, the Nigerian Military Government under General Yakubu Gowon established the NYSC scheme as part of its reconciliation policy, not only to achieve peaceful coexistence and unity, but also overall national development. The scheme identified the educated youths of the nation as its focus for mobilisation, realising that such youths constitute the most viable channels of human rehabilitation, social reconstruction and national reconciliation.<sup>16</sup> The objectives of the scheme are better expressed by the decree that established it – the National Youths Service Corps Decree (No. 24), 1973 – which stated as follows:

- a) To inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work, and, of patriotic and loyal service to the nation in any situation they may find themselves;
- b) To raise their moral tone by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement and social and cultural improvement;
- c) To develop in them attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilisation in the national interest;
- d) To develop common ties among them to promote national unity by ensuring that –
  - i. As far as possible, youths are assigned to jobs in States other than their States of origin;
  - ii. Each group, assigned to work together, is a representative of the country as possible;
- e) To encourage members of the service corps to seek, at the end of their corps service, career employment all over the country thus promoting the free movement of labour;

<sup>15</sup> See U. Faruk (2011), *The Victors and the Vanquished of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970: Triumph and Valour over Greed and Ambition*, Zaria, ABU Press.

<sup>16</sup> N. Ikharo (24-02-1994), "NYSC and National Development", *The Triumph*.

- f) To induce employers, partly through their experience with members of the service corps, to employ more readily qualified Nigerians irrespective of their States of origin; and
- g) To enable Nigerian youths to acquire the spirit of self-reliance.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, for about five decades of its existence, the NYSC as an institution has been running national service programme in line with these and other related objectives, subsequently constituted by Decree No. 51 of 1993 which revised the 1973 Decree, and the NYSC Act, Cap.-84 of 2004.<sup>18</sup> The policy and decisions governing of the NYSC are formulated and enforced by the National Directorate and the various State Committees. In fact, from inception in 1973, it was the National Directorate of the NYSC that took the responsibility of designing the scheme's annual national service programmes of training and schedules, which were structured for achieving the objectives of the NYSC.<sup>19</sup> Headed by a Director General, the fairly staffed and well departmentalised National Directorate is supported by the State Committees, which are available in all States across the country. The State Committees, in turn, operate under the leadership of their respective State Coordinators who head other supporting departments and staff. As an institution, with a well-structured system of administration and staffing, the NYSC ensures that from mobilisation to passing out, its national service annual programmes and schedules, which are centrally designed by the National Directorate are strictly adhered to throughout the country. It also maintains regular contact with universities and colleges, manage corps members' activities throughout service year and assess the progress of the scheme from time to time.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> National Archives Kaduna (1973) CSA/OFF/148, "National Youth Service Corps".

<sup>18</sup> D. O. Arubayi (2015), "Youths in Development, pp. 83-84.

<sup>19</sup> National Archives Kaduna (1973) CSA/OFF/148...

<sup>20</sup> National Archives Kaduna (1973) CSA/OFF/148...

The national service programme under the NYSC operates as a one year mandatory programme that mobilises Nigerian youths who graduated from universities and polytechnics within and outside Nigeria;<sup>21</sup> it is a critical 'transitional period' during which such graduates are posted to States other than their States of origin where they, hopefully, unlearn the prejudicial stereotypes they must have learnt about other parts of the country, embrace patriotism and a spirit of national development.<sup>22</sup> Among the scheme's targets for mobilisation, graduates who are military/ paramilitary personnel, or above the age of thirty years are exempted: the latter clarifies the programme's concept of 'youths' as graduates below the age of thirty years. Once they are mobilised, these graduates are until the end of the programme known as corps members. The NYSC through the instrumentality of its officials usually guide the corps members through most of the established national service programmes' trainings and schedules, which are carried out annually. Indeed, since the end of the 1972/1973 academic session, NYSC has been mobilising youths for national service following the completion of every academic session.<sup>23</sup> While the scheme mobilised about 2,000 corps members nationwide in 1973, the number increased dramatically to about 85,000 in 1999 and 297,293 in 2017.<sup>24</sup> Resulting from the gradual increase in the number of graduates produced annually, the programme now mobilises youths in different batches every year. These batches are usually classified as Batch A, Batch B and Batch C, sometimes, each batch further divided into two streams.<sup>25</sup> Throughout the service year, the major activities undertaken by

<sup>21</sup> G. O. Oneh (2018), "NYSC's Engagement in the Development of Abuja...", p. 143.

<sup>22</sup> National Youth Service Corps (August, 2006), "Has NYSC Achieved Its Objectives? - Interview with Mary Dan-Abia, the State Coordinator of NYSC, Abia State", *Abiakopa - End of Service Year Magazine of NYSC Abia State - Batch B 2005*, Vol. 2, No. 8, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> National Archives Kaduna (1973) CSA/OFF/148...

<sup>24</sup> F. Alo (2018), "Retooling Nigeria's Youth Service Corps to Drive National Transformation", <https://gga.org/retooling-nigeria-s-youth-service-corps-to-drive-national-transformation/>

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Badmus Oluwasegun (4<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2020), Serving Corps Member & NYSC Liason Officer for Dala LGA, at NYSC Secretariat, Dala LGA, Kano State.

the corps members summate the four cardinal programmes of the scheme.

These cardinal programmes, as mentioned earlier, are Orientation, Primary Assignment, Secondary Assignment/CDS and Winding up and Passing Out. The orientation comes first. Immediately after the calling-up of prospective corps members and their deployment to different States across the country, orientation engages them for three weeks camping, during which a plethora of activities, ranging from lectures, regimental drills/ trainings, exercises, social activities as well as other important initiation rituals that prepare corps members ahead of the national service are performed.<sup>26</sup> This is followed by the Primary Assignment, which ensures the deployment of corps members to various government departments, statutory corporations, schools, hospitals, private sectors, etc. to work for national service, for a period of about eleven months. The Primary Assignment randomly distributes corps members to various local government areas within the State they are posted, including the remotest areas – invariably referred to as host communities.<sup>27</sup>

Following this is the Secondary Assignment, otherwise known as CDS. It operates on dual planes: personal CDS and group CDS. While the former provides corps members the opportunity to identify and execute community development projects on personal basis (optional); the latter is, however, compulsory. Every corps member must belong to one of the approved CDS groups under the constituency of which consistent collaborations and commitments among the corps members and between them and the NYSC officials are maintained for common national purposes. CDS, which is also undertaken for most part of the service year, ensures the consideration and provision of community development projects by the corps members for the benefit of their host communities.<sup>28</sup> The Winding up and Passing Out programme

<sup>26</sup> See D. O. Arubayi (2015), "Youths in Development," pp. 87-89.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

marks the final phase/stage of the NYSC scheme. It engages assessment of corps members' performances in Primary Assignment and CDS. It also engages the release of passing-out corps members by their various primary assignment employers, clearing of corps members by the NYSC, the passing-out ceremony and the issuing of NYSC discharge certificates to successful corps members.<sup>29</sup>

Beside these cardinal programmes, there are other supporting programmes stimulating the operation of the NYSC. Among them is the monthly clearance of corps members by their respective Places of Primary Assignments (PPA) and CDS groups' Schedule officers, which is followed by the monthly clearance by their respective Lis. While the former is done to ensure that corps members have discharged their monthly duties, the latter okays the corps members for the collection of their monthly stipend/ allowance. Others are the activities of the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Department, beginning from 2012<sup>30</sup> and those of the NYSC religious societies/associations. The next section discusses the ideas of Corps Members' Groups and Societies and their modes of operations.

## Corps Members' Groups and Societies

Multiple CDS groups and three approved religious societies presently exist and operate within the NYSC scheme. The stance and activities of these groups and societies was considerably shaped by the general conditions prevailing in Nigeria at the establishment of the NYSC in the 1970s, as well as other social changes that ensued to date. The NYSC was established at a critical time in Nigeria's history. The civil war had just ended; and having suffered a rough interlude – killing, displacing and destabilising millions of people – the post-war period ushered in a time of intense need. There was an intense need for

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p. 91. See also, NYSC (21<sup>st</sup> Sept. 2020) NYSC/DHQ/PRs/DIR/CIR/STATE/VOL. II/ „2019 Batch 'C', Stream 1, Winding-Up/ Passing-Out: Approved Activities and Programme.

<sup>30</sup> See [www.nysc.gov.ng/saed.html](http://www.nysc.gov.ng/saed.html).

reunification and reconstruction; as well as the need for development, just as was the case before the war. In this parlance, the intellectuals – particularly historians – continued to preach the gospel of 'unity for national development', and from this period, studies on inter- group relations began in earnest.<sup>31</sup> Even the once headstrong Federal Military Government began to use soft-power to establish and maintain proper reunification and reconstruction. It is, in fact, this strategy that birthed the NYSC scheme. Commencing the scheme with a CDS programme is, therefore, not surprising. So is the subsequent strategic bargain that endorsed the operation of religious associations within the scheme, beginning from the late 1970s and early 1980s. For the purpose of organisation, the chapter studies the activities of the CDS groupings and religious societies separately. It begins with the CS groups.

## I. The CDS Groups

Designing NYSC's programme for annual training and schedules in 1973, the National Directorate of NYSC under its pioneer Director-General, Ahmadu Ali, crafted Community Development Service as an important programme.<sup>32</sup> The CDS, as it is presently known, operates in line with the framework of the 'bottom-up' development approach, which suggests communal mobilisation of human and material resources to complement the activities of the government at various levels in the efforts towards national development.<sup>33</sup> CDS obliges corps members to not only realise and harness their innovative potentials, but also empathise with the aborigines of their host communities by identifying with the needs of such communities and collaborating with the members of the communities to plan and execute development projects and programmes for the

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<sup>31</sup> A. I. Yandaki (2011), "The Changing Nature of Nigerian History, 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present", in S. B. Ahmad and I. K. Abdussalam, *Resurgent Nigeria: Issues in Nigerian Intellectual History*, Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, p.46.

<sup>32</sup> Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau (1973-1976) C/705/L420/, "National Youths Service Corps", pp. 1-3.

<sup>33</sup> G. O. Oneh (2018), "NYSC's Engagement in the Development of Abuja...", p.145.

communities' benefits. From the inception of the NYSC scheme, however, the CDS has at different times undergone various adjustments and transformations.

In the early years of NYSC's existence, the philosophy, organisational structure and modes of operation of the CDS were substantially different from what is obtainable in the recent times. In the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, CDS was variously referred to as 'community development work', 'community development activities' or 'community development projects'.<sup>34</sup> During those formative years of the NYSC, identifying the needs of the host communities and the projection of community development projects was not a domain of the corps members, as it is now. Host communities' needs were identified by the community development personnel under the various state governments across the country; and corps members were only grouped, deployed to various community development project sites and supervised by the appropriate NYSC and state governments' officials to work for specific durations earmarked for the CDS within the service year. Impliedly, the corps members' CDS groups were never substantive and specialised groups; they were less organised, strictly temporal, unnamed and their activities loosely defined. In line with NYSC's objectives, however, such groupings were as much as possible, representatives of the country's cultural and religious diversity. Also, CDS was only undertaken at two different times during the service year. In most instances, one week was set aside, out of the 4 weeks orientation course to perform CDS activities. In the latter parts of the service year, four weeks were earmarked for the Easter CDS activities.<sup>35</sup> To justify these assertions, examples are drawn from the North-Western State – the forerunner of the present Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara and Niger states – showing how CDS was operated during the 1973/74, 1974/75 and 1975/76 service years, respectively. This is supported with examples from other parts of the country in the 1980s.

<sup>34</sup> This could be observed here: Waziri Jumaidu History and Culture Bureau (1973-1976) C/ 705/I - Sokoto 1/52/420/, pp. 34-36, 56-58, 61, 81-85 and 95-101.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

As an annual routine, NYSC's national service operates in line with its programme for annual training and schedules. Just as other State Committees across the country, the NYSC State Committee for the North-Western state kicked off the national service activities in 1973 under the guidance of the programme for annual training and schedules, which spelt out the activities for that service year. While the programme placed 4 weeks, 42 weeks and 2 weeks for orientation course, primary assignment and winding up respectively, it allocated 4 weeks to CDS. Nevertheless, within the period of orientation – which actually commenced on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1973 – five days were spared during which corps members were taken to CDS sites where they went through solo-survival schemes. This was done under the coordination of one Mr. G. R. Pillai, the day's Chief Community Development Inspector.<sup>36</sup> Also, towards the ending of the 1973/74 service year, CDS was undertaken from 10<sup>th</sup> April to 1<sup>st</sup> May 1974. It was inaugurated by the state commissioner for Community Development, Alhaji Ibrahim Agaie at Chafe, on 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1974. To perform the CDS activities, corps members were divided into groups, distributed across various localities under Sokoto, Argungu, Birnin Kebbi and Zuru Divisions. The CDS activities were coordinated by inspectors from NYSC; these include Mallam Hanafi Sa'adu, Alhaji Isyaku B. Kuta and Alhaji Sani Muh. Yeldu. The activities were supervised by the State's community development officers.<sup>37</sup>

In the following service year, 1974/75, corps members – as done during the previous year – were assigned CDS tasks as part of their orientation course. During the orientation course, which lasted for about four weeks from 3<sup>rd</sup> August to 10<sup>th</sup> September 1974, CDS tasks were performed within a period of one week, between 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> August 1974. During this year's orientation CDS, the corps members were divided into five groups. The first three groups which had 30 members each, worked at Gummi, Gusau and Binji; for the other two groups, each with 15

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<sup>36</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 34-36.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 56-58.

members, they worked at Maru and Gwadabawa. During the period of the work, feeding and accommodation was made available for the corps members by the State, through the State's chairman of Area Development Board. The CDS projects were initiated and supervised by the State's Community Development Officers in various CDS sites' locations. Undertaken between 15<sup>th</sup> March and 15<sup>th</sup> April 1975, the end of service year CDS was carried out in 4 weeks. Corps members were categorised into six groups to perform the CDS tasks in Sokoto, Gusau, Birnin Kebbi, Bida, Kontagora and Minna. Transport and accommodation was provided for the corps members by the State. Moreover, corps members were given feeding allowances while at CDS sites. At the CDS sites, corps members worked from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm daily, without break. As usual, the work was coordinated by NYSC inspectors and supervised by community development officers in charge of the various areas where the corps members were deployed to work.<sup>38</sup>

Moving to the next service year (1975/1976), CDS was, as usual, undertaken as part of the orientation course. Out of the period of the orientation course, one week was spared for CDS between 18<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1975. For this service year's orientation CDS activities, corps members were taken to execute CDS projects at Gwadabawa, Bodinga and Yabo districts. The CDS works were undertaken under the supervision of community development officers. At Gwadabawa, it was supervised by Mallam Sule Dogondaji and Mallam Namadina Aliyu; at Bondinga, by Mal. Aliyu Gumbi and Lawali Gusau; and at Yabo, by Mallam Abubakar Bagudu and Mohammed Abubakar. As usual also, the end of the year CDS otherwise called Easter Community Development Projects were undertaken for a period of about one month from April 5<sup>th</sup> to May 1<sup>st</sup> 1976.<sup>39</sup> During this service year however, more emphasis was

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 85-88 and 95-101.

<sup>39</sup> Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau (1976) c/705 - Sokoto/1/52/421, "National Youth Service Corps", pp. 146-147.

given on the active participation of beneficiary communities' village leaders, district and village heads and local organizations in further facilitating the projects. These host communities' stakeholders were saddled with the responsibility of organising full scale participation of community in executing the projects, and to remain readily helpful at the projects sites.<sup>40</sup>

More like a loose and tortuous programme, assembled and intersected by institutional analogies, the CDS – throughout the 1980s – continued to operate as an established and closely coordinated NYSC programme, whose modes of operations dances to the tunes of the various state governments' conception of the CDS and commitment towards it, as well as the community development projects needs during each service year. "When we served in the late 1980s, there were no established substantive CDS groups as there are now; after some community development projects were identified, time was spared for us to go and undertake such projects"<sup>41</sup>, confirmed, an informant who served at Katsina Ala, Benue State during the 1986/87 service year. In the 1970s and 1980s, the CDS, its groupings and general activities were perhaps a reflection of the multiple institutional development challenges – including the possible lack of adequate staffing – that NYSC grappled with at its formative stage.

But the decade from 1990 to 2000 served as a turning point in the history of NYSC's CDS programme. This 'transitioning' decade offered a round of new challenges that compelled the NYSC scheme to buckle down to effectively contribute its quota in meeting the limitless aspirations Nigerians had for the new millennium. As the global atmosphere was changing, continuously reechoing liberalism, democracy and good governance; accompanied by unprecedented technological advancements and opening of new frontiers in public discourses, – such as human rights, women's issues,

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Umar M. Jabbi (17<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2020), an ex-corps member who served at Katsina Ala, Benue State in 1987, at Department of History, UDUSokoto.

environmental conservation, demographic management, etc. -Nigerians' expectations for development swelled up. Added to these pull factors were the enormous hardships Nigerians were facing as part of the consequences of the Structural Adjustment Programme of the mid-1980s, which was ruinously taking its toll on the people, as well as other divisive forces that were terribly testing national unity; these included the persistence of public outcry, stirred by the 'June 12' incident and Ken Saro Wiwa's call for an independent Ogoniland.<sup>42</sup> Readjusting the CDS to overcome the new challenges, the NYSC began to review and reorganise the nature and operations of the CDS, beginning from the early 1990s. In fact, the whole scheme was revised by the NYSC Decree No. 51 of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1993.<sup>43</sup> As for the CDS, well defined objectives were spelt out. Recently, the general objectives of the CDS are as follows:

1. Impacting positively on the improvement of rural community life.
2. Developing the spirit of entrepreneurship in the corps members.
3. To utilise the challenges which rural development poses and inculcate in the Nigerian Youth the ideals and capacities for leadership, endurance, selflessness, community service, national service, patriotism and creativity.
4. Exposing corps members to diverse traditions and customs of the host communities.
5. Providing the forum for corps members to experiment with ideas and translate them into concrete achievements thereby relying less on foreign technology and encouraging the use of local raw materials in the execution of projects.
6. Harnessing the enormous talents and skills of corps members into an effective machinery of change in our rural communities.

<sup>42</sup> A. I. Yandaki (1999), "Corruption and Failure of Democratic Rule in Nigeria: A Case Study of a Muslim Religious Group's Responses to the Situation", Being A Paper Presentation at the 1999 Annual Religious Studies Conference organized by the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> F. Alo (2018), "Retooling Nigeria's Youth Service Corps.

7. Providing on-the-job training and experience for corps members.
8. Providing complementary service in our National development activities, by ensuring that our underprivileged population learns basic techniques for self-help through the appropriate technology concept being promoted by NYSC.
9. To instill in corps members' the tradition of dignity of labour and productivity.
10. To complement the activities of government at all levels in the stride towards national development.<sup>44</sup>

In the same parlance, from the 1990s, the restructuring of the CDS ensued, with various reshufflings and add-ups at different times to meet-up with different demands. The earliest evidence of the beginning of the restructuring of the CDS activities was in 1994, when in his newspaper article, one Nasiru Ikara, lauded NYSC for its more defined community based development projects in "poultry industry, mass literacy campaign, mobile health clinics, tree planting campaigns, legal aids, construction projects, environmental sanitation and a host of others."<sup>45</sup> Since then, the restructuring of the programme continued and eventually matured into the creation of specific substantive and specialised groups, each with a peculiar purpose and mode of operations. An ex-corps member who served in Owerri, Imo State, confirmed the existence of such groups in 1998, including that of the Road Safety.<sup>46</sup> Continuously, such groups continued mutating in number, philosophy and operations to eventually take their present shape. In the recent times, the approved CDS groups – which were operated throughout the nation – as identified by an NYSC publication, released in 2014, were sixteen in number. Each of the sixteen approved CDS groups has

<sup>44</sup> National Youth Service Corps (2014), *ABC of Community Development and Special Project Department...*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>45</sup> N. Ikharo (24-02-1994), "NYSC and National Development".

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Aisha B. Bawa (19<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2020), an ex-corps member who served in Owerri, Imo State in the 1997/1998 service year, at Bado area, Sokoto.

its peculiar purpose and methods of activities. These are shown in the table below:

**Table 5: CDS Groups, their Purposes and Activities**

S/N	CDS Groups	Purpose	Activities
1	Corps Legal Aid Group (CLAG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free legal service to the less privileged and indigent inmates prison (victims of dials and violation of rights)</li> <li>• Sensitisation of the public on fundamental human rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocacy</li> <li>• Visit to prison</li> <li>• Legal service to inmates and indigent persons</li> <li>• Public lecture and awareness on fundamental human rights</li> <li>• Participation in sports competition</li> <li>• Identifying and training members of the community</li> <li>• Organising sports competition</li> </ul>
2	Sports Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creates avenue for recreation and healthy rivalry among corps members and the community</li> <li>• Arousing the consciousness of living healthy and purposeful lifestyles through participation in one form of physical activity or the other</li> <li>• Identifying talents among corps members.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying talents</li> <li>• Creation of tourism clubs</li> <li>• Entertainment</li> <li>• Setting up of schemes theater gro ups</li> <li>• Campaign against illiteracy</li> <li>• Mass literacy classes for adults</li> <li>• Organising ext ra mural classes for students</li> <li>• Organising of in-school programmes</li> <li>• Setting up ICT laboratories</li> <li>• Tree planting</li> <li>• Sanitation</li> <li>• Drainage control</li> <li>• Erosion control</li> <li>• Reforestation</li> <li>• Landscaping</li> <li>• Making presentation on mass med ia to enlighten people on socio-cultural education</li> <li>• Production of NYSC magazine</li> <li>• Sensitisation and control of traffic</li> <li>• Rendering first aid to accident victims</li> <li>• Establishment of road safety clubs in school</li> <li>• Sensitisation and campaign</li> <li>• Formation of anti -aids clubs in schools</li> <li>• Training of students as peer educators</li> <li>• Counseling and referral services on HIV/AIDS and others STIS</li> </ul>
3	Cultural and Tourism Group (Band, Dance, Drama & Tourism)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting Arts and Culture</li> <li>• Dissemination of vital socio-economic and political problems and prospects</li> <li>• Awareness creation on tourism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying talents</li> <li>• Creation of tourism clubs</li> <li>• Entertainment</li> <li>• Setting up of schemes theater gro ups</li> <li>• Campaign against illiteracy</li> <li>• Mass literacy classes for adults</li> <li>• Organising ext ra mural classes for students</li> <li>• Organising of in-school programmes</li> <li>• Setting up ICT laboratories</li> <li>• Tree planting</li> <li>• Sanitation</li> <li>• Drainage control</li> <li>• Erosion control</li> <li>• Reforestation</li> <li>• Landscaping</li> <li>• Making presentation on mass med ia to enlighten people on socio-cultural education</li> <li>• Production of NYSC magazine</li> <li>• Sensitisation and control of traffic</li> <li>• Rendering first aid to accident victims</li> <li>• Establishment of road safety clubs in school</li> <li>• Sensitisation and campaign</li> <li>• Formation of anti -aids clubs in schools</li> <li>• Training of students as peer educators</li> <li>• Counseling and referral services on HIV/AIDS and others STIS</li> </ul>
4	Education Development Group (Mass Literacy, Adult Education, Extra Murals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance the educational standard of the host community</li> <li>• Create guidance and counseling for students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying talents</li> <li>• Creation of tourism clubs</li> <li>• Entertainment</li> <li>• Setting up of schemes theater gro ups</li> <li>• Campaign against illiteracy</li> <li>• Mass literacy classes for adults</li> <li>• Organising ext ra mural classes for students</li> <li>• Organising of in-school programmes</li> <li>• Setting up ICT laboratories</li> <li>• Tree planting</li> <li>• Sanitation</li> <li>• Drainage control</li> <li>• Erosion control</li> <li>• Reforestation</li> <li>• Landscaping</li> <li>• Making presentation on mass med ia to enlighten people on socio-cultural education</li> <li>• Production of NYSC magazine</li> <li>• Sensitisation and control of traffic</li> <li>• Rendering first aid to accident victims</li> <li>• Establishment of road safety clubs in school</li> <li>• Sensitisation and campaign</li> <li>• Formation of anti -aids clubs in schools</li> <li>• Training of students as peer educators</li> <li>• Counseling and referral services on HIV/AIDS and others STIS</li> </ul>
5	Environmental Protection and Sanitation Group (Ecovanguard, NESREA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To promise and sustain healthy environment</li> <li>• To create awareness on suitable environment management and regeneration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying talents</li> <li>• Creation of tourism clubs</li> <li>• Entertainment</li> <li>• Setting up of schemes theater gro ups</li> <li>• Campaign against illiteracy</li> <li>• Mass literacy classes for adults</li> <li>• Organising ext ra mural classes for students</li> <li>• Organising of in-school programmes</li> <li>• Setting up ICT laboratories</li> <li>• Tree planting</li> <li>• Sanitation</li> <li>• Drainage control</li> <li>• Erosion control</li> <li>• Reforestation</li> <li>• Landscaping</li> <li>• Making presentation on mass med ia to enlighten people on socio-cultural education</li> <li>• Production of NYSC magazine</li> <li>• Sensitisation and control of traffic</li> <li>• Rendering first aid to accident victims</li> <li>• Establishment of road safety clubs in school</li> <li>• Sensitisation and campaign</li> <li>• Formation of anti -aids clubs in schools</li> <li>• Training of students as peer educators</li> <li>• Counseling and referral services on HIV/AIDS and others STIS</li> </ul>
6	Editorial/ Publicity Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliment the activities of the NYSC PRU in disseminating information to the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying talents</li> <li>• Creation of tourism clubs</li> <li>• Entertainment</li> <li>• Setting up of schemes theater gro ups</li> <li>• Campaign against illiteracy</li> <li>• Mass literacy classes for adults</li> <li>• Organising ext ra mural classes for students</li> <li>• Organising of in-school programmes</li> <li>• Setting up ICT laboratories</li> <li>• Tree planting</li> <li>• Sanitation</li> <li>• Drainage control</li> <li>• Erosion control</li> <li>• Reforestation</li> <li>• Landscaping</li> <li>• Making presentation on mass med ia to enlighten people on socio-cultural education</li> <li>• Production of NYSC magazine</li> <li>• Sensitisation and control of traffic</li> <li>• Rendering first aid to accident victims</li> <li>• Establishment of road safety clubs in school</li> <li>• Sensitisation and campaign</li> <li>• Formation of anti -aids clubs in schools</li> <li>• Training of students as peer educators</li> <li>• Counseling and referral services on HIV/AIDS and others STIS</li> </ul>
7	Road Safety Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To contribute to public safety on our roads</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying talents</li> <li>• Creation of tourism clubs</li> <li>• Entertainment</li> <li>• Setting up of schemes theater gro ups</li> <li>• Campaign against illiteracy</li> <li>• Mass literacy classes for adults</li> <li>• Organising ext ra mural classes for students</li> <li>• Organising of in-school programmes</li> <li>• Setting up ICT laboratories</li> <li>• Tree planting</li> <li>• Sanitation</li> <li>• Drainage control</li> <li>• Erosion control</li> <li>• Reforestation</li> <li>• Landscaping</li> <li>• Making presentation on mass med ia to enlighten people on socio-cultural education</li> <li>• Production of NYSC magazine</li> <li>• Sensitisation and control of traffic</li> <li>• Rendering first aid to accident victims</li> <li>• Establishment of road safety clubs in school</li> <li>• Sensitisation and campaign</li> <li>• Formation of anti -aids clubs in schools</li> <li>• Training of students as peer educators</li> <li>• Counseling and referral services on HIV/AIDS and others STIS</li> </ul>
8	Reproductive Health & HIV/ AIDS Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To train and mentor students</li> <li>• To mobilise and strengthen community based responses in HIV/AIDS prevention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying talents</li> <li>• Creation of tourism clubs</li> <li>• Entertainment</li> <li>• Setting up of schemes theater gro ups</li> <li>• Campaign against illiteracy</li> <li>• Mass literacy classes for adults</li> <li>• Organising ext ra mural classes for students</li> <li>• Organising of in-school programmes</li> <li>• Setting up ICT laboratories</li> <li>• Tree planting</li> <li>• Sanitation</li> <li>• Drainage control</li> <li>• Erosion control</li> <li>• Reforestation</li> <li>• Landscaping</li> <li>• Making presentation on mass med ia to enlighten people on socio-cultural education</li> <li>• Production of NYSC magazine</li> <li>• Sensitisation and control of traffic</li> <li>• Rendering first aid to accident victims</li> <li>• Establishment of road safety clubs in school</li> <li>• Sensitisation and campaign</li> <li>• Formation of anti -aids clubs in schools</li> <li>• Training of students as peer educators</li> <li>• Counseling and referral services on HIV/AIDS and others STIS</li> </ul>

9	Anti-corruption Group (EFCC & ICPC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To help in eradicating corruption through campaign</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sensitisation</li><li>• Creation of Awareness in school and organisation</li><li>• Establish anti-corruption club in schools and organization</li><li>• Training</li><li>• Sensitisation</li><li>• Group discussion on value reorientation</li><li>• Advocacy and mentoring the host community</li><li>• Health outreach</li><li>• First aid administration</li><li>• Establishment of community based clinic</li><li>• Setting up clinic for NYSC secretariat</li><li>• Campaign and sensitisation</li><li>• Establishing of drug free clubs in schools</li><li>• Ensuring linkages with the host communities</li></ul>
10	Service delivery Group (Attitudinal Change, Re-Branding, SERVICOM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sensitisation on service delivery and good work ethics</li></ul>	
11	MDGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To create awareness and actualise the 8 goals of MDGs</li></ul>	
12	Medical and Health Services Group (Red Cross, Breast without Spot, Polio Plus etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promotion and provision of medical services</li></ul>	
13	Drug free and Quality control Group (NDLEA, NAFDAC, SON)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eradication of fake and adulterated food and drugs</li><li>• Create awareness on the danger of drug abuse</li><li>• Create awareness on fake and sub-standard products</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstration farms/extension services</li><li>• Establishment of Farmers Cooperative societies</li></ul>
14	Agro-Allied Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support agro-allied activities in host communities</li><li>• To promote better food production and security</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>v Training and capacity building</li><li>• Establishment of young farmers clubs in host communities</li><li>• Mobilise funds and other resources for less privileged</li><li>• Visit of orphanage and prisons</li><li>• Sensitisation and awareness creation</li><li>• Donation of materials to homes</li><li>• Public enlightenment on disaster management and control through the emergency vanguards</li><li>• Disaster management</li><li>• Liason with NEMA on how to assist during emergencies</li><li>• Formation of emergency vanguard clubs in schools</li></ul>
15	Charity Services and Gender Group (NAPTIP, WOTCLEF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To improve the living standard of the downtrodden</li><li>• Charity outreaches to the public</li><li>• To create awareness on gender equality</li><li>• Campaign against human trafficking and child abuse</li></ul>	
16	Disaster Management Group (NEMA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To create awareness on disaster management</li><li>• To disseminate information on how to manage disaster through corps emergency vanguards</li></ul>	

**Source:** National Youth Service Corps (2014), *ABC of Community Development and Special Project Department*, Abuja, National Youth Service Directorate Headquarters, pp. 5-8.

Nevertheless, oral evidences have shown that from 2014 to date (2020), there have been some numerical increases and changes as regards the CDS groupings. In a group interview with Mallam Nura Manir, the NYSC ZI for Katsina Zone and Alhaji Samaila Suleiman, a CDS Schedule Officer in Katsina State, the duo confirmed that new CDS groups were recently created by the NYSC. Among these are the 'Info Tech' and 'Financial Inclusion' groups. While the former is a specialised group for corps members with background training in Information Technology and Computer Science, the latter is created for the graduates of economics and accounting, among others. These groups were created to meet up the social changes that necessitate the increasing need for a computer literate society and the need for inculcating financial management among the teeming youth in the country. As regards to changes, for example, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) group was recently renamed to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) group.<sup>47</sup>

Already identified as situated within a larger ambit of the CDS objectives, the various CDS groups discussed above are further intersected by a common mode of administration, some classifications and other general guiding principles. The administration of the CDS groups is well structured and stratified. At its highest level, the National Directorate of the NYSC has a department called 'Community Development and Special Projects Department'.<sup>48</sup> This department, headed by a Substantive Director, has branches in the various secretariats of the 36 States across the country. Each of the various branches of the CDS Department is headed by an Assistant Director. Essentially, the CDS Department and its various branches are saddled with the responsibility of inspecting and supervising the CDS activities. They are, however, supported by other NYSC officials such as the ZIs and most importantly, the LIs, who

<sup>47</sup> Group interview with Mallam Nura Manir – NYSC Zonal Inspector, Katsina Zone & Alhaji Samaila Suleiman – CDS Schedule Officer (2<sup>nd</sup> Sept. 2020) at NYSC Secretariat, Katsina State.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

inspect, not just CDS, but other activities of corps members across all the 774 local government areas in Nigeria. Each of the ZIs and LGIs is expected to go round regularly, to supervise the activities of the various CDS groups operating in their respective areas of jurisdiction; they also report to their respective CDS Department branches. Meanwhile, at the various CDS Department branches, there is a Deputy Assistant Director and various CDS Schedule Officers working under the Assistant Director. Each of these Schedule Officers is each given the mandate to supervise the activities of the various CDS groups within the state in which they work.<sup>49</sup> At the lowest strata, each CDS group is headed by a corps member –usually known as 'President' – who is assisted by other subordinates, often with designated tasks (in a nutshell, EXCO) within the group. However, some CDS groups' leaders are not called President; for instance, the Road Safety group leader is known as Cadet in Chief.<sup>50</sup>

Worthy of note, however, is the fact that not all of these CDS groups are solely run and administered by the NYSC. There are collaborative CDS groups: the NYSC collaborates with National and Non-Governmental Organisations, among other establishments, to plan and execute development projects/programmes. The NYSC signs Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with partners, clearly stating the roles of each partner. Some of the collaborative CDS groups include Road Safety, Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS group, Anti-Corruption EFCC and ICPC group, MDGs, Drug Free and Quality Control Group, etc. Under these groups, corps members are usually involved as volunteers for the concerned programme.<sup>51</sup> Generally, various interviews at Kaduna, Katsina, Kano and Sokoto States proved strong analogies in the administration of the CDS groups in various States across the country. There are,

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Interview with Abdulwahab Lawal Rafindadi...

<sup>51</sup>National Youth Service Corps (2014), *ABC of Community Development and Special Project Department...*, p. 9.

however, few differences, especially marked by the personal differences of the people operating such administrations.<sup>52</sup>

Under the supervision and management of this well-structured administrative chain of the CDS, CDS activities are carried out in line with some established principles. Following the 3 weeks' orientation camp – with which the service year commences – corps members are expected to report to the LI of local government area where they are posted for Primary Assignment. There, the LI assign each corps member to one of the various CDS groups. In fact, as a matter of policy, each corps member must belong to one CDS group and no corps member is allowed to participate in more than one group. Failure to participate in the CDS without any genuine reason attracts punishment, which is often an extension of service year.<sup>53</sup> At the local governments – especially remote ones – where the number of corps members is not fair enough to be distributed across all the existing CDS groups, the LI has the mandate to choose specific groups with most vital needs of the host community and distribute corps members across such groups.<sup>54</sup> Although a prerogative of the LI, the posting of corps members to various CDS groups is done considering some factors. For example, in specialised groups, only corps members with the necessary educational background are posted: only corps members with experience in medicine or any paramedical course are posted to Health Services Group and only graduates of Law are posted to the Corps Legal Aid Group. For other groups, the LI may randomly post corps members; he/she may, however, inquire to know the corps members' interest before posting them. This is to ensure maximum commitment of the corps members in performing CDS activities, as they are more likely to stay

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Ayuba Dauda (13<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2020), an ex-corps member and former President of SERVICOM Group – Kaduna, at Narayi, Kaduna. Also, Interview with Haladu Abubakar (8<sup>th</sup> Sept 2020), NYSC Staff, at NYSC Secretariat, Dala LGA, Kano.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Mutuah Joshua (15<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2020), Assistant Director in charge of CDS Department Sokoto, at NYSC Secretariat, Kalambaina, Sokoto State.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Mustapha Muhammad Bakori (18<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2020), LI – Dutsinma LGA, Katsina State.

committed if posted to the groups they are interested in.<sup>55</sup>

From the time they are posted to various CDS groups up to the end of their service year, corps members are expected to dedicate one day in every week for CDS meetings and activities. More often than not, groups meet Thursdays or Fridays for such activities. On the days of such meetings, corps members must be fully kitted in the NYSC uniform before they are allowed to attend.<sup>56</sup> As a sanction, any corps member that refuses to attend CDS activities for two consecutive weeks within a month would not be cleared by the CDS Schedule Officer for that month; impliedly, they would miss their monthly clearance. For those who fail to attend once in a month, however, they are warned. Through the agency of the CDS groups, corps members are expected to identify community projects, rub their minds to agree on the necessity and feasibility of a project, and develop and submit a proposal to that effect; for the consideration and approval of the NYSC. Preferably, by the fourth month of the service year, it is hoped that most proposals have been submitted to the State Coordinator through LIs and ZIs for consideration and approval. These are, however, undertaken through a plethora of processes.<sup>57</sup>

The concerned CDS group must first of all identify the basic needs of host community through both the observation of the challenges facing the community and engaging the major community stakeholders – such as traditional leaders, social groups, etc. Having identified the needs of the host community, two methods are often applied in choosing a project to embark on. One of such methods is the 'Smart Test of Project Management' which interrogates the feasibility of the specific project, with due consideration for sources of funding, its benefits to the host communities and the limited time the corps

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Sabo Nana (9<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2020), Assistant Director – CDS Department, NYSC Secretariat, Kano State.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Haladu Abubakar...

<sup>57</sup> National Youth Service Corps (2014), *ABC of Community Development and Special Project Department...*, pp. 11-12.

members have to complete it. The other method used is the consideration of the 'Felt- Need' of a community: this ensures that the project addresses the most necessary needs of the host community.<sup>58</sup> The corps members should then further interact with the host community's stakeholders in order to identify sponsors of the projects from among individuals and organisations within the state of service. Corps members are always discouraged to invest their own 'minor' incomes in executing projects. Once the projects are planned and sponsors identified, the concerned CDS groups write proposal the NYSC State Coordinator through the LGI and ZI. By the sixth month of the service year, it is hoped that corps members have submitted their proposals and that such proposals have been approved. For the rest of the year, the project would be executed with a time to time supervision from NYSC. Also, late proposals for minor projects and programmes are received and approved. By the 10<sup>th</sup> month, it is expected that every project has been completed and inaugurated.<sup>59</sup> And corps members who proved exceptional in executing such projects are awarded by NYSC; anyway, personal CDS often gets the awards easily because most of the awards are for individuals rather than groups.<sup>60</sup>

## II. Religious Societies

The three corps members' religious societies/ associations that operate under the aegis of the NYSC are: Muslim Corpers' Association of Nigeria (MCAN), National Association of Catholic Corpers (NACC) and Nigeria Christian Corpers' Fellowship. Although operating under its auspices, these religious societies were not created by the NYSC. They were, rather, created by individuals/religious bodies and approved by NYSC, with a stipulation of operating in line with the general objectives of the scheme. In every state, NYSC officials are attached to these societies in order to supervise their activities

<sup>58</sup>Ibid, pp. 9-10.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid, pp. 9-12.

<sup>60</sup>Interview with Mustapha Muhammad Bakori..

and ensure compliance.<sup>61</sup> The creation of these associations is not unconnected to some aspects of the history of the two major religions in Nigeria, i.e. Islam and Christianity. A common thread that runs through the evolution of these two different religions vis-à-vis the Nigerian society, however, is a protracted history of religious politicisation. Since the creation of Nigeria as a single political entity during the colonial period, Islam and Christianity have been increasingly held by various groups of people, albeit passionately, as social identity signifiers, which are continuously manipulated to activate social conflicts and achieve political ends. This has been more glaring in the northern part of the country where the British colonial policy of cultural and religious non-interference in the predominantly Muslim emirates of the far-North coincided with missionary activities in the Middle Belt, thereby historically forging two contending world communities, and strengthening the divide between the Muslims and non-Muslims within the region.<sup>62</sup>

This was further entrenched by the colonial re-conceptualisation of the 'Islamic' emirate system to Native Authority, which was used by the British to ensure the effective running of indirect rule throughout the North. Naturally, Christians in the Middle Belt felt stigmatised with a feeling that Christianity was abandoned as a politically subversive religion. Following this, therefore, were heavy criticisms by the Christian Missionaries operating in the Middle Belt.<sup>63</sup> This condition was re-echoed during the struggle for independence when the non-Muslims in the Middle Belt began pursuing nationalism partly as a movement for religious and ethnic survival in the face of Muslims domination. As a result, non-Muslim organisations were created as part of the nationalist movement during the dawn of Nigerian independence. One of such organisations was the Non-Muslim League founded in Jos in 1950, which metamorphosed into the Middle Zone League in 1951, and eventually, resurfaced as the United Middle Belt Congress

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Mustapha Muhammad Bakari...

<sup>62</sup> S. Suleiman (2012), "Exhuming Passions... p. 22.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

(UMBC) in 1955. The UMBC was designated a "Pagan and Christian party" by the British colonial Government.<sup>64</sup> Although the Premier of the Northern Region, Ahmadu Sardauna has been praised for his efforts towards creating an indivisible Northern Region, as his administration carried everybody along irrespective of ethnicity or religion, religious cleavages were reinstated by his 'Islamisation' campaigns.<sup>65</sup> This has been the general thread in the northern Nigeria. Given the controversial religious space within the region, therefore, it is not surprising that, as shall be seen, all the three corps members' religious societies - MCAN, NACC and NCCF - were created, and are to date, headquartered in the northern Nigeria. Both as a melting pot and an umbrella of national unity, NYSC's approval of these religious associations was not more than a tactful bargain which did not only assured skeptics that they could practice their religious activities wherever they are posted to serve within the country, but also made them to accept the scheme unbiased and truly national.

MCAN is so far the only Islamic association operating within the NYSC scheme. Established during the 1978/1979 service year, MCAN came to limelight during a critical stage in the history of Islam in Nigeria. It was a period when the call for inciting actions towards Islamic revivalism, particularly echoed clerics such as Shaikh Mahmud Gummi and Shaikh Isma'il Idris, reached its climax with the inauguration of an Islamic sect popularly known as Izalah. Izalah was inaugurated on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1978 in Jos, the very same year when MCAN was established.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps, the creation of MCAN was inspired by the tempo commanded by the day's Islamic resurgence in the

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>See S. Garba et. al. (2016), "An Appraisal of Islamisation Activities of Sir Ahmadu Bello 'The Sardaunna Sokoto' Among Maguzawa of Northern Nigeria", in I. A. Malumfashi et. al. (eds.), *The Hausa People, Language and History: Past, Present and Future*, Kaduna, Garkuwa Publishers. See also, M. T. Usman and I. A. Zakari (2014), "Islamisation Campaigns in the Gbayi Areas of Former Minna Chiefdom, 1963-1965", in T. Wuam and M. L. Salahu (eds.), *Aspects of Niger State History: Essays in Honour of Professor Ibrahim Adamu Kolo*, Lapai, IBB University Press.

<sup>66</sup>See A. I. Yandaki, (1990) "A History of the Izalah Movement in Northern Nigeria Up to 1989", *M. A. Dissertation*, Dept. of History, UDUS.

country. After its creation in 1978, MCAN was eventually registered under the Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria in 1994. With its National Headquarters located in Mubushi District of Abuja, MCAN has branches all over the country. Its membership, though not compulsory, is open to all serving Muslim corps members within Nigeria. MCAN usually receive and register new members at the orientation camp, at the beginning of every service year.<sup>67</sup> Most of its members usually retire from MCAN following their discharge from the NYSC scheme at the end of the service year. The major objectives of the MCAN include:

1. to serve as a coordinating body and a forum in exchange of the ideas between Muslim corps members in all parts of the federation;
2. to protect the legitimate interest and rights of all Muslim youth corps members in the country;
3. to promote better understanding of Islam among corps members, students and the rest of the populace with a view to having a more dedicated and unified ummah; and
4. to complement the efforts of various Islamic organisations in the propagation of Islam in Nigeria and throughout the world.<sup>68</sup>

To achieve these objectives, MCAN has some organised programmes that are meticulously structured to ensure that they do not hinder the full participation of corps members in their national service programmes. These programmes are structured into three major categories: pre-orientation programmes, the orientation camps programmes and post-orientation programmes. In the pre-orientation programmes, MCAN liaise with the Muslims Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) – which operates in most tertiary institutions – by jointly organising seminars to familiarise prospective corps members with the programmes of NYSC and MCAN. The orientation

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.mcan.org.ng/about>

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

camp programmes commence with the opening of orientation camp at the beginning of every service year. Here MCAN identifies and mobilises Muslim corps members to provide an atmosphere for personal spiritual improvement and closer interactions with Muslim corps members from different backgrounds. To achieve these, activities such as lectures presentation, use of posters or banners to publicise mosque activities, regular da'awah/enlightenment activities and paradise night (MCAN night) are carried out during the orientation camp. In the post orientation programmes, activities such as weekly Al- Usrah programme, various da'awah/enlightenment programmes, visitation to prison yards, hospital, community development programme, skill acquisition, leadership training programme, annual national sisters' seminar, conventions, general meeting, etc. are carried out. This is with a view to engaging the Muslim corps members in MCAN activities from the moment they leave orientation camp up to the very last day before their passing out.<sup>69</sup> Meanwhile, during the post-camp period, MCAN also provides accommodation for some of its members at the MCAN lodges which exist in all the states across the country.<sup>70</sup> The activities of MCAN are financed through monthly contributions from its members and freewill donations.<sup>71</sup>

The NACC is one of the two Christian associations that operate under the umbrella of the NYSC. It is a religious association whose membership is open, but not compulsory, to all Nigerian Christian corps members of the Roman Catholic denomination. The NACC was established in Jos, in September 1982 by Rev. Dr. Gabriel Gonsum Ganaka, a former Archbishop of Jos, Plateau State. During its formative stage, the association was widely known as the Association of Catholic Corps (ACC). Initially the association's activities were concentrated in

<sup>69</sup><https://www.nairaland.com/1962105/mcan-muslim-corpers-association-nigeria>

<sup>70</sup>Interview with Mustapha Muhammad Bakori...

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Aminu Umar Alkammawa (16<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2020), an ex-corps member and MCAN official who served at Abia State in 2005/2006 Service year, at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.

Jos. However, the need to reach out to other members around the country saw the spread of the associations to other parts of the federation. The association's secretariat, whose foundation stone was laid in 2003 by Archbishop Ignatius Ayau Kagainma, is located in Jos. Headquartered in Jos, the NACC has state chapters, normally situated at the Cathedral – the Catholic church's Bishops and Archbishops' base in all the 36 States of the Nation including Abuja.<sup>72</sup> In 2008, the NACC was officially recognised and approved by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) and Rev. Fr. Celsus Daklong of the Catholic Diocese of Shendam was appointed as the National Chaplain of the corps members. The NACC is recognised as the fourth youth organisation in youth apostolate of the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria; they work with the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria to achieve their objectives. Also, in conjunction with the Catholic Youth Organisation of Nigeria, Nigerian Federation of Catholic Students and the Youth Catholic Students of Nigeria, NACC send its yearly reports and plans to the secretary of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria Youth Committee.<sup>73</sup> The objectives of the NACC include:

1. creating a forum that unites and promotes interaction among catholic corps members;
2. to ensure that the aims and objectives of the NYSC scheme are achieved;
3. to help spread the gospel by propagating the catholic faith while ensuring that its members live by the faith they profess;
4. to positively impart through various projects to the host communities where the organisation is situated; and
5. to foster the welfare of its members in a bid to create leadership traits among her members.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup><https://nigerianinfopedia.com.ng/addresses-of-nacc-state-chapters-in-nigeria/>

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

The second corps members' Christian association that operates within the NYSC scheme is the NCCF. It is a body that houses other inter-denominational, non-denominational and protestant NYSC youth corps members in Nigeria. Established in 1983, NCCF exist in all the 36 states in Nigeria, including Abuja; it has its national headquarters in Jos, Plateau State. At the various states, the NCCF has a residential house known as 'Family House'. In each state, there are NCCF zones, sub-zones and units. The NCCF Family House is considered as "a home away from home" where members of the association could be accommodated if they so wishes.<sup>75</sup> The objectives of the NCCF are: to protect and propagate the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; to bring all born again youth corps members into functional parts; and to strengthen Christians in the faith.<sup>76</sup> At its national headquarters in Jos, national delegates hold a conference meeting every quarter. This meeting comprises all the 37 chapters in Nigeria. At the meetings, resolutions and policies are put in place, which are expected to be implemented by state chapters with no questioning. The NCCF was registered in line with the Companies and Allied Matters Decree No. 1 of 1990. To achieve its objectives, the NCCF performs various humanitarian and evangelical activities. These include preaching Christianity in the nooks and crannies of the country including house to house and street evangelism, hospital visitations, prison visitation, etc. These activities are funded from three major sources: tithes, offerings, freewill donation and Capitation. Capitation is one out of corps members' 12 months allowances, payable in installments.<sup>77</sup>

### Challenges Faced by Corps Members Groups and Societies

The operations of the various CDS groups and corps members' religious societies within the NYSC scheme are not without challenges. Indeed, corps members are faced with multiple challenges amid the discharge of the activities of these groups

<sup>75</sup><https://www.nccfnational.com>

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

and societies. One of the major challenges is that of funding. Actually, no group or association can function without adequate funding of its activities. In operating CDS groups, corps members are often faced a the financial challenges. It was earlier noted that funding of the CDS groups' projects and programmes is not provided by the NYSC. As such, having identified the specific CDS projects and programmes to be undertaken, each group of corps members reaches out to philanthropists, wealthy individuals and organisations within the concerned host communities; who are expected to sponsor the projects/programmes. Conspicuously, however, not only is the identification of such philanthropists, wealthy individuals and organisations often hard for the corps members who are usually new to the host communities, it also demands intense commitment from the corps members to persuade such potential sponsors to fund a particular community development project/programme.<sup>78</sup> But even when they agree to sponsor the project/programme, the sponsors only finance the specific project/programme identified. As for the basic homework they are supposed to do, that is, identification of community needs and exchanges of ideas on the specific project/programme to undertake, corps members often encounter all sorts of inconveniences, caused by financial instability. For example, they are faced by financial challenges shrouding mobility and weekly meetings – many CDS groups do not have reliable means of transportation or even enough chairs to be used by their members during meetings.<sup>79</sup> As a result, where corps members are committed to the CDS, they often end-up succumbing to making financial contributions, which they are always discouraged of, in order to finance some minor activities. Many informants, among the corps members, confessed that corps members actually do contribute money for CDS activities.<sup>80</sup> The same is applicable to religious societies. While MCAN members

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Mutuah Joshua...

<sup>79</sup> Interview with John Iliya (4<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2020) Serving Corps Member at Kano State NYSC Secretariat, Dala LGA, Kano State.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* Also, Interview with Ayuba Dauda...

do give monthly contributions to facilitate the activities of the association, NCCF collects up to one out of the twelve months stipends/allowances that each of their members is paid by NYSC.<sup>81</sup>

Corps members' CDS groups and religious societies are also faced by a problem of inconsistency in terms of administration and commitment of the corps members. At the most basic level of their administrations, corps members' groups and societies are primarily run by an EXCO made up of corps members, who are registered in batches that only last for a year, i.e. the end of every service year. According to the various CDS Schedule Officers interviewed in Kano, Katsina and Sokoto States, this poses a very serious challenge as regards the sustainability and improvement on the nature, volume and of course, impact of CDS projects/ programmes undertaken each year. Many CDS schedule officers and LIs confessed that during each service year, they encounter corps members with different instincts and commitment towards the CDS. To them, the successive batches of corps members they have graduated from various CDS groups in the past depict the fluctuation of corps members' commitment towards the CDS. While some batches demonstrate all sense of seriousness, others do not care about the CDS activities. "Some only participate because they know it is compulsory"<sup>82</sup>, stressed Nana – an Assistant Director heading the CDS Department branch in Kano. In some sets, however, one may find a mixture of serious and unserious corps members.<sup>83</sup> Some corps members are not even punctual at the weekly meetings, less to talk about participating in community development projects; some get their meetings attendance signed for them by their colleagues, a reason why the former Director General of NYSC, Brigadier General Suleiman Kazaure attempted to introduce biometric attendance for the CDS

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Aminu Umar Alkammawa... See also,

<https://www.nccfnational.com...>

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Sabo Nana...

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* Also, Group interview with Mallam Nura Manir...

groups' weekly meetings, in 2018.<sup>84</sup> The case is not much different with religious societies. An ex-corps member who served in Abia State in 2005 made similar lamentations. According to him, he singlehandedly took the pain of steering the activities of MCAN in Isiukwuato Local Government during his service year: sometimes, he even had to plead with the few Muslim fellows serving in the same local government at the time to join him in performing their daily congregational prayers;<sup>85</sup> less one thinks of them performing other important activities. Essentially, the speed with which the administrators and members of these groups and associations are changed, coupled with the commitment swings leads to interruptions that causes stalemate, hindering long-term improvements in the activities of the CDS groups and corps members' religious societies.

The corps members CDS groups and religious societies are platforms on which people from diverse ethnic, religious, regional and sectarian backgrounds meet to deliberate, agree and work on national and religious issues. Sometimes, it seems difficult for people with different perceptions of life and its essence to agree on issues. Added to this, are the time limit constraints. Corps members 'CDS groups and religious societies may want to execute more essential projects, but time constraints would not allow them to do so. More so, sometimes the projects corps members initiate cannot be completed within the time limit they have for the service year. Therefore, in order to take the credit, corps members may compromise the 'felt need' of the society and go for any other project that may not be very basic to the needs of the host communities. An ex-corps member who served in Jama'are, Bauchi State during the 2002/2003 service year, explained how they abandoned other important albeit time-consuming projects to undertake a project in which they placed directional signposts of streets' names in Jama'are town; even this project was not pursued to its logical conclusion,

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<sup>84</sup> M. Onochie (29<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2018), "NYSC Warns Corps Members Against Skipping CDS," Daily Trust, <https://dailytrust.com/nysc-warns-corps-members-against-skipping-cds>

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Aminu Umar Alkammawa...

chiefly due to time constraints.<sup>86</sup>

Finally, the most serious challenge faced by the CDS groups and religious societies throughout the history of the NYSC scheme is that of the Covid-19 Pandemic. For the first time in nearly five decades of NYSC's existence, the activities of the CDS groups were temporarily suspended to avoid the contagion of the Coronavirus. Indeed, despite these and many other challenges – actually too numerous to be discussed here – the corps members' groups and societies have been tremendously impactful. This leads the discourse to its next section.

## **Impact of Corps Members' Groups and Societies on the NYSC Scheme and Community Development**

The corps members' CDS groups and religious societies have for many years, proved impactful in various ways. However, considering the myriad of Nigeria's unity and development challenges, some critics inconsiderately suggested that even the NYSC scheme, within which such groups and societies are situated, has failed.<sup>87</sup> Worthy of note, however, is the fact that NYSC was not established to serve as the sole facilitator of unity and development in Nigeria; it was rather created to contribute its own quota towards the duo, alongside other important stakeholders in the society – including other bureaus of the government, civil society organisations, religious organisations, community members, etc. As such, the continuing existence of the NYSC despite the bureaucratic and ethno-religious mayhem in Nigeria is enough to suggest that, although there are many rooms for improvement within the scheme, it has not failed. The impact of NYSC's corps members' groups and societies could be viewed within three major contexts: their impact on the NYSC scheme, the corps members and on community development.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Tukur M. Mukhtar, an ex-corps member who served at Jama'are, Bauchi State in 2002/2003 Service Year, at Dept. of History, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.

<sup>87</sup> This was observed by Oneh. See G. O. Oneh (2018), "NYSC's Engagement in the Development of Abuja...", p.149.

For many years, the CDS groups and religious societies that operate within the NYSC scheme have been very instrumental in its sustenance. As already noted, the NYSC scheme operates its national service programme annually. During each service year, the scheme trains corps members through some established technicalities including those associated with the orientation course, primary assignment, CDS, SAED, etc. Of all these, however, no single programme facilitates consistent healthy intersections among the corps members and between them and the NYSC officials, throughout the service year, than the CDS groups and religious societies; in fact, even the community development service would have been hard to coordinate without the instrumentality of the groups, for how could the NYSC coordinate its CDS activities – with the average number of corps members mobilised across Nigeria, steadily increasing from 223,677 since 2010<sup>88</sup> – without the instrumentality of the CDS groups that reduce the rather high number of corps members into manageable categories across various states? Indeed, the constant intersections provided by CDS groups' and corps members' religious societies' regular meetings; the healthy controversies evoked during such meetings, which are often stirred by debates on national issues, host communities' needs, specific projects to be undertaken and religious issues; and the strictness, formalities, the wearing of the NYSC uniform to the meetings and fear for sanctions engendered by the supervisions by CDS Schedule Officers, ZIs and LGIs – all constitute some sorts of bureaucratic procedures without which the national service year would be both dry and unappealing. This leads to the second area of concern, i.e. the impact of CDS groups and corps members' religious societies on corps members.

More than any other programme within the NYSC scheme, CDS groups and corps members' religious societies facilitates direct interactions between the corps members and the open society within their host communities, especially through such groups' and societies' programmes like sensitisation, visitations,

etc. This greatly assists the corps members in unlearning prejudices and in having a firsthand confirmation that Nigerians of all ethnic groups share multiple similarities. Internally, corps members who belong to the same CDS groups and religious societies often develop strong ties. In this parlance, an NYSC official who served in Abuja in the year 2000 confirmed that he is still in contact with some of the friends he met through CDS group and MCAN.<sup>89</sup> Two other NYSC officials affirmed that CDS partnership have led to inter- ethnic marriages among corps members.<sup>90</sup>

More essentially, however, CDS groups and religious societies have been instrumental in imbuing corps members with the virtues of discipline, humility, leadership traits, team work, patriotism, etc. The CDS groups often provide platforms for inculcating these virtues in the corps members through the rigours associated with the multiple interactions among the corps members, with the NYSC officials, the major community stake holders, as well as the open society within the host communities, at various phases of planning and executing CDS projects/programmes. Additionally, they serve as platforms for corps members' individual skills development, especially in terms of innovativeness, problem-solving skills and entrepreneurship, thereby deemphasising dependence on public service employment.<sup>91</sup> Such groups expose corps members to various challenges, the most apparent being the identification of their host communities' basic problems and innovatively providing solutions to them. As for religious societies, they provide corps members with an avenue for furthering spiritual growth and a shared sense of fellowship, through regular worshiping activities and even through the agency of the accommodations that such groups provide for corps members. The MCAN, NACC and NCCF all have lodges where they accommodate their members, especially the newly mobilised members.<sup>92</sup> Without making much effort to further

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Mustapha Muhammad Bakori...

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Sabo Nana... Also, Interview with Muftah Joshua...

<sup>91</sup> N. Ikharo (24-02-1994), "NYSC and National Development"

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* Also Interview with Aminu Umar Alkammawa... and <https://www.nccfnational.com...>

justify these points, they could be better understood through the discourse on the next area of concern, i.e. the impact of CDS groups and corps members' religious societies on community development in the country.

The impact of corps members' groups and societies on the wider society are examined within two major contexts. While the programmes undertaken by such groups are considered separately, the projects they undertake are equally examined. It is, however, pertinent to understand that in the face of Nigeria's numerous developmental challenges, corps members' groups and societies – with all the challenges they faced – could not change the whole direction of issues for the better. They could only undertake programmes and projects within their limited reach. Perhaps, their motivation comes with the understanding of the fact that if their programmes/projects can improve the living condition of even one individual or community, they have reduced the people's problems and have served humanity. As intelligible from the above discussions on CDS groups and corps members' religious societies, they do undertake programmes that include sensitisations, visitations, campaigns, seminars, lectures, etc. This has, for many years, been part of the activities of the corps members.

Between 1982 and 1992, in Abuja alone, corps members had through their CDS activities executed 26 health programmes such as health campaigns, immunisation campaigns and other community health services. Within the same period, 15 social works were undertaken within the spectrum of environmental improvement and legal aid.<sup>93</sup> To be more detailed, during the 2005/ 2006 service year, the corps members of the NYSC Charity Services CDS Group, who served at Aba North LGA, Abia State visited a Motherless Babies' Home in Aba, where they donated assorted items to the indigent babies. Such items include rolls of toilet tissues, detergents, biscuits, insecticides, soaps and clothes.<sup>94</sup> In the same service year, the Legal Aid CDS group

<sup>93</sup> G. O. Oneh (2018), "NYSC's Engagement in the Development of Abuja...", p.150.

<sup>94</sup> F. O. Sunday (August 2006), "NYSC Charity Services Group Donates to Indigent People", *Abiakopa - End of Service Year Magazine of NYSC Abia State - Batch B 2005*, Vol 2, No 8, p.28

facilitated the settlement of three accused persons' cases at court, and the release of five convicted persons with the options of fine from the prison.<sup>95</sup> In these sorts of activities, corps members' religious societies are not left behind. It was the NCCF that paid a sum of ₦ 3,000 to the complainant for the discharge of one of those three accused persons, whose cases were settled by the Legal Aid group.<sup>96</sup> Coming down to the year 2020, a serving corps member in Kano, shared with enthusiasm how they performed an outreach during which they went round the city with food and clippers to barb and feed indigent and vulnerable children, especially the Almajirai.<sup>97</sup> The examples are inexhaustible.

Corps members' groups and societies have also been executing various projects, including construction projects. These projects cut across the constructions of bridges, culverts, pit latrines, public conveniences, feeder roads, market stalls, bus stops, classroom blocks, mosques, churches, etc. While such projects have immensely contributed, especially, in improving rural life throughout the nooks and crannies of Nigeria, they are too numerous to be portrayed in details here. However, with some few examples of these projects from different parts of the country, at various points in the years of NYSC's existence, one could, at least, imagine the impact of corps members' groups and societies through executing community development projects. As early as 1973/1974, i.e. during the very first service year run by the NYSC, archival records have shown evidence of construction projects undertaken by groups of corps members under the auspices of NYSC's CDS. Some of the works undertaken by corps members between 10<sup>th</sup> April and 1<sup>st</sup> May at the defunct North Western State (the present Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara and Niger States) included construction of Dam at Bodinga town, construction of Culvert at Yabo town, building of

<sup>95</sup> J. N. Maishanu (August 2006), "Legal Aid Clinic CDS", *Abiakopa - End of Service Year Magazine of NYSC Abia State - Batch B 2005*, Vol. 2, No. 8, p. 25.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Badmus Oluwasegun...

Market Stalls at Bayawa town, construction of Night Shelter for relatives of patients at the General Hospital Birnin Kebbi, building of Adult Education Centre in Minna town, 7 miles projects of laying of pipes to Paiko water supply at Paiko town, erosion control at Kuchiworo, bridge construction at Kutigi and construction of 15 miles road along Gwadabawa-Tangaza road, among others.<sup>98</sup>

Coming down to the 1980s and 1990s, construction projects continued to be undertaken by corps members throughout the country. In Abuja alone, about 22 construction projects were undertaken. Some of these included building of a dispensary at Bwari in 1986, construction of a Mosque in Lugbe Village in 1987, invention of all-purpose cutting and sealing machine in 1989, Digital Electronic Safe 1990/1991.<sup>99</sup> In the mid years of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, an ex-corps member and a former administrator of MCAN explained how they did not only founded a mosque in Isiukwato LGA, Abia State, but also bought kettles for ablution, wall clock, Islamic books, etc., all under the auspices of their religious association.<sup>100</sup> Even in the recent times, such projects are being planned and executed at various levels and dimensions. An NYSC official, from Katsina, Mustapha Bakori, shared a story of how they commissioned about 5 different projects in one day, at Baure LGA of Katsina State in 2014. These projects, a few among which were personal CDS, included a block of classes at a primary school.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, an ex-corps member who served in the SERVICOM CDS group in Kaduna State in the 2019/2020 service year explained how they developed the Kaduna State Complaint System, a software created to bridge in the existing complaint gap between the people that are exploited, sexually abused, extorted, as well as people with other complaints, say, associated with teachers' incompetency, etc, and the relevant authorities. This complaint

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<sup>98</sup> Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau (1973-1976) C/705/I..., pp. 34-36 & 56-58.

<sup>99</sup> G. O. Oneh (2018), "NYSC's Engagement in the Development of Abuja..." p. 150.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Aminu Umar Alkammawa...

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Mustapha Muhammad Bakori...

channeling system is still accessible at [www.kscs.com.ng](http://www.kscs.com.ng).<sup>102</sup> Indeed, such community development projects provide real opportunities for impacting positive improvements in rural community life by motivating people towards self-help projects and reducing overdependence on the government for almost everything.<sup>103</sup>

## Conclusion

Having x-rayed the genesis, nature, activities, challenges and impact of CDS groups and corps members' religious societies, this chapter concludes that such groups and societies are adequately fitted into the rationale of the NYSC scheme. Apart from providing the most consistent framework within which intersections are maintained during the service year, they – as explained in the main- text – help corps members to inculcate discipline, develop tradition of industry at work, raise moral tone, develop the spirit of self reliance, unlearn prejudices, develop sharp minds from shared experiences and develop strong ties; because such groups and societies are always representatives of Nigeria's cultural and religious diversities, and corps members within such groups and societies are always assigned to work together. Not only did all these constitute the major objectives on the basis of which the NYSC scheme was established in 1973, they also feed into the wider essence of NYSC's existence – that of sustained commitment towards collaboration in achieving peaceful co-existence, unity and national development. Moving forward however, the scheme ought to be implored to look into the major challenges confronting these groups and societies and develop not only a framework within which such problems would be solved, but the needed commitment and efforts towards solving them.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Ayuba Dauda...

<sup>103</sup> N. Ikharo (24-02-1994), "NYSC and National Development" ...

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## Chapter Nine

# THE NYSC COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICE: ITS NATURE AND IMPACT

*Pascal Onumonu*

*Department of History*

*Bowen University*

*Iwo, Nigeria*

### Introduction

The Community Development Service (CDS) programme of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was borne out of the need to provide social services in Nigeria. As at the time the scheme was introduced in 1973, the state of basic amenities in Nigeria was generally poor.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Nigerian civil war which took place from 1967 to 1970 adversely affected the state of social amenities in various Nigerian communities.<sup>2</sup> The Gowon's administration had many socio-political and other national challenges to tackle with at that time. Similarly, before the introduction of the NYSC, different communities across the federation were yet to have the needed amenities which was a concern for the Gowon's administration.<sup>3</sup>

In view of the challenges experienced after the Nigerian civil war, the Gowon's administration considered it important to introduce a scheme that will help in healing the wound created by the war. It was on this basis that Gowon considered it necessary to establish the NYSC scheme. As one of the ways of reaching out to Nigerians, CDS was incorporated into the scheme as one of its core features. The CDS programme was

<sup>1</sup>NYSC Hand Book, 2015/2016: ABC of CDS. A Publication of the National Youth Service Corps-NYSC Community Development Service and Special Project P1

<sup>2</sup>Achebe, C. (2012), *There was a Country*, Penguin Press, London. P96

<sup>3</sup>Oral interview with Deacon Osita Obasi on 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2020, at Nnebukwu Autonomous Community, Oguat Local Government Area, South of Oguta Lake, Imo State

<sup>4</sup>Ibid

introduced with the sole aim of raising the standard of various communities in Nigeria through the provision of basic amenities and social services.<sup>4</sup> The programme was designed for the benefit of both the urban and rural communities across Nigeria. Given the impact of CDS over the years, the scheme can be said to be one of the most laudable initiatives of the Nigerian government in the post Nigerian civil war era.<sup>5</sup> Since the establishment of the NYSC programme, the fragile nature of Nigeria's foundation has been strengthened in various ways by the NYSC Community Development Service as examined hereafter. Community services executed by corps members across Nigeria have added great value to their host communities and brought succor to them in greater measures. Thus, this initiative handed over to corps members by the Yakubu Gowon's government administration is a veritable tool for nation-building which is in tandem with the general principle of nation-building as demonstrated by great nations of the world at different times in human history.<sup>6</sup> Its immense significance notwithstanding, NYSC's Community Development Service has not been accorded sufficient scholarly attention over the years. This chapter thus seeks to fill this lacuna by examining the nature and impact of Community Development Service as a vital programme of the NYSC scheme.

### **NYSC and Community Development Service**

CDS is one of the four (4) cardinal programmes of the NYSC in which corps members contribute positively to the development of their host communities throughout the period of national service. The scheme has been in the vanguard of the nation's drive to correct the imbalance in rural-urban development through the various community development programmes executed by corps members. These programmes have

<sup>5</sup> Ige, B. (1995), *People, Politics, and Politicians of Nigeria (1940-1979)*, Heinemann Educational Books(Nigeria) Plc, Ibadan. pp. 365-367

<sup>6</sup> See Acemoglu, D. & Robinson, J. A. (2013). *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty...*

revolutionised Nigerian communities in the areas of education, health care delivery, agriculture, communication, infrastructure, technology, economic empowerment, poverty eradication, social services and, above all, national consciousness and socio-cultural regeneration<sup>7</sup>.



**Fig. 10:** Corpers Offering Medical Services

CDS comprises welfare services, aimed at bettering the lots of the host communities. Here, the creativity, innovativeness and ingenuity of the young men, and women are harnessed for community development which of course impacts the generality of the nation for national development.<sup>8</sup>

### **Objectives of Community Development Service**

The achievements of the NYSC Community Development Service clearly shows that it was established to better human

<sup>7</sup>NYSC Hand Book, 2015/2016: ABC of CDS. A Publication of the National Youth Service Corps-NYSC

Community Development Service and Special Project Pt I

<sup>8</sup>OYO KOPA, 2014: A Publication of Press and Public Relations Unit, NYSC, Oyo State, P.

society through selflessness and imaginative efforts of corps members.<sup>9</sup> Corps members have demonstrated their ingenuity in this direction in various ways. The most preferred groups for the humanitarian service of corps members have been communities located in rural areas, which often have limited access to facilities enjoyed by urban dwellers. Over the years since the establishment of the scheme, this concern has been realised to a large extent. On the other hand, community development service is considered as a practical platform for stirring the minds of young Nigerian youths for self-realisation, self-awareness, creativity, imaginative power, ingenuity, self-reliance, lofty ideas, and great aspiration for greatness in life.<sup>10</sup>

Below are the specific objectives stipulated:

1. Impacting positively on the improvement of rural community life
2. Developing the spirit of entrepreneurship in the corps members
3. To utilise the challenges which rural development poses and inculcate in the Nigerian Youth the ideals and capacities for leadership, endurance, selflessness, community service, national service, patriotism and creativity
4. Exposing corps members to diverse traditions and customs of the host communities
5. Providing the forum for corps members to experiment with ideas and translate them into concrete achievements thereby relying less on foreign technology and encouraging the use of local raw materials in the execution of projects
6. Harnessing the enormous talents and skills of corps members into effective machinery of change in rural communities

<sup>9</sup>See: NYSC News, OCDC 342014: A Journal of the NYSC Directorate Headquarters. P.14  
<sup>10</sup>Oral interview with Professor S.A. Ademola Ajayi of Dept. of History, University of Ibadan, on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020 at Ibadan, Oyo State

7. Providing on-the-job training and experience for corps members
8. Providing complimentary service in national development activities, by ensuring that under-privileged population learn basic techniques for self-help through the appropriate technology concept being promoted by the NYSC
9. To instill in corps members the tradition of the dignity of labour and productivity
10. To complement the activities of government at all levels in the stride towards national development<sup>11</sup>

**Classification and Nature of Community Development Service** The management of the NYSC designed the mode of operation of the CDS in such a systemic way as to ensure the realisation of its objectives.

In other words, the NYSC community service has various forms and shapes which could be considered as its nature in terms of executions by corps members across different states in Nigeria.<sup>12</sup> The first in the classification is identified as Group Community Development Service (Group CDS). Corps members are expected to use one day in a week for CDS activities. Therefore, they are not expected to attend such duties in their places of primary assignment on CDS days. Such days are dedicated to the execution of projects and programmes that will improve the living conditions of their host communities. In order to enhance the actualisation of the said objectives of community development service, corps members are divided into CDS groups for exchange of ideas.<sup>13</sup> Table 1 aptly elucidates the point being made here.

<sup>11</sup>NYSC Hand Book,2015/2016 ...P

<sup>12</sup>Oral interview with Miss Marian Olohunginko of History and International Studies Dept., Adeleke University, on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2020 at Ede, Osun State

<sup>13</sup>NYSC Hand-Book for 2015/2016... P

**Table 6: NYSC CDS, Purpose and Activities**

S/n	CDS Groups	Purpose	Activities
1.	Corps Legal Aid Group (CLAG)	-Free legal services to the less privileged and indigent prison inmates (victims of denials and violation of rights) - Sensitisation of the public on fundamental human rights	-Advocacy -Visit prisons -Legal service to inmates and indigent persons -Public lecture and awareness of fundamental human rights
2.	Sports Group	-Creates an avenue for recreation and healthy rivalry among corps members and the community -Arousing the consciousness of living healthy and purposeful lifestyle through participation in one form of physical activity or the other -Identifying talents among Corps members	-Participation in sports competition -Identifying and training members of the community -Organising sports competitions
3	Cultural and Tourism Group (Band, Dance, Drama & Tourism)	-Promoting arts/culture Dissemination of vital socio-economic and political problems and prospects	-Identifying talents -Entertainment -Setting up of the schemes theatre group
4.	Education Development Group (Mass Literacy, Adult Education, Extra Murals ICT)	-Enhance the education standard of the host community -Career guidance and counselling for students	-Campaign against Illiteracy - Organising Extra-mural classes for adults -Organising of in-school programmes
5.	Environmental Protection and Sanitation Group (Ecovanguard, NESREA)	-To promote and sustain a healthy environment -To create awareness on sustainable environment management & regeneration	- Tree planting -Sanitation -Drainage Control -Erosion Control Reforestation -Landscaping
6	Editorial/Publicity Group	-Compliment the activities of the NYSC PRU in disseminating information to the community	-Making presentations on mass media to enlighten people on socio-cultural education
7.	Road Safety Group	-To contribute to public safety on roads	-Sensitisation and control of traffic -Rendering first aid to accident victims -Establishment of road safety clubs in school
8.	Reproductive Health & HIV/ AIDS Groups	-To train and mentor students -To mobilise and strengthen community-based responses on HIV/ AIDS prevention	-Sensitisation and campaign
9.	Anti-corruption Group (EFCC & ICPC)	-To help in eradicating corruption through Campaign	-Sensitisation -Creation of awareness in schools and organisations -Establish Anti-Corruption Corps members in schools.
10.	Service Delivery Group (Attitudinal Change, Re-Branding)	-Sensitisation on Service delivery and good work ethics	-Training -Sensitisation -Group discussions on value re-orientation
11.	Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)	-To create awareness and actualise the 8 goals of MDGs	-Advocacy and mentoring of the host community
12	Medical and Health Services Group (Red Cross, Breast Without Spot, Polio Plus etc.)	-Promotion and provision of Medical Services	-Health outreach -First Aid administration -Establishment of Community-based clinic -Setting up of clinic for the NYSC Secretariat
13.	Drug-Free and Quality Control Group (NDLEA, NAFDAC, SON)	Eradication of fake and adulterated foods and drugs -Create awareness on the danger of drug abuse	-Campaign and sensitisation -Establishment of a drug-free club in schools -Ensuring linkages with the host communities
14.	Agro-Allied Group	-Support agro-allied activities in host communities -To promote better food production and security	-Demonstration farms/ Extension Services -Establishment of Farmers Cooperative Societies -Advocacy -The teaching of new farming techniques to communities -Training and capacity building -Establishment of young farmers clubs in host communities

15.	Charity Services and Gender Group	-To improve the living standard of the downtrodden -Charity outreaches to the public	-Mobilize funds and other resources for less privileged -Visits of orphanages & prison -Donation of materials to homes
16.	Disaster Management Group (NEMA)	-To create awareness on disaster management -To disseminate information on how to manage disasters through Corps Emergency Vanguards <sup>14</sup>	-Public enlightenment on disaster management and control through the emergency Vanguards -Disaster management -Liaison with NEMA on how to assist during emergencies -Formation of emergency vanguard club in schools.

**Source:** Researcher's Field work, 2020.

The aforementioned types of CDS are carried out in groups as seen above. Based on the nature of this type of community service, it requires the combination of ideas, initiatives and interests of diverse groups of people as buttressed above. The next categorisation is the Personal/Individual Community Development Service (Personal/Individual CDS).

Personal/Individual CDS are projects/programmes executed by individual corps members in their host communities based on community felt needs. In addition to the group CDS, corps members are encouraged to look out for areas where they could make an individual impact in the community. This could be in the area of construction projects such as building of toilets, incinerators, bridges, classrooms, games facilities for schools or social/ educational projects such as establishment of ICT laboratory, school libraries, extra-mural classes, campaigns, charity work and vocational training for the unemployed youths.<sup>14</sup>

The third category of community service is Collaborative Community Development Service. Under the scheme, NYSC partners with National and Non-Governmental organisations and other establishments to implement development programmes. Thus, the organisation signs Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the partners, clearly stating each partner's roles. Corps members are usually involved as volunteers on these programmes. Examples of collaborative CDS include:

- Road Safety Group
- Reproductive Health & HIV, AIDS Group
- Anti-Corruption (EFCC & ICPC) Group
- Service Delivery Group (Attitudinal Change, Re-Branding)
- Millennium Development Goals
- Medical and Health Services Group (Red Cross, Breast Without Spot, Polio Plus, etc)
- Drug-Free and Quality Control Group (NDLEA, NAFDAC, SON).<sup>15</sup>

### **The Philosophy of NYSC Community Development Service**

The Nigerian civil war of 1967 to 1970 severely interrupted the co-existence of Nigerians. The manner in which the war was prosecuted caused much pain, thereby worsening the fragility of Nigeria's foundation laid by the British.<sup>16</sup> It is a fact that Nigeria had challenges before the Nigerian civil war. However, the war in itself heightened hatred, disunity, mutual suspicion, resentment and all manner of dangerous malicious vices among Nigerians.<sup>17</sup> At the end of the war therefore, there was the immediate need to remedy the above national maladies.<sup>18</sup> It is upon this premise that the NYSC's philosophy derived its roots and foundation.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, the philosophy behind the creation of CDS was borne out of the need to swiftly bring back Nigeria from the ashes of the country's civil war. The war was indeed one of the darkest episodes in Nigerian history, hence the need to change the atmosphere of disunity at the end of the war.<sup>20</sup>

The philosophy of CDS includes selflessness, sacrifice, compassion, hard work, love for humanity and the spirit of brotherhood. The corps members are expected to demonstrate these noble attributes in the course of their national service to

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid

<sup>16</sup>NYSC Hand Book, 2015/2016... P

<sup>17</sup>Achebe, C. (2012), There was a Country, Penguin Books, London

<sup>18</sup>Ibid

<sup>19</sup>Bourne, R. (2016), Nigeria: A New History of a Turbulent Century, Book Craft, Ibadan P. 105

<sup>20</sup>Ibid p 123

their fatherland. First, corps members are encouraged to demonstrate selflessness in their immediate host communities where they would be exposed to the need of the people. All serving corps members, irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds, are obliged to participate in the community development service of the NYSC. Also, it is expected of corps member to learn these virtues as well as express them as part of their lifestyle after the service year.<sup>21</sup>

From the foregoing, it could be established that the philosophy behind CDS goes beyond executing projects. The philosophy of the CDS was crafted in such a fashion as to compel corps members to imbibe the culture and concept of service to humanity. Given the above reality, one could also infer that NYSC's doctrine is ultimately geared towards preparing corps members for the future with particular focus on nation-building with CDS as its cornerstone and modus operandi.

### **Corps Members and CDS in Perspectives: A Survey**

CDS is no doubt a very vital component of the NYSC scheme. It is the relevance of CDS that has added much flavour and value to the entire NYSC programme. According to Christie J.F Ade Ajayi, the NYSC would not have been appreciated this much without the flavour CDS fervently gives to the scheme. The veteran teacher and wife of the late doyen of History said her husband (J.F Ade Ajayi) was the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lagos when the NYSC programme was introduced and the undergraduate students at the institution (University of Lagos) strongly protested against the scheme but later embraced it. According to her, the brilliant results of CDS since 1973 are living testimonials across the nooks and crannies of Nigeria. This is the reason the scheme has come to stay against all odds since its inception, and has also become part and parcel of Nigeria's history and experience.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Amos 3:3 (Bible)

<sup>22</sup> Oral Interview with Abigail Bako (A Retired NYSC Official) on 10 August, at Sabon Tasha, Kaduna South.

Corroborating the perspective of Christie J.F Ade Ajayi, Joseph Ola lamented with a heavy heart that he missed the NYSC in 1975 after two years of its establishment for some reasons beyond his control. In his opinion, the commitment to fatherland through CDS was rather a passionate and patriotic engagement he cherished, but did not have the honour and privilege of being part of.<sup>23</sup> However, his wife, Mrs (Janet Olufunmilayo) Ola, who served in Adventist Grammar School, Ede, in 1979, participated in the scheme, and belonged to a CDS group that built a school in Ede.<sup>24</sup> Community Development Service could be described as a bridge-builder. According to S.A Demola Ajayi, humanitarian services through the CDS of the NYSC scheme have taken corps members to many rural areas in Nigeria. In his service year in 1982/ 1983 in the old Oyo State but now part of Osun State, he affirmed that various CDS groups carried out essential services and built some vital social amenities or facilities, such as public toilets and roads which greatly improved the living standard of the rural dwellers in great measures. In his opinion, the first two decades of the scheme were highly successful but he maintained that the unfolding events in the nation such as terrorism, kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery, insecurity of all kinds and a host of other events have affected the scheme. S.A Ajayi asserts that the commitment of the corps members to CDS endeared them to members of their host communities who sometimes had a negative perception about their place of origin. Such stereotypes were eroded following the expression of kind gestures by corps members outside their place of origin. Some corps members ended up marrying from their host communities as a result of their commitment to CDS which their host communities appreciated. From S.A Ajayi's earlier reflections, it could be argued that CDS projects have enabled young Nigerians serving their fatherland to express milk of kindness. It, therefore, means

<sup>23</sup>Oral Interview with Chief (Mrs) Christie J.F Ade Ajayi on 17<sup>th</sup> August, 2020, at Bodoja, Ibadan, Oyo State, Ibadan

<sup>24</sup> Oral interview with Professor Joseph Ola of the Dept. of Religious Studies, Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State.

that without such gestures from corps members, some negative perceptions would have remained with Nigerians permanently.

Musa Dasikwo who served in Bida, Niger State in 1982/1983, opined that CDS is the 'heart' of the NYSC. According to him, various services rendered by corps members of his set met the needs of the people which in turn brought immeasurable joy in their communities. He, however, noted that at that time, individual execution of projects was not as common as it is now. Musa added that corps members engaged more on sanitation exercise in public places in different communities.<sup>25</sup>

Olatunji Alao served in Shagamu High School, Ogun State. He observed that during his service year in 1984/1985, group CDS was more active than personal CDS. He, however, recalled that one of his fellow corps members, a graduate of Fine Arts, built a sculpture for the school where he served. According to Alao, his service year was the period of Buhari/Idiagbon military government which placed so much emphasis on discipline with particular reference to keeping the environment clean always. In this regard, corps members were involved in a weekly clean up exercise in various strategic public places.<sup>26</sup>

There was involvement and demonstration on cleanliness by corps members at the time, and this had a positive impact on the general public who so much respected and admired corps members then. Alao recalled with nostalgia that he single-handedly ensured the qualification of his students for the finals of Principal's Cup (of football competition) among all secondary schools in Ogun State in 1988. He also recalled how he had regarded himself as the 'unofficial Game Master' of the school. The finals took place in the former Asero Stadium, now called Moshood Abiola Stadium, in Ogun State. The event was significant as the principal of his school who did not believe in his optimism later believed him when he single-handedly got his students to the football final. Alao believes that CDS plays a

<sup>25</sup> Oral Interview with Mrs Janet Olufunmilayo Ola on 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 at Ibadan, Oyo State

<sup>26</sup> Oral Interview with Rev'd Musa Dasikwo of Living Stone Assembly, Sabo, Kaduna South on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2020

critical role in national development considering the activities of corps members in various Nigerian communities. The ingenuity of corps members, no doubt, breaks social barriers and builds bridges of friendship through CDS activities considered as the spice of the NYSC.<sup>27</sup>

Victor Osaro Edo who served in Dennis Memorial Grammar School (DMGS), Onitsha, Anambra State, in 1988, appreciated the inclusion of CDS into the NYSC programme. According to him, during his service year, his CDS group-built bus stop pavilions at various strategic locations in Onitsha. He also noted that awareness campaigns on various subjects or trending issues of concern were carried out by corps members of his set which positively impacted on their host community and also made the NYSC to be accepted by a vast majority of Nigerians.<sup>28</sup> Various charity works executed by corps members through CDS is one of the reasons the NYSC is still relevant.<sup>29</sup>

In the same vein, R.O. Olaniyi highly commended the management of the NYSC and the initiative behind CDS. Olaniyi participated in the NYSC scheme in 1995/1996 at Akwanga, Nasarawa State. His involvement in CDS could be regarded as a lifetime experience of impact and commitment. According to him, his place of primary assignment was a typical rural area locked up in deprivation and penury. One noticeable challenge he observed upon the assumption of his primary assignment as a corps member was the complete lack of interest in western education. In other words, the people lived in an enclave, completely cut off from the reality of modern life or quest for western education. This, he said, moved him to carry out a series of awareness campaigns on growing and resuscitating the passion for western education which in the end yielded visible results.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Oral Interview with Dr Olatunji Alao of Dept. of History and International Studies, Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State, on 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2020

<sup>28</sup>Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Oral Interview with Prof. Victor Osaro Edo, Dept. of History, University of Ibadan, on 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020 at Ibadan

<sup>30</sup> OYO KOPA, 2018: A Publication of Press and Public Relations Unit, NYSC, Oyo State, Pp. 47-47

Apart from the campaign on the importance of education, Olaniyi also drew the attention of his host community towards the importance of cleanliness and decent environment. The exercise on clean and decent environment improved learning as the environment, especially the school surroundings, became attractive and conducive for learning. Again, to give the school of his primary assignment visibility, Olaniyi constructed a large concrete signboard that was mounted on the highway between Akwanga and Abuja.<sup>31</sup> Kasim Isioma who served in 1994/1995 in Bida, Niger State, also offered his best through CDS during his service year. Isioma affirmed that CDS is humanity - oriented and should be preserved by all means for posterity. He further remarked that within the context of Nigeria, the government has not been able to meet the needs of the people, especially the forgotten rural dwellers wallowing in penury. Isioma, therefore, believes that without the intervention of the corps members in the form of CDS in Nigeria, a greater percentage of rural dwellers would suffer a great deal. He sees CDS as an opportunity to provide for poor rural communities held in deprivation across the length and breadth of Nigeria.<sup>32</sup>

O.V. Ekanade served in 1996 within Lagos but has a profound view of CDS. According to him, CDS is a promoter of humanitarian services as well as builder of unity and harmony. His perception was borne out of his keen observation of how CDS has helped in building and fostering mutual understanding through humanitarian gestures by corps members to the underprivileged.<sup>33</sup> Tinuola Ekenade served in 1997 in Abuja. He opined that: 'CDS is just beautiful'. During her service year, she joined an environmental club whose major objective was advocacy on tree planting.<sup>34</sup> In view of her statement and the objective of the club, no one would doubt the importance of her

<sup>31</sup> Oral Interview with Prof. R.O Olaniye, Dept. of History, University of Ibadan, on 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020 at Ibadan

<sup>32</sup>Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Oral Interview with Isioma Kasim of the Dept. of Languages and Literary Studies, Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State on 29th July, 2020 at Ede

<sup>34</sup> Oral interview with Prof. O.V. Ekanade of the Dept. of History and International Studies, Redeemers' University, Ede, Osun State on 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 at Ede

CDS group, knowing the importance of preserving the human environment in the face of global warming and the danger it poses to human existence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Samuel Ifechukwudi Sylvanus served in Kibiya, Kano State, and functioned as the CLO of the Local Government in 2002. He noted that various groups executed projects that touched the lives of the *talakawas* (commoners). Based on Kano's poverty rate, corps members who had the vision of touching lives used the opportunity to execute projects that had direct impact on their host communities. In the light of this, corps members executed different projects such as the building of public toilets, refurbishment/ construction of classrooms, donation of desks/chairs to schools, donation of wheelchairs to physically challenged persons and a host of other humanitarian services.<sup>35</sup>

Elijah Uche Okoh served in Wudil, Kano State, in 2006/2007. According to him, the importance of CDS to Nigerian communities cannot be overemphasised in view of its national impact. Elijah's experience was profound and has permanently become a part of his living memory. He expresses his overwhelming pleasure with regards to his CDS experience as follows:

I am overwhelmingly grateful to God and the NYSC for the privilege of being able to participate in community development service of the NYSC. During my service year, I was fully involved in CDS and even functioned as the Vice President of the Road Safety Group in Wudil, Kano State. In my honest estimation, CDS is a way of giving back to society through different projects such as establishment of social amenities and creating awareness on important aspects of human life. Among them, as corps members, were different professionals based on the courses they studied in the university and other higher institutions of learning. The knowledge of those fields was translated into service that improved

the well-being of our host communities. Different sensitive topics were tactically handled during our awareness campaigns. For example, our colleagues in the medical line carried out all kinds of awareness campaigns on HIV/AIDS, child marriage or early marriage, child spacing, female circumcision, malaria, typhoid, hygiene, decent environment and a host of other issues. Medically, the awareness campaigns helped in reducing maternal mortality rate, HIV/AIDS infection and other health-related challenges. The awareness of sex, or sex education as it were, emphasised the need to avoid pre-marital sex or unprotected sex as the case may be. Based on this exercise, members of our host communities learnt how to have safe sex without getting infected with HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases. Those of us in the Road Safety Group embarked on controlling traffic on their market days which was also their prayer day (Fridays). Fridays were usually busy days. Before our intervention, there were high records of road accidents occasioned by the recklessness of road users, which led to deaths and confusion. Our ability to organise the people, vehicular moments and their excesses brought order to the entire community as well as reduced incidents of accidents being experienced before our arrival. Given our conduct and performance, the *mai angwa* (district head) highly commended us for a job well done.<sup>36</sup>

Elijah's account reveals that the CDS is very critical for the sustainability of Nigeria's communities. Given its impact, also, it could be argued that the CDS is one of the highly commendable measures deployed for nation-building in the post-Nigerian civil war era through NYSC programme. CDS is no doubt, charity-oriented with the far-reaching influence that cuts across

<sup>36</sup> Oral Interview with Elder Samuel Sylvanus of Major Light Consult, Kaduna, Kaduna State, on 18 July, 2020, at Kaduna South, Kaduna State.

the beneficiaries and benefactors. This implies that as a building material for nation-building, CDS costs less, compared to other alternatives that require so much yet make little or no impact. The timeless impact of CDS on Nigeria's communities across her six(6) geo-political zones as captured in this study deserves more attention and further research. The embodiment of knowledge embedded in the CDS programme is an invaluable intellectual capital for Nigeria if properly utilised. CDS programme could be re-branded with more fascinating ideas through research work and sold to other nations with similar history and experience such as Nigeria.

Still on the contribution of CDS to Nigerian communities, Ugo P. Onumonu served in 2006/2007 at Andy Comprehensive College, Marish, at Bokkos Local Government Area, Plateau State, and carried out some personal CDS that endeared him to the Forof community. His CDS consisted of 10 wheelchairs at the cost of N20, 000 (twenty thousand naira) each and donation of textbooks to the library worth N100, 000. This brought succor to the physically challenged persons that benefited from the gesture, while the students of Andy Comprehensive College began to enjoy a robust study which improved their academic performance, especially those of them who were preparing for WAEC, NECO and JAMB. Sylvester Shima Kohol asserted that the initiative behind the CDS is unarguably the best action taken by Gowon and no subsequent government could boast of having a similar idea. Kohol served in Army Comprehensive High School, Owena Barracks, Akure in Ondo State. Kohol presided over Corper Peer Educator Trainers (c-pet), a group that advocated the awareness of Reproductive Health and HIV/ AIDS, as well as the training of other peer educators within the community. As a coordinator and Secretary of HIV group, he was involved in a series of campaigns and organising seminars on very topical issues, such as HIV, unprotected sex and other health-related matters. According to Kohol, the principal of the school where he served opposed the idea of setting up a peer educator programme in the school at its initial stage, on the

ground that students at the junior classes were too young for such sensitive matters on sex education. However, after much persuasion, he agreed and when the initial investigation was carried out, they discovered that a good number of the said 'innocent junior students' had been exposed to diverse sex behaviour already. The revelation rattled the school management and they began to take quick measures in arresting the unpleasant development. Kohol's CDS group also extended their campaign activities among soldiers in 323 Artillery Regiment of Owena Barracks and the outcome/ impact were worthwhile.<sup>37</sup>

In 2013, Orans Joy Adaeze sunk two boreholes in Tilli, a community in Bunza Local Government Area of Kebbi State as part of her community development service<sup>38</sup> while Chijioke Amaka Okereke who served at Government Secondary School, Kofar Yandaka, provided educational materials worth over one million five hundred thousand naira to three schools in Kastina. Government Day Secondary School, Kofar Yandaka received 80 three-seats metal seats and a three-room toilet. Shema Community School for the Deaf, Daura, got 30 pieces of treated mosquito nets, 28 dozen packets of biros and pencils while the School of the Blind, Kastina, received 10 Braille typewriters.<sup>39</sup> Ibrahim Godwin Shekwotayawoza who served in Ohafia Model Girls' School, Amaekpu in Ohafia Local Government Area, emerged as the best corps member of Abia State in 2013. He established an ICT centre and fully equipped it.<sup>40</sup> Alozie Chima, a Batch 'C' corps member donated two wheel chairs to physically challenged persons in Dutse, Jigawa State. Fifteen corps members of Batch 'A' were honoured in Delta State in 2013 by the State government. They were commended for their

<sup>37</sup> Oral Interview with Dr Elijah Uche Oko of Dept. of Physics, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndudu Alike Ikwo, Ebonyi State. Also see: OYOKOPA, 2017. A Publication of Press and Public Relations Unit, NYSC, Oyo State. P.116

<sup>38</sup> Oral Interview with Sylvester Shima Kohol of Dept. of History and International Studies, Redeemers' University, Ede, Osun State On 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2020 at Ede, Osun State

<sup>39</sup> NYSC News. SPOC 332014: A Journal of the NYSC Directorate Headquarters p. 16

<sup>40</sup> NYSC News. SPOC 332014: A Journal of the NYSC Directorate Headquarters. P.40

contributions to the provision of primary health care, enlightenment programme on HIV/AIDS, environmental beautification and vocational training. The Governor said, 'There is no doubt that you have impacted positively on the well-being of the rural communities where most of you served'. In 2013, Rilwan Ibrahim built an information Centre for Jigawa State Polytechnic as his personal community service.<sup>42</sup> In 2013 in Bayelsa State, the corps member of the year was recognised for establishing a computer Training Centre in Community Secondary School, Enwelesuo, a riverine community. Among other things, he also embarked on sensitisation exercises on malaria, HIV/AIDs and other lofty initiatives.<sup>42</sup>

In a bid to contribute towards improving the standard of education, Olafimihan Olaniyi constructed a modern library at Koroama Community in Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The library, stocked with books for Junior and Senior Secondary Students, was also computerised.<sup>43</sup> Omanudhowho E. Kennedy who served in Abuja donated 50 wheelchairs to physically challenged persons in Kuchingoro, a community in the territory.<sup>44</sup> Three corps members who served in Benue State in 2014 executed projects worth N 1,067,000.00 and handed them to their communities. Precious Ijinagha, Ume Ijika Kalu and Khadijat Abubakar were the corps members in question. Precious constructed a food canteen at her place of primary assignment, Cross College, Ugba, Logo Local Government Area, Kastina -Ala Zone. Ajike fabricated a palm oil processing machine and donated it to his place of primary assignment, the Commercial Crop Farm Department of the University of Agriculture, Makurdi, Makurdi Zone, while Khadijat erected a modern toilet facility at Otukpa Community Secondary School in Ogbadibo Local Government Area where she served.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 57

<sup>42</sup> NYSC. MAJJ 322014: A Journal of the NYSC Directorate Headquarters. P. 42

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p 48

<sup>44</sup> Ibid p.71

<sup>45</sup> NYSC News, JAFMA 362015:42<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition. P.29

Also notable was the contribution of Uduma Eberechi Confidence who built a block of three classrooms and two offices for the Community Secondary School, Ozi, in Konton-Karfe Local Government Area of Kogi State in 2014.<sup>46</sup> Before her intervention, the benefitting school had to wait for the government primary school in the community to close every day to be able to use the school facility for their studies in the afternoon. A blind corps member in 2014, Ukaogo Nwabueze Williams set up a special computer training laboratory in the School for the Blind, Afaraukwu Umuahia, Abia State.<sup>47</sup> Tomiwa, a corps member in 2014, carried out eight different projects including a borehole at Lubere, Odeda Local Government, Ogun State.<sup>48</sup> Tukura Shalom Grace also provided a borehole for the Barracks of the Divisional Police Headquarterns in Birnin Kebbi State Capital in 2014.<sup>49</sup> Solomon Aribiyi in Imo State donated drugs and other items worth thousands of naira to pupils and teachers of Umualum Primary school in Owerri West Local Government Area. Ekikere Udoka who served with Akamkpa Local Government Council constructed a tank stand, donated a reservoir tank and connected taps to Base Camp, Isong Inyang community in Akamkpa.<sup>50</sup> Ujunwa Anene was a corps member in 2014 who served with General Electric, Calabar. He handed a project worth over 1 million naira to schools in the community where he served. The projects are: renovation of the two secondary schools' libraries and equipping them with textbooks.

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In the same manner of impacting both institutions and rural communities, Peter Ndubuisi who served in 2015 in Plateau State College of Education, Gindiri, Mango, Plateau State, explains his experience as follows:

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p. 42

<sup>47</sup> NYSC News, JAFMA 2015: A Journal of the NYSC Directorate Headquarters. P. 37

<sup>48</sup> Ibid p. 41

<sup>49</sup> Ibid p. 61

<sup>50</sup> Ibid 69

<sup>51</sup> CROSSKOPA: 2015 Batch 'B' End of Service Year Magazine. P. 14

My service year was awesome at Gindiri in Plateau State where I had the opportunity of serving as the Chair, Project Committee, among my fellow corps members. We identified the need of the people, especially those in the larger community outside the school environment, and met them as much as we could. Awareness campaigns were carried out on important issues like; peer pressure, academic success. We rehabilitated 5 boreholes, sunk 1 fresh bore hole and carried out skills acquisition training for both students and members of the larger community outside the four walls of schools.<sup>52</sup>

Uchechi Dike served in 2015/2016 at Christ Ascension Middle School, Osogbo, Osun State. He maintained that CDS supplies the needs of rural communities who often live in abject poverty. She narrates her experience with regards to CDS as follows:

Nigeria is too large, as such the government alone cannot reach out to everyone. My involvement in CDS was an eye-opener to the realities of life especially on the ordeals of the downtrodden in the rural communities. During my service year, I was part of the NYSC band. Given the function of my group, we were often requested to accompany any CDS group embarking on any CDS exercise. Our function was to entertain and catch people's attention. The very task exposed me to so many heart touching events. We were able to donate the following to rural communities: public toilets, boreholes, medical care and a host of other essential services.<sup>53</sup>

As part of the event marking Nigeria's 54<sup>th</sup> independence anniversary, the Economic and Financial Crime Commission Community Development Service group (EFCC, CDS) visited

<sup>52</sup> CROSSKOPA: 2015 Batch 'B'... P. 16

<sup>53</sup> Oral Interview with Innocent Ndubuisi Peters of Religious Studies Dept., Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State, on 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2020 at Ede, Osun State.

the satellite prison Garu Dutse, Jigawa State, where they donated relief materials for the rehabilitation of the inmates.<sup>54</sup> Also, Folashade Daramola who served in Ikom, Cross Rivers State in 2016/2017 shared a similar sentiment with Uchechi. Folashade affirmed that CDS offered her the opportunity of touching the lives of people she met from different cultural backgrounds, which to her was most gratifying. As the Secretary of her CDS group (Culture and Tourism), Folashade spearheaded some humanitarian activities from which their host community gained tremendously. Some of their services to the community include awareness campaigns on how to improve sanitation in the community, campaign on the need to embrace western education, campaign on the benefit of unity in Nigeria, campaign on the benefit of ethnic diversity in Nigeria, campaign on the dignity of labour and a host of other social services.<sup>55</sup>

Apart from the group CDS, Folashade taught some members of the community skills on interior decoration management and event planning free of charge. As a result of the trust built in her, children of the community were released to her warm embrace for constant mentoring and nurturing throughout the period of her service year.<sup>56</sup> Then there was Chiamobi Awucha who served in Government Day Secondary School, Yola South, in 2016/2017. He affirmed the invaluable significance of CDS to host communities. As a member of the Red Cross, he witnessed many kind-hearted services carried out by corps members in Yola South where he served. He identified some of them as awareness campaign on drug abuse, free medical check-up to the general public, medical care to the physically-challenged persons and a host of other activities.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Oral Interview with Uchechi Dike, Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State, on 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2020 at Ede, Osun State.

<sup>55</sup> NYSC News, OCDC 342014: A Journal of the NYSC Directorate Headquarters. P10

<sup>56</sup> Oral Interview with Folashade Daramola of the Dept of History and International Studies, Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State, on 9<sup>th</sup> August, 2020 at Iwo, Osun State.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

In 2017 in Oyo State, the NYSC Medical Community Development Service (CDS) group conducted an outreach at Mercy Land comprehensive Academy Ogbomoso on the 'Health Effects of Substance Abuse'. In a bid to cushion the effect of lack of potable water, Iyanuoluwa executed some personal CDS which included digging of portable standard well with a pumping machine after which a 1000 litres water storage tank was mounted. She also gave the community insecticide and treated mosquito nets.<sup>58</sup> In the same vein, Oyenike Ajayi with Delsu Investment Limited, Delta State University, Abraka constructed a borehole, and donated a generator set to power the borehole in Oria, Abraka, with copies of s booklet titled 'Practical Guide to Catering-A do it yourself approach'. She also constructed a metallic traffic control stand and office door tag for Delsu Investment Limited Offices, where she did her Primary Assignment.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Tukur Buratai commissioned an urban water treatment plant built by army and the NYSC corps engineer at the 82 Division Nigerian Army, Enugu, Enugu State in 2018 for the benefit of the generality of the public within the community. According to Tukur:

... Apart from supplying water to the cantonment and the public, the plant which is producing one million litres of water a day will also supply water to the NYSC Orientation Camp, Awgu during corps members' orientation exercise as part of the Division's social responsibility.<sup>60</sup>

Adejumo Funmilayo Precious opined that CDS is the core of NYSC given its contribution to society. Adejumo served in Ojoo, Ibadan, Oyo State, and executed her personal CDS in Army Day Secondary School, Ojoo, Ibadan in 2020. According to her, the deplorable state of the above school was what burdened her

<sup>58</sup> Oral Interview with Chimaobi Awucha of Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State, on 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2020 at Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State.

<sup>59</sup> OYOKOPA Magazine. 2018: A Publication of Press and Public Relations Unit, NYSC, Oyo State. P. 19

<sup>60</sup> NYSC News, 0CDC342014: A Journal of the NYSC Directorate Headquarters. P. 52

with depression and concern. She, thereafter, expressed concern for the future of the students who were subjected to learning on a most terrible atmosphere. Precious thereafter approached the necessary stakeholders for financial support to fix the entire school. Some of the students sat on the bare ground. The windows, doors, chairs, ceilings, walls, and virtually everything was in a complete state of mess and dilapidation. That, indeed, required a complete renovation which gulped about a million naira. Following her compassion and tenacity which brought her dreams to realisation, Adejumo emerged as the 'Best Corps Member' of the year in Oyo State in 2020. Indeed, the achievement of Adejumo aligns with the goals of the CDS programme in Nigeria since its inception.<sup>61</sup>

On the whole, one of the changes Adejumu brought to the school is an improved learning environment through her CDS. The transformation her CDS brought enhanced learning for the students which they had missed for many years. It was on this basis that Precious deserved the NYSC State award she won.

### **Impact of CDS on Host Communities and National Development**

Most rural communities lack basic amenities, hence they usually got the first consideration in the NYSC postings up to the 1990s. Based on the design of the programme, corps members are trained to integrate themselves into the community of their host as well as seek to address their various challenges. Since the inception of the NYSC, Nigerian youths upon graduation from various tertiary institutions have deployed skills, talents and selflessness in this direction, which has indeed yielded enormous result. Be that as it may, it is discouraging to state that in the recent years, the fortunes of CDS has dwindled due to the present socio-political challenges being faced by Nigeria. Consequently, parents always select where their children would be posted to for their national obligation, contrary to the

traditional philosophy of the scheme. Posting to the rural areas is becoming fast unattractive and endangered as a result of growing insecurity in the country. This trend is gradually becoming the norm, thereby making a large chunk of corps members to serve in the cities. This growing challenge is, unfortunately, denying most present corps members the real experience/inspiration for humanitarian services in form of CDS. Meanwhile, the CDS is arguably the reason the NYSC has retained its character as a factor in community development.

Moreover, in some cases, the CDS activities of the corps members are seen as an extension of government projects to some villages.<sup>62</sup> The records of CDS have proven that most of the projects addressed the human need of water through the sinking boreholes. Ironically, even communities in the cities are not exempted from the challenges of medical health care which the NYSC through CDS takes care of. In line with the foregoing, the Vice Chairman of Arochukwu Local Government Area of Abia State, Daniel Abba, commended the NYSC scheme for its Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers Programme, which caters for the medical and health needs of the less privileged in the society.<sup>63</sup>

Having examined the CDS programme from its formative days till date, it must also be established that CDS has had its own challenges over the years. For example, some corps members have used the platform of CDS to enrich themselves in collaboration with non-governmental organisations, government agencies and, in some cases, NYSC officials. Such corps members are also in the habit of using the CDS as an excuse for staying away from their places of primary assignments.<sup>64</sup> Peace Otonihu, an ex-corps member who served at Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo State, in 2020, further shed light on

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<sup>62</sup>Oral Interview with Adejumo Funmilayo Precious on 14 August, 2020, at Ibadan, Oyo State.

<sup>63</sup> See: OYO KOPA, 2014: A Publication of Press and Public Relations Unit, NYSC, Oyo State.

the challenges of CDS. Peace opined that projects executed by corps members are often times affected by lack of proper maintenance.<sup>65</sup> In her own opinion, such reality had in time past discouraged some corps members from venturing into major CDS for communities they are posted to.<sup>66</sup> Without doubt, the problem of maintenance culture is a general challenge which affects government at various levels in Nigeria. The NYSC management in her wisdom should proffer a solution to this problem in order to encourage serving and prospective corps members in the execution of CDS. This observation is highly important considering the place of CDS in national development as examined in this research.

## Conclusion

The NYSC Community Development Service has recorded far-reaching impact across different communities in Nigeria. The strength and ingenuity of Nigerian youths have been massively deployed and utilised for the propagation of CDS over the years with an undiluted passion for excellence. Members of communities living in extreme deprivation have at different times benefited from laudable CDS projects that have greatly improved their total well-being. Some communities left in total darkness of ignorance and ignominy due to their disconnection from the larger Nigerian community since independence (1960) have received the attention of 'government ambassadors' through CDS projects in one way or the other. Common features of CDS projects have been 'sinking of borehole', upgrading of primary/secondary schools with social amenities and educational facilities in the city and rural communities. Thus, such developmental projects have brought great relief, immeasurable joy and comfort to the rural communities. While medical services of corps members through CDS have been

<sup>65</sup> Oral interview with Kohol Shima...

<sup>66</sup> Oral interview with Peace Otonihu of University of Lagos, Lagos State, on 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2020 at Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State.

received with overwhelming joy, other awareness campaigns on social and educational matters have been much cherished. There is hardly any community in Nigeria, irrespective of its location, that has not benefitted from CDS projects executed by corps members.<sup>67</sup>

The intervention of corps members through CDS have helped in improving the living standard of communities in Nigeria as reflected in this research. This is vital, as no nation survives if its component units are not healthy. On a final note, the involvement of corps members in CDS gives them fulfillment, a sense of purpose, drive and direction for life after the NYSC programme. Indeed, it means that corps members' engagement in CDS raises their consciousness towards human needs in their environment and also increases their rate of empathy for humanity, especially the underprivileged. The study also established the fact that CDS helps in framing the minds of corps members towards becoming purposeful leaders.

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid

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## **SECTION THREE: GROWTH DEVELOPMENT AND TRENDS**



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## Chapter Ten

# TRANSFORMATIONS IN NYSC

*David Imbua*

*Department of History & International Studies  
University of Calabar  
Calabar, Nigeria.*

## Introduction

Established by Decree 24 of 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1973, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was designed as an interventionist agency aimed at accelerating the healing processes of a country battered by a gruesome thirty-month civil war that left millions of casualties in its wake. Emerging from the throes of the fratricidal conflict in an environment that was still hostile and ethnically-charged, many people doubted, opposed and misrepresented the noble motives of the scheme.<sup>1</sup> University students and their parents/guardians were in the vanguard of the apprehension and opposition. Among several other reasons for the apathy to the Scheme was the reluctance of parents to have their children/wards work in places far away from “home” in a country that was largely disunited. Although the war had ended some years earlier, many parents feared that law and order could easily break down with devastating consequences.<sup>2</sup> In some parts of the country, the corps member was thought to be a spy of the Federal Government. Irrespective of what the initiators of the Scheme and their supporters said, some people in the educationally more advanced southern Nigeria believed that the Scheme was designed to solve the acute shortage of skilled and skillful manpower in the North. The litany of

<sup>1</sup>Interview with Professor Joseph Ushie, 62 years, Department of English, University of Uyo, AkwaIbom State, 04/08/2020.

<sup>2</sup>Gregory Enegewea and Gabriel Umoden (1993), *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service* (Lagos: Gabumo Press), p.17.

assumptions, fears and biases, bred largely by ignorance, insularity and prejudices, produced the opposite result, which left the government in no doubt that the Scheme was imperative.

Today, the same programme which some ill-informed persons wrote off at inception has become synonymous with national unity, rural development and youth empowerment.<sup>3</sup> From a humble beginning in 1973, with 2346 corps participants, the Scheme currently mobilizes about 300,000 young Nigerians yearly for service, and has become arguably the largest youth mobilization agency in the world. The number of participants has truly leapt into hundreds of thousands yearly, culminating into four million, six hundred and forty-four thousand, eight hundred and four (4,644,804) participants as at August 2019.<sup>4</sup> Thus, from its modest beginning, the NYSC Scheme like a mustard seed has grown into a giant oak tree. It is in the context of its peculiar history and progress that we could appreciate the Scheme's phenomenal growth from its "turbulent infancy to become a handsome child of promise."<sup>5</sup> Despite the vicissitudes and challenges that the scheme has faced over the years, it has emerged as one of Nigeria's most enduring social institutions that has kept faith with its mission of mobilizing and grooming graduate youths for the promotion of national unity, sustainable developments, self-reliance and preparing them for leadership and nation building. For close to five decades, the NYSC programme has succeeded in bringing together young people from various parts of Nigeria and those in diaspora to share experiences and by so doing break barriers of national unity and integration.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Mr. BusariDaudau, 50+ years, Head of Archives, NYSC National Headquarters, Abuja, 10/08/2020

<sup>4</sup> Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim (2019), Address by the Director-General, NYSC at the Media Parley with Editors, Bureau Chiefs and Youth Correspondents held on Thursday, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2019 at Barcelona Hotel, Abuja, P.5.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel O. Asein (1993), *Call to Service: Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme, 1973-1993* (Ibadan: Sam Bookman), p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Chief Gregory Anyia, Retired Directorof NYSC,interviewed at Ogoja, Cross River State, 02/ 08/2020

Though the NYSC has remained committed to its four cardinal programmes: Orientation Course, Primary Assignment, Community Development Service (CDS) and Winding-Up/ Passing-Out Programme, the Scheme has witnessed a raft of transformations, changes and/or innovations in the past 47 years. Being a dynamic and innovative organization that aligns its activities and policies with the demands of the operating environment, the NYSC has prospered and expanded considerably almost beyond recognition by those who conceived it in the early 1970s. From inception to date, the Scheme has had eighteen dynamic Chief Executives: Col. AA Ali, Col. SK Omojokun, Col PK Obasa, Brig. Gen. EA Akpan, Col A Braimoh, Brig. Gen. HB Momoh, Brig. Gen. SA Sofoluwe, Brig. Gen. SM Dule, Brig. Gen. KO Ogunkoya, COMPOL SI Emokaro, Rev. PO Okunromade, Brig. Gen. W Oki, Brig Gen. Y Bomoi, Brig. Gen. MI Tsiga, Brig. Gen. NT Okore-Affia, Brig. Gen. JB Olawumi, Maj. Gen. SZ Kazaure and the incumbent, Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim. Each of these chief executives introduced a number of innovations- both in scope and mode of service of the Scheme- aimed at expanding, repositioning and reinvigorating the scheme for more effective service delivery in order to make the scheme as responsive to the dynamics of the society as possible.<sup>7</sup> While some of the changes were sweeping and radical, others have been moderate and gradual. This chapter seeks to identify the changes that have occurred in the NYSC since 1973, with emphasis on the implication of the changes for the Scheme and the nation. We begin with eligibility criteria and deployment/posting policies.

## Eligibility Criteria

Participation in the service corps scheme was originally designed for a select group of qualified Nigerian youths who had successfully completed the prescribed course of academic

<sup>7</sup> Mr. Mustapha Abdulsalam, Assistant Director of Research, NYSC National Headquarters, Abuja, 11/08/2020

and/or professional training in any of the six universities and their respective campuses (as the case may be) that were in existence at the time the decree was promulgated in 1973.<sup>8</sup> The six universities were: University of Ibadan, Ibadan; the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; University of Ife, Ile-Ife; University of Lagos; and the then fledgling University of Benin. Graduates of equivalent institutions overseas and those of other tertiary institutions in Nigeria were excluded from the programme.<sup>9</sup>

The first adjustment to the eligibility criteria was made in the 1975/76 service year. This followed the promulgation of the National Youth Service Corps (Extension of Application) Decree No. 24 of 1973 which extended the eligibility criteria to include every Nigerian who:

- i. Successfully completed his first degree at the end of the 1973/74 academic year at a university or degree-awarding institution of higher learning outside Nigeria;
- ii. Successfully completed his first degree at a university or degree-awarding institution of higher learning, outside Nigeria before the 1973/74 academic year but had since been engaged in post-graduate studies.

To encourage their enlistment into the Scheme, the Federal Military Government offered to pay the passage of all the volunteers. Where a male volunteer was married and had children, the government also paid the passage of his wife and children up to a maximum of three.<sup>10</sup> With the inclusion of foreign-trained graduates, the number of participants passed the 3,000 mark for the first time during the 1975/76 service year.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Asein, *Call to Service*, p.49

<sup>9</sup>Interview with Pastor Emmanuel Ojie, 58 years, 2 Pastor Avenue, Calabar, 24 July, 2020.

<sup>10</sup>General Yakubu Gowon (1974), "An Address to the Graduating National Youth Service Corps Members on Sunday, June 30, 1974, p.2.

<sup>11</sup>Enegwea and Umoden, *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service*, p.26.

A more dramatic increase was to follow during the 1976/77 and 1977/78 service years. Another amendment to the NYSC establishment decree of 1973 now stipulated that:

- i. Every Nigerian shall be under obligation to make himself available for service for continuous period of one year, if at the end of the 1975/76 academic year or any subsequent academic year, such a Nigeria obtained the Higher National Diploma (HND) or the National Certificate of Education (NCE) or similar professional qualifications.
- ii. Age shall cease to be a ground for exemption for those graduating as from January, 1977.

The inclusion of graduates from polytechnics and colleges of education (HND and NCE holders respectively) raised the number of participants from the 3,513 in 1975/76 to 6,107 in 1976/77. This amounted to an increase of 2,594 corps members or 73.84 percent between 1975/76 and 1976/77.<sup>12</sup>

The removal of the 30-year age limit in January 1977 further increased the number of participants in the 1977/78 service year. This time, the number of corps members grew to 10,814 from 6,107 during the previous service year. This increase amounted to a further 77.08 percent leap in the number of participants. Thenceforth, the number of corps members increased steadily and by the end of the first decade in 1982/83, a total of 146,294 youths had served under the scheme. For the 1984/85 service year, the number of participants in the scheme reached a staggering 46,685.<sup>13</sup> The upsurge in the number of participants was a reflection of the increase in the number of institutions of higher learning in the country between the late 1970s and the early 1980s whose graduates participated in the NYSC. By the 1984/85 academic session, the number of universities in the country had risen to 24. In addition, there were now 27 polytechnics and 47 colleges of education. Apart from this, there

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid*, p.27

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid*

was great increase in the number of foreign-trained Nigerians, who having obtained requisite academic qualifications for participation in the NYSC, returned home to serve their fatherland.<sup>14</sup> The rapid transition of the Scheme from a position of limited acceptance to that of overwhelming patronage put tremendous strain on both the NYSC's material resources and its management capabilities.<sup>15</sup> All this was happening at a time when the nation was experiencing serious economic challenges which compelled the Federal Government to adopt national belt-tightening measures. Thus, in 1985, the Government issued another decree amending the former eligibility criteria. At the inception of the scheme, all graduates above the age of 30 years at the time of the call-up were exempted. The factor of age as a ground for exemption from corps service was withdrawn on January 1, 1977; it was reintroduced in August 1985 and has remained in force ever since. The new rule on statutory exemption was amended to read as follows:

With effect from 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1985, a person shall not be called upon to serve in the service corps if, at the date of his graduation or obtaining his diploma or other professional qualification:

- a. He is over the age of thirty; or
- b. He has served in the armed forces of the Federation or the Nigerian Police Force for a period of more than nine months; or
- c. He has been conferred with any National Honours.

It also excluded from service, with effect from the end of the 1984/85 academic year, holders of the National Certificate of Education. When this decree came into effect, commencing from the 1985/86 service year, the number of participants dropped

<sup>14</sup> G. EjelaEmenako (1986), *12 Years of National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria: 1973-1985* (Lagos: Gabumo Press), p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Mr. Mustapha Abdulsalam

sharply to 24,804.<sup>16</sup> But soon after then, the number of corps members started rising again and today, it is growing in leaps and bounds. In an attempt to manage the huge number of participants, the programme is now conducted in batches and streams. Because this strategy has not been able to address the issue of corps members' explosion, some people have called for a downward review of the age limit to 25 years.<sup>17</sup> Such people believe that reducing the age limit will help to reduce the number called up annually. Some other people are opposed to a reduction in the age limit, insisting that people who want to serve voluntarily should be allowed to enlist, even if they are above 30 years of age. The numerous contributions of corps members, past and present, to the development of the country calls for great caution on this matter.

### Deployment/Posting of Corps Members

Since the cardinal objective of the NYSC scheme is to achieve national unity and integration, corps members were posted to states other than their states of origin, or of cultural affinity so that they could learn about the variety of Nigeria's peoples, cultures, and resources. No corps member had choice of state of deployment, just as he/she did not have a choice of place of primary assignment.<sup>18</sup> The distribution of corps members to states was essentially based on the guideline provided in some paragraphs of the objectives of the Scheme, viz:

To develop common ties among (service corps members) and promote national unity by ensuring that:

- i. As far as possible youths are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin;
- ii. Each group assigned to work together is as representative of the country as possible;
- iii. The youths are exposed (through their postings) to the

<sup>16</sup>Enegwea and Umoden, *NYSC:Twenty Years of National Service*, p.28.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid, p.152.

<sup>18</sup>Interview with Professor Joseph Ushie.

modes of living of the people in different parts of the country with a view to removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance, and confirming at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups.

The traveling outside their home-base and cultural area was to open their horizon to see Nigeria beyond the narrow confines of their villages, towns, states, regions and ethnic groups. The primary aim of this policy was to curb extreme ethnocentrism, sectionalism, tribalism and stereotype views held about other groups' identity. Inter-ethnic and religious marriages were also encouraged; along with corps members taking up jobs in their states of service at the end of the service year as a way of redistributing manpower in the country. Since the relatives of the corps members would visit them at their places of service, it was also hoped that the Scheme will pull more Nigerians other than the corps members out of their ethnic and religious cocoons to travel around the country, and interact with fellow Nigerians.<sup>19</sup> H.B. Momoh had observed that:

[...] our experience is that the posting of the youths outside their cultural zone, bringing them into firsthand contact with the local culture in their places of service, helps to foster assimilation and acceptance. It places them in a position to appreciate the peculiarities of others, and how to cope and adapt to other's circumstances.<sup>20</sup>

Experience gave impetus to the policy that corps members should not have a choice as to where they serve. Exemptions to this posting policy was only granted on health, marital or other extremely compassionate grounds. To qualify for concessional

<sup>19</sup> O.B.C. Nwolise (2004), "The NYSC Scheme: An Appraisal of the First Decade of Hope," in Danfulani S.A. and Aja Akpuru-Aja (eds), *NYSC in its Fourth Decade: A Strategic Policy Outfit for National Development* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books) p.59.

<sup>20</sup> Hafiz B. Momoh (1991), "The Journey So Far: An Overview of the NYSC Scheme: An Address Presented at the Opening of the Workshop on NYSC in the '90s" Abuja, p.5

deployment to states of request, unhealthy prospective corps members were mandated to procure medical reports from the University Teaching Hospitals, Medical Centres of relevant tertiary institutions, General Hospitals, Military or Mission Hospitals, duly signed by the Chief Medical Health Officer or Consultant. The privilege of preferential posting was rarely abused as there existed tight procedures for screening those entitled.<sup>21</sup> As part of the scrutiny process, medical reports from private hospitals and clinics were not honoured.

Over the years, the criteria for the deployment of corps members have been abused by unwarranted favouritism or what Samuel Asein describes as the "Nigerian Factor."<sup>22</sup> Asein asserts that "many corps members have been known to mount all forms of pressure on Directorate officials (in spite of repeated warnings against such practices) to induce favourable consideration and posting." Such demands have taken several forms, including:

- i. Pressures for initial favourable deployment to states of first preference;
- ii. Pressure for change of initial deployment from one state to another;
- iii. Pressures for preferential postings to urban and suburban centres as against postings to rural areas;
- iv. Pressures for favourable postings to particular undertakings and projects.<sup>23</sup>

The scheming to abuse due process and laid down rules often follow well-orchestrated patterns: dubious medical reports indicating the need for their holders to be close to their doctors in the urban centres and sometimes within their original home states; extensive lobbies by corps members and their 'sponsors' where specious arguments on medical grounds fail. The situation attracted comments from well-meaning Nigerians

<sup>21</sup>Interview with Mr. Godwin Ashiebi, 60 years, Secondary School Principal, interviewed at Bendi, Cross River State, 15/08/2020

<sup>22</sup>Asein, Call to Service, p.67.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid, p.68.

who argued that deployment should be guided by the interest of the service and national interest. Displeased that people now “serve in their own backyards,” Gabriel Umoden advised that:

We must introduce a fool-proof computerization programme designed to ensure that no participant is ever allowed to serve in his or her own part of the country. For every service year, at least 75 percent of all participants from the former north should be sent to the south and vice versa.<sup>24</sup>

The corps Mobilization Department decried recently that her major challenge “is in dealing with external and internal influences on the mobilization process, especially with regard to deployment of prospective corps members and relocation of corps members.”<sup>25</sup> Despite the measures taken by the managers of the scheme, including the fact that corps members posted on concessional grounds are automatically disqualified from being selected for honours award, the practice is still common place. In an attempt to address the pressures mounted on the managers of the scheme for preferential deployment, especially with the dreaded Boko Haram insurgency, the scheme had to modify its deployment policy by giving the prospective corps members the privilege of participating in the deployment process. To this end, prospective corps members are given the option of choosing four states they want to be deployed to, excluding their states of origin and study.<sup>26</sup> There is no doubt that even the caveat here is consistently ignored.<sup>27</sup> This development is antithetical to the

<sup>24</sup> Enegwea and Umoden, *NYSC:Twenty Years of National Service*, p.110.

<sup>25</sup> Y.S. Ehoda-Adi et al (eds.) (2018), *National Youth Service Corps Yearbook, 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*, Abuja: National Directorate Headquarters, p.127.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Dr Benjamin Ubleble, 40+ years, Former NYSC Staff & currently Academic Staff, University of Calabar, interviewed at the University of Calabar, 20/07/2020.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Professor Patience Erim 69 years, Federal Housing Estate, Calabar, Akwa Ibom State, 25 July, 2020.

provisions of the Act establishing the Scheme. Apart from promoting sectarian and ethnic differences, this has made many young Nigerians to be ignorant of their country. Since it is agreed that travelling is part of education, young graduates would know more of their fatherland and become more tolerant of other people if they serve in places distant from their cultural areas. The long-term negative impact of this development on the nation-building process is incalculable.<sup>28</sup>

### Orientation Course

The orientation course is designed to induct corps members into the one-year national service and equip them mentally and physically with the relevant skills and knowledge to enable them face the challenges of the service year. It is fundamentally designed to equip the corps members for the task of community service and nation building. At the inception of the Scheme in 1973 and several years after, the orientation programme lasted for one and half month.<sup>29</sup> This period provided the opportunity for corps members to learn the languages and cultures of their hosts in terms of values, religion, customs, and traditions. The regimentation, drills and paramilitary parades and activities such as Man O'War helped inculcate self-control and discipline in the corps members. Lectures were organised and delivered by experts on different topics and themes. In the 1970s, orientation course included one whole week state tours, which enabled corps members to go round the state of deployment even before the posting to their primary assignment areas.<sup>30</sup>

Though the orientation programme is still being carried out, so much has happened to its nature and essence. To start with, orientation now lasts between two and three weeks.<sup>31</sup> This has posed serious threat to the proper training of corps members for

<sup>28</sup>Interview with Chief Gregory Anyia.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid

<sup>30</sup>Nwolise, *The NYSC Scheme*, p.70.

<sup>31</sup>Interview with Mr. Patrick Odey, 40 years, Lecturer, University of Calabar, interviewed in Calabar, 21/07/2020.

national service and community development. The reduction in the orientation period has been attributed to the remarkable increase in the number of participants which posed some very serious problems for the organizers of the NYSC, the most debilitating of which has been that its limited facilities, skills and other resources have been stretched to the breaking point. Again, the state tours that were organised for all corps members to acquaint themselves with the nooks and crannies of their host states are now missing from the orientation course despite the fact that the states have become smaller than they were in the 1970s. In her insightful reminiscences, Iyabo Omokri, who rose to the enviable position of State Director of the NYSC, said the following about state tour:

It was a very nice experience. We were taken to all parts of the state and arrangements were made for us to be accommodated in some secondary schools along the way. It also afforded us the opportunity to see all other parts of the state, apart from the Orientation Camp and our places of primary assignment. If not for the tour, many of our colleagues would not have known many areas of the then North Western State... The tour is something I cherish a lot and I really have no regrets over my service year.<sup>32</sup>

The cancellation of state tours has been attributed to the vast economic difficulties associated with transportation, accommodation and other logistics. The herculean problem of organizing tours has been severally compounded by the now grievous underfunding of the scheme to the extent that many states cannot even provide the essential things needed in orientation camps. It is of great concern that while the number of corps participants has been on the upswing, in the last few years, there have not been conscious efforts by the state governments to expand the various orientation camps to at least the 5000-

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Enegwea and Umoden, *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service*, p. 98.

capacity types. This gap in facilities has resulted in the segmentation of batches of corps members into streams, with the attendant negative health implications for the managers of the scheme, who, literally, spend great part of the year in Orientation Camps.<sup>33</sup> Now, many corps members rarely know anywhere else beyond their places of primary assignments and the state capitals.

### Community Development Service (CDS)

Alternatively called Secondary Assignment, Community Development Service (CDS) is a cardinal programme of the NYSC aimed at deploying the innovativeness and creativity of corps members for the execution of development projects in conjunction with members of the host communities.<sup>34</sup> The theory and practice of CDS is based on the ideology of self-reliance through effective coordination, exploration and adoptive exploitation of all human and material resources, aimed at destroying the dependence syndrome on government by communities for their development aspirations.<sup>35</sup> Among the major achievements of the NYSC scheme since inception is the array of corps members' projects that have dotted various villages, towns and cities of Nigeria.

Since the NYSC was inaugurated in 1973, it has been obligatory for all corps members to participate in community development through the execution of CDS projects. From 1973 to about 1984, the CDS programme of the NYSC scheme was virtually synonymous with rural development and the provision of basic infrastructures.<sup>36</sup> At its inception, the NYSC Community Development Service programme was designed as a vacation assignment and carried out during the short Easter schools' vacation, lasting about two to three weeks. The Easter

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Benjamin Ubleble.

<sup>34</sup> Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim (2019), Keynote Address presented at the meeting of the NYSC Management with Representatives of State Governments, Tuesday, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2019, Abuja: Sandralia Hotel, p.6.

<sup>35</sup> Ann Davis (1984), "Preface to Service of CDS: Theory and Practice of CDS", NYSC DHQ, Lagos.

<sup>36</sup> Asein, *Call to Service*, p.103

project, as it became generally known, brought together corps members from their respective places of primary assignments to a pre-determined location within a local government area to execute development project(s) in areas of communities' greatest communal need. Some of the familiar projects executed at this early period include: building of bridges, construction of town halls, construction or renovation of classroom blocks, erection of health centres, erection of market stalls, erection of street sign posts and the numbering of houses in the rural areas.<sup>37</sup>

In the light of changing circumstances, the community development aspect of the service was broadened and expanded to make it an all-year-round project. This trend became more visible from about 1984, after the scheme's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This was the time when the Easter-time development service programme metamorphosed into the now familiar year-round community development service programme. The scope of the CDS projects was expanded to include farming and the scheme embarked on massive food production as a priority area. This development led to the establishment of NYSC Farm Settlements and Ventures, including: Garment Factories, Rice Mills, Feed Mills, Garri Processing Factories, Water Bottling Plant etc. A contemporaneous report on the transformation of the CDS programme in the mid-1980s indicates that:

Under the [new] CDS, a good number of corps members are deployed to work directly on farmland acquired by the NYSC State Secretariat in each of the nineteenth states of the Federation and Abuja. Each NYSC State Secretariat has acquired a minimum of one hundred hectares of farmland. Some states have acquired up to 3,000 hectares of farmland for cultivation. By July, 1985, a total of 10,000 hectares of land had been acquired for immediate cultivation.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Emenako, 12 Years of National Youth Service Corps, p.19.

Over the years, CDS has been classified into two broad categories, namely: group and personal (individual) CDS. In the former category, corps members are expected to use one day in a week for group CDS activities. They are not expected to attend duties in their places of primary assignment on Group CDS days, which are completely dedicated to the execution of programmes that will improve the living conditions of their host communities.<sup>39</sup> Personal/individual CDS projects are executed by individual corps members in their host communities based on community felt- needs. Corps members are always encouraged to identify areas where they could make individual impact in their host communities. It could be construction projects like building of toilets, incinerators, bridges, classrooms, game facilities for schools etc. or social/educational projects such as establishment of ICT libraries, extra-mural classes, enlightenment campaigns, charity work, vocational training for the empowerment of unemployed youths etc.<sup>40</sup>

In time past, the funding of Group CDS projects and activities of corps members was a shared responsibility among the three tiers of government, particularly the states and the local governments.<sup>41</sup> In recent times, these funders have either become highly disinterested or completely withdrawn. This has taken a serious toll on the fortunes of the CDS programme and as observed by a former Director General of the scheme, Brig. Gen. MI Tsiga, "a common phenomenon these days is the weekly gathering of corps members at designated CDS sites to socialize, pick papers, hold group meetings, mark register and disperse."<sup>42</sup> This is a sad development that needs to be urgently addressed so that Group CDS can be repositioned and reinvigorated to play

<sup>39</sup> Aigbokhai Solomon Arumemi (2018), "The National Youth Service Corps Community Development and Growth of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, 1982-2008." M.A. Thesis, Federal University Lafia, p.109. The author has provided a comprehensive list of activities undertaken by the various Group CDS.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, pp.112-113.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Chief Gregory Anyia.

<sup>42</sup> MI Tsiga (2010), *Working the Talk: A Selection of Speeches by Brigadier General M.I. Tsiga*, DG NYSC, Abuja: Rollamak Resources, p.217.

its important role of harnessing the skills, creativity and innovations of youths into an effective machinery for national development and progress of both the urban and most especially the rural communities. There are myriad reasons why the Group CDS, which instill the traditions of dignity of labour in corps members should be given adequate attention and encouragement. As the entire NYSC Scheme instills in the youths the spirit of selfless service to the fatherland, the community development programme imbues them with a sense of pride at having contributed, in a practical, visible manner, towards the completion of a development project. As has been established by stakeholders in the NYSC Scheme, CDS serves to bring out the best from corps members who show initiative, talent and promise for success. Convinced that the innovations, transformations and the spirit of entrepreneurship that were injected into the CDS programme in 1984 would revolutionise the Scheme, the then Director, Col. Edet Akpan, stressed that:

I am envisaging an NYSC scheme that is not content with things as they are... that seeks to render them better, or better understood; one that accepts hard work, dignity in labour and sacrifice; one that is ready to question, to inquire, to explore, to change, to seek and obtain better options, such that will ensure the survival of the scheme, now and for our coming generations.<sup>43</sup>

The Community Development Service of the Scheme further witnessed increased activities with the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), now re-christened Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Special Assistant to the current Director General of the NYSC, Yunusa Tanimu, stated recently that under the partnership with the Sustainable Development Goals, "corps members are trained to participate

<sup>43</sup> Qtd in Asein, *Call to Service*, p.105. See also Emenako, *12 Years of National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria*, p.iii.

actively in the SDGs awareness creation nationwide." He states further that "since the beginning of the programme, 1,176,957 Corps members have been sensitized on the SDGs at the NYSC Orientation Camps while 197,535 of them have so far been trained as Corps Advocates."<sup>44</sup> NYSC active participation in the SDGs programmes attracted an award from the United Nations and accolades from other several agencies.<sup>45</sup> There are several other national and international organizations and establishments with which the NYSC collaborates with in its aspiration to impact on the development and progress of both urban and rural communities in Nigeria. To this, we turn brief attention.

## NYSC and Collaborations

Though the NYSC scheme was established by government in 1973 as a deliberate policy for social reconstruction after the civil war, it has undergone a lot of role transformation over the years. It was clear by the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> decade of NYSC's existence that it has to be repositioned for more enduring results. The late Brig-General Yusuf Bomo who was the NYSC Director General from 2004 to 2009 indicated that his administration was not only determined to consolidate the gains recorded, but also to maximize the potentials of the Scheme including the mobilization of its enterprising, energetic, skillful and resilient youths, for effective service delivery in order to meet the high expectations of Government and Nigerians. A major thrust in this regard was the establishment and expansion of the frontiers of collaboration with national and international agencies.<sup>46</sup> Currently, the NYSC is in effective partnership with such

<sup>44</sup>YunusaTanimu (2010), "Preface" to *Selected Speeches and Strides of the 18<sup>th</sup> NYSC Director-General Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim* (Abuja: DrPrint Limited, 2020), p.vii.

<sup>45</sup> Brig Gen S Ibrahim (2019), Address Presented at the Media Parley with Editors, Bureau Chiefs and Youth Correspondents held on Thursday, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2019 at Barcelona Hotel, Abuja, p.5.

<sup>46</sup> Yusuf Bomo (2008), "Postscript," in Danfulani S.A and Aja Akpuru-Aja (eds), *NYSC in Its Fourth Decade: A Strategic Policy Outfit for National Development* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2008), p.273.

agencies as United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Energy Commission of Nigeria (ECN), British Council/World Bank Institute, Nigeria Institute of Management (NIM), The National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Legal Aid Council, Pan African Institute for Global Affairs and Strategy (PAIGAS), Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Society for Family Health (SFH), Global Fund, National Population Commission (NPC), National Programme on Immunisation (NPI), Federal Ministry of Health, National Action Committee on Aids (NACA), Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), Federal Ministry of Agriculture, amongst others.<sup>47</sup> A former Director General of the Scheme, Brig. Gen. MI Tsigahad stated that:

The NYSC is being sought after for collaboration by many national and international agencies who have realized the abundant potentials in the scheme. My office has always been inundated with requests for collaboration by unaccountable number of governmental and non-governmental organizations.<sup>48</sup>

The various collaborations enhance the development and empowerment of the youth, enable resources to be pooled to execute commonly defined projects, thereby allowing useful experiences to be gained. Major stakeholders in the Scheme testified that the gains of collaborations have been immense, adding value to service, especially through skill acquisition and quality service delivery. Perhaps, of special relevance is the INEC/ NYSC collaboration on free, fair and credible elections. NYSC's collaboration with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) began in 2008 with the engagement of corps

<sup>47</sup> Ahoda-Adiet al., National Youth Service Corps, p.47. See also Bomoi, "Postscript," p.274.

<sup>48</sup> Tsigi, *Working the Talk*, p.219

members in the conduct of re-run elections in several states across the country.<sup>49</sup> The commitment, professional conduct and patriotism exhibited by corps members in that experiment led to the permanent arrangement of assigning corps members to administer all INEC-organised elections.

The INEC/NYSC partnership transformed into a full-fledged inter-agency collaboration leading to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by the two organizations in November, 2011. The MOU was reviewed in 2013.<sup>50</sup> The basic logic behind the deployment of corps members in elections is that since most of them are not members of the community where they serve, they are likely to be non-partisan.<sup>51</sup> Also, their education attainment confers on them the advantage of being easily trainable and teachable for the conduct of elections. There is an increasing body of opinion attesting to the fact that the participation of corps members in the electoral process has greatly enhanced the credibility of the elections. In a recent address, the Director General of the Scheme, Brig. Gen. S Ibrahim admitted that "the scheme takes great pride in the sense of patriotism, commitment and neutrality exhibited by the corps members in the course of discharging the election duties, especially during the 2011, 2015 and 2019 general elections, as well as, the Anambra, Ekiti and Osun Governorship elections."<sup>52</sup> Only recently, the European Union (EU), through its Election Observation Mission, poured accolades on NYSC at a ceremony organised by the body to honour and distribute Information Technology equipment to seventy-five corps members selected across the country for their outstanding performance during the 2019 general elections.<sup>53</sup> Several other national and international bodies are appreciative of the enormous contributions of corps members to the electoral process in Nigeria.

<sup>49</sup> Ibrahim, Address Presented at the Media Parley with Editors, p.12.

<sup>50</sup> Ahoda-Adiet *et al*, NYSC, p.48.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Professor Patience Erim.

<sup>52</sup> Ibrahim, Address Presented at the Media Parley with editors, p.12.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

The Energy Commission of Nigeria (ECN) officially joined the league of NYSC collaborators when it signed an MOU with it in 2010. This collaboration was designed to engage the corps members in the creation of awareness in the development of alternative source of energy and energy devices, especially in the rural areas. Brig. Gen. MI Tsiga who signed the MOU on behalf of NYSC was optimistic that the collaboration will achieve the aim of equipping corps members with skills for fabrication of small tools for renewable energy devices and will build a core advocacy group to reach the rural area for dissemination of lowest information on rural renewal energy.<sup>54</sup> As expected, corps members trained by the ECN now undertake enlightenment campaigns as part of their community development activities.<sup>55</sup> Apart from the training that was done in Sokoto, Enugu, Kaduna and Niger States, the ECN also sponsored the training of twelve corps members on Renewable Energy in Berlin Germany in 2009.<sup>56</sup>

NYSC's partnership with the British Council/World Bank Institute is geared towards raising the awareness of the corps members and preparing them as agents of change towards attaining the noble objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals. The NYSC/SDGs Advocacy Project which was established in September 2006 has become one of the most acknowledged contributions towards the attainment of the MDGs in Nigeria.<sup>57</sup> The attainment of the seventeen-point SDGs which represent the United Nations' global agenda for development requires the support of all and sundry. Of its various key players and stakeholders, NYSC has distinguished itself through its impactful contribution to the health, water and sanitation, education and poverty eradication programmes. NYSC's projects like Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers and Corps members' projects like construction and reactivation of hand pumps and motorized boreholes for communities,

<sup>54</sup>Tsiga, *Working the Talk*, p.176

<sup>55</sup>Ahoda-Adi, et al, *National Youth Service Corps*, p.47

<sup>56</sup>Tsiga, *Working the Talk*, p.177

<sup>57</sup>Interview with BusariDaudau.

construction of public toilets to reverse the trend of open defecation, teaching as Primary Assignment, Mass Literacy Campaign, and vocational training for members of host communities amongst other programmes of the scheme have been highly commended.<sup>58</sup> The NYSC is today held in "very high esteem in government circles and among the host communities as a result of its many achievements under the MDGs (SDGs) advocacy project". The impressive performance of the NYSC in the SDGs project led to Government's approval of the War Against Poverty (WAP) programme for implementation by the Scheme. The ability of the NYSC/WAP initiative to address the problem of post-service unemployment among corps members and the level of financial commitment by government have given many people cause for joy and interest.<sup>59</sup> It is gratifying to note that many WAP beneficiaries are doing well and contributing their quota in the various communities, where they have established their agro-enterprises. As part of their training and mentoring mandate, they train and mentor at least five (5) youths in the host community.<sup>60</sup> Meanwhile, between its inception and 2018, no fewer than 3,266 corps members were trained and 2,543 empowered with the sum of Six Hundred and Twenty-Nine Million Seven Hundred Thousand Naira (₦629,700,000.00) as revolving loans.<sup>61</sup> Also, the Scheme was able to exploit the opportunities of the WAP programme to facilitate the attendance of Advanced Entrepreneurial Training at Barry University, Miami, Florida, USA, by seven (7) corps entrepreneurs. The corps entrepreneurs were given loans of between ₦ 1.8 Million and ₦ 3.0 Million by the National Economic Reconstruction Funds to expand their enterprises in order to employ more community members.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>58</sup> S Ibrahim (2020),*Selected Speeches and Strides of the 18<sup>th</sup> NYSC Director General* (Abuja: Drprint Limited), p.161.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Barbara N. Ibiam, Serving Corps Member, Newspaper Corporation, Calabar, Cross River State, 24/07/2020

<sup>60</sup> Tsiga, *Working the Talk*, p.231

<sup>61</sup> *National Youth Service Corps Yearbook*, p.39

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p.38

NYSC/Cognity Advisory partnership has also been lauded as initiative geared towards the empowerment of youths and the development of the country. It was in furtherance of its commitment to the effective implementation of the Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development that the NYSC established the Partnership with Cognity Advisory, which is coordinating a group of telecom, banking and other multinational giants to enhance entrepreneurship training, mentorship and funding options for aspiring corps entrepreneurs.<sup>63</sup> They include Sterling Bank, Fidelity Bank, First Bank, Samsung, Globacom, Airtel, Kwese/LflixFNigeria.<sup>64</sup> As the next section indicates, they also undertake capacity building, career guidance, job search, basic entrepreneurship and employability training, geared towards reducing youth unemployment.

### **Entrepreneurship Development Programmes**

The hope that the NYSC programme will enable the corps members develop the spirit of self-reliance and capacity for self-employment after the service year suffered great disappointment.<sup>65</sup> This arises from the fact that Nigeria's educational system lacks any meaningful programmes and infrastructure for practical teaching and learning, which can inculcate skills required for self-reliance and self-employment. There are hardly any functional laboratories, workshops, or libraries for the impartation of practical knowledge. The most objective assessment of the Nigerian educational system would have to concede that the country has not positioned its education where it could equip citizens with the necessary knowledge and skills to function in a modern society. Worried by this conundrum, the NYSC has over the years made various attempts to facilitate the process of skill acquisition and entrepreneurship development among corps members. Though

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> Ibrahim, Address Presented at the Media Parley with Editors, p.13

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Oscar Gukas, 58 years, Assistant Director, Corps Certification, NYSC Directorate Headquarters, Abuja, 12/08/2020

the concept of entrepreneurship development has always been a part of the NYSC programme, the pioneer corps members had little or no need to take it seriously. Several options were available to young graduates in the early years of the scheme.<sup>66</sup> With the downturn in the economic fortunes of the country starting from the 1980s when job opportunities for graduates became dimmer, it became necessary for corps members upon their discharge to search for alternative means of sustaining a living and to pursue employment generation options within the labour market/ economy. This necessity, naturally brought about the increased interest in and awareness of the value of Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP).<sup>67</sup>

The NYSC was thus compelled by unfavourable circumstances in the labour market which made it difficult for the Scheme to serve as an employment, or unemployment buffer to promote innovative and revolutionary steps in tackling the menace of incipient disaffection among Nigerian youths who have to contend with the socio-economic reality of increased unemployment and possible social maladjustment.<sup>68</sup> The first major step was taken in October 1987 with the introduction of the NYSC Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP). As its name suggests, EDP was aimed at instilling the spirit of enterprise in corps members. Administered during orientation course, the EDP was expected to help corps members develop their mercantilist instincts and the requisite abilities for the establishment and management of their individual or collective business ventures after an initial period of training provided by professional resource persons drawn from the private and public sectors.<sup>69</sup>

With the establishment of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the EDP was reinvigorated. The

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Professor Joseph Ushie.

<sup>67</sup> Asein *Call to Service*, p.108

<sup>68</sup> AdieleAfigbo(2005), "The National Youth Service and the Challenge of the Fourth Republic," in ToyinFalola (ed) *Nigerian History, Politics and Affairs: The Collected Essays of AdieleAfigbo*, Trenton: Africa World Press, p.551.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Chief Gregory Anyia.

NDE/NYSC collaboration widened the scope of entrepreneurship engagement and development as some areas which were hitherto considered demeaning for graduates were patronized with tremendous and rewarding revolutionary results.<sup>70</sup> Though it opened up new opportunities for gainful employment for youths who would otherwise have remained unemployed, the fortunes of NDE nosedived and it became grossly inadequate in building youths for self-reliance. The uncertainties and frustrations of endless job hunt continued to give the administrators of the NYSC sleepless nights. The continuous search for alternative means of sustaining a living and to pursue employment generation options within the labour market/economy culminated in the establishment of the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Department (SAED) in March, 2012.<sup>71</sup> It aimed at "building the capacity of young graduates as well as provide the enabling conditions for them to cope with the challenges of unemployment and wealth creation."<sup>72</sup> The SAED project is implemented through In-camp and Post-camp training of corps members. The In-camp component focuses largely on creating the entrepreneurial and self-reliant spirit, helping corps members explore various income generation opportunities available with a view to identifying the one that best suits their personality/circumstances and professional training. The Post-camp component provides the platform for a more rigorous training of interested corps members with a view to equipping them with the necessary technical/vocational skills as well as business competence needed to startup businesses.<sup>73</sup>

SAED programmes are financed and executed in collaboration with various organizations and enterprises, including the Bank of Industry (BOI), the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Access Bank, Direct Credit Limited, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), International Labour

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p.109

<sup>71</sup>Interview with Mustapha Abdulsalam

<sup>72</sup>Ibrahim, Address Presented at the Media Parley with Editors, p.13

<sup>73</sup> Nuhu S. Kwaghe (2018), "Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Department", in Y.S. Ehoda-Adi et al., (eds), *National Youth Service Corps Yearbook, 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary* (Abuja: Drprint Limited), p.171

Organisation (ILO), Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), Bank of Agriculture (BOA), and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), etc.<sup>74</sup> Through its public-private partnership drive, the scheme has established Mega Skill Acquisition Centres in Ekiti and Gombe States for the South West and North East geo-political zones of the country respectively. The Scheme is committed to ensuring that similar facilities are established in the remaining zones in the first phase of the programme.<sup>75</sup> From the inception of the programme to date, 1,132, 409 corps members have been sensitized and reached with SAED messages. Out of this number, 764,677 successfully completed the post-camp training.<sup>76</sup> Conscious of the fact that entrepreneurial training without capital to set up business is as good as not doing anything, several partners have trained and disbursed funds to corps members, and the beneficiaries have all established their own businesses in different parts of the country. The table below indicates what the major partners have disbursed to corps members:

**Table 7:** Showing Organisations and the Monetary Value of Support to Corpse Members Under SAED

S/N	Name of Organisation	Number of Beneficiaries	Amount
1	Bank of Industry	1077	N540.02 million
2	Credit Direct	13,344	629.016 million
3	Central Bank of Nigeria	07	15 Million
	<b>Total</b>	<b>14,428</b>	<b>1.184 Billion<sup>77</sup></b>

SAED has tremendously transformed the entrepreneurial development aspirations and programmes of the NYSC, especially corps members and has left no one in doubt that it is a

<sup>74</sup>Ibid

<sup>75</sup>Ahoda-Adi, et al., NYSC Yearbook, p.37.

<sup>76</sup>Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim (2019), "Remarks at the Official Handover of Information Technology Equipment to Corps Members by the EU Election Observation Mission held at the NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Kubwa, FCT on Monday, 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2019.

<sup>77</sup>S. Ibrahim (2019), "Life Without White Collar: Imperatives for Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education: The NYSC Perspective". Lecture at the 11<sup>th</sup> Convocation Ceremony of Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State on Thursday, 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2019, p.18.

veritable antidote to the perennial unemployment problem in Nigeria. Little wonder the editors of the *National Youth Service Corps Yearbook* unanimously agreed that "SAED remains one of the most valuable initiatives of the 45 [now 47]-year old Scheme, empowering successive batches of Corps members with skills and instilling entrepreneurial mindset in them. It is an active answer to the rhetorical question: after NYSC what next?"<sup>78</sup>

### **National Honours Awards**

The NYSC National Honours Award was instituted in 1974 when the Scheme was a year old to promote dedication and excellence in service among corps members. When the ceremony was first held in July 1974 only ten corps members received the award. Two years later, State Honours Award was established in recognition of the meritorious service of many more corps members who cannot all be awarded National Honours Award. With this development, the award was categorized into two and rechristened "Chairman's National Honours Award" and Chairman's State Honours Award". In 1976, the number of states in Nigeria increased from 12 to 19. That year witnessed the decoration of 22 corps members by the Head of State. Out of this number, the best three were awarded the Head of State's National Honours Award, while the remaining ones got the Head of State's State Honours Award. Until 1982/83 service year, the titles of these awards were "Chairman's National Honours Award" and Chairman's State Honours Award. The 1984 change affected the 1983/84 award winners.<sup>79</sup> In this same year, the award changed from plaque to medal presentation.

In 1988, General Ibrahim Babangida on the occasion of that year's Honours Award held at Abuja, called for the "extension of the annual award to the local government level." This was the principal reason that the Scheme intensified its efforts to monitor corps members' achievements and contributions at the

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<sup>78</sup>Ehoda-Adiet al., *NYSC Yearbook*, p.296.

<sup>79</sup>Emenako, *12 Years of National Youth Service Corps*, p.25.

grassroots level.<sup>80</sup> In 1989, the Scheme constituted a standing committee to inspect and monitor corps members' achievements and contributions in the rural areas. The committee was charged with the responsibility of visiting all local government areas in the Federation to ascertain and measure the achievements of corps members in their host communities.<sup>81</sup> The impact of this innovation on the development of Nigerian rural communities was catalytic. It is important to state that the three categories of awards are still being given. They are Local Government Honours Award, State Honours Award, and President's Honours Award. There is yet another award sponsored externally by the National Council Women Societies (NCWS). It was instituted during the 1992/93 service year by the umbrella women body for the best female corps member. The winner is usually given a trophy and cash prize during the President's NYSC Honours Award Ceremony.<sup>82</sup> Also, the 1992 service year witnessed the institutionalization of merit awards aimed at encouraging healthy competition among the NYSC staff and to enhance overall commitment: Staff Merit Award, Best Secretariat Award and Best Department Award.

Over the years, the constituency has continued to expand as the number of states rose from the initial twelve at the inception of the Scheme to nineteen, then twenty-one, later thirty and now thirty-six plus the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja. To further rekindle the competitiveness of the award and place proper emphasis on merit irrespective of the states of deployment of corps members, General Ibrahim Babangida, as Head of State, enjoined the operators of the NYSC to discard the representational Federal Character factor in the selection of award winners. In compliance with this directive, there were, at the December 1992 award ceremony 20 winners from only 15 states, from a total of 93 nominees drawn from all over the country.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>80</sup>Enegwea and Umoden, *NYSC*, p.195.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup>Ahoda-Adiet *et al.*, (eds), *NYSC Yearbook*, p.41.

<sup>83</sup>Enegwea and Umoden, *NYSC*, p.194 - 195.

Meanwhile, this tradition of promoting excellence among corps members was suspended in 1998 and was not revived until 2005, after nearly ten years in limbo. The resuscitation and restoration of the Honours Award was an indication that the management of the scheme is committed to repositioning and re-engineering it for excellence and to motivate Nigerian youths for national development. The NYSC Honours Award has greatly engendered love and commitment of the youths to their fatherland.<sup>84</sup> Solomon Arumeri posits that “the policy of Honours Award introduced a fundamental change in the attitude of corps members towards their place of primary assignment. Having observed that most of the corps members who benefitted from the award served in the village/rural communities; the erstwhile desire to serve in the city or urban centres shifted to the village community, where it is easier to make an impression.”<sup>85</sup>

### **Information and Communication Technology/Digitization**

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Department, which was established in 2012 has been anchoring the deployment of ICT solutions to drive the operations of the NYSC Scheme for greater efficiency. One of the best things that has happened to the Scheme is its migration from analogue to an online integrated system.<sup>86</sup> A recent comment by the Director General of NYSC, Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim is instructive:

It is gratifying to note that the innovative application of ICT solutions, which commenced over half a decade ago, has not only revolutionized NYSC operations, but also helped in entrenching transparency and accountability. While we relish the feats so far achieved, management desires to achieve further breakthrough in the scheme through ICT deployment.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Interview with Benjamin Ubleble.

<sup>85</sup>Arumemi, “The National Youth Service Corps”, p.82.

<sup>86</sup>Interview with Oscar Gukas.

<sup>87</sup>S. Ibrahim (2020), Address Presented at a Training Workshop on NYSC Integrated System for NYSC State Coordinators, held at Top Rank Hotels Galaxy, Utako, Abuja on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2020, p.1.

The full computerization of the mobilization process started with the 2014 Batch 'C' service year, bringing in its wake the following achievements:

- i. Online upload of Senate / Academic Board Approved Lists by Corps Producing Institutions (CPIs);
- ii. Online Registration by both Local and Foreign Trained Prospective Corps Members;
- iii. Online Registration by Part-time Graduates;
- iv. Online Printing of Call-up Letters;
- v. Biometric Verification and Registration during Orientation Programmes;
- vi. Online Processing of Relocation of Corps Members;
- vii. Automated Printing of Certificates of National Service, Exemption Certificates and Exclusion Letters Embossed with Passport Photographs;
- viii. Real-time Generation of Various Reports on Corps Data;
- ix. Use of Biometrics for the Monthly Clearance of Corps Members in all the states of the federation and the FCT.

The above feats have enthroned a culture of integrity, enhanced efficiency and eased the process of doing business between the Scheme and its stakeholders.<sup>88</sup> The new ICT-driven NYSC is gaining acceptance across the broad spectrum of its stakeholders. The transformations and innovations the scheme has achieved through the use of ICT has attracted the endorsement of relevant bodies as the Scheme was conferred with the Best MDA Award in the innovative application of ICT solutions at the 2016 e-Governance Award Ceremony organised by NITDA/Nihilent.<sup>89</sup> Before the digitalization of the Scheme's processes, prospective corps members had to return to their institutions of graduation for collection of Call-up Letters. But with the computerization of the process through the NYSC online Integrated System, a graduate can register online for

<sup>88</sup>Interview with Oscar Gukas.

<sup>89</sup>Ibrahim, Address Presented at the Media Parley with Editors, p.11

mobilization from any part of the world, and any graduate so mobilized can print the Call-up Letter online.<sup>90</sup> This innovation has many benefits, including enhancement of the credibility of the mobilization process by eliminating chances of sharps practices, saving of travel cost and time that would have been spent if one had to collect Call-up Letter by hand and the attendant risks involved in travelling especially with the bad state of Nigerian roads.<sup>91</sup>

We round off this brief section by highlighting the innovation in certification. The inscription of date of birth on the certificate of national service has been widely applauded. This development which began with the 2019 Batch 'A' aims at forestalling the manipulation by over age persons seeking mobilization for service.<sup>92</sup> In the same vein, arrangements have been concluded for the date of birth to be reflected on Exclusion Letters commencing from the 2019 Batch 'C' service year.<sup>93</sup> The current management of the scheme is poised to maximize the use of ICT to achieve greater efficiency. The policy of the current Director General, which is to "pursue a technologically driven organization to deepen effective service delivery," says much of this aspiration.

## Changes in Organisational Structure

The Scheme has undergone several administrative re-organisations in response to the dynamics of the society. Due to the constraint of space, we will only highlight the major changes here. Like the participants, the structure started with a humble beginning of a Director as Chief Executive at the apex assisted by a few pioneer staff at the Headquarters and Principal Inspectors as heads of State Secretariats.<sup>94</sup> After a series of re-organisations, the NYSC has today grown into a complex organization - Grade A parastatal - with a Director-General and Departmental

<sup>90</sup>Interview with Barbara N. Ibiam.

<sup>91</sup>S. Ibrahim, Selected Speeches and Strides of the 18<sup>th</sup> NYSC Director-General, p.159.

<sup>92</sup>Interview with Oscar Gukas.

<sup>93</sup>Ibrahim, *Selected Speeches*, p.252

Directors at the National Directorate Headquarters and state coordinators in each of the 36 states of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja. At its inception, the heads of the State Secretariats were known as Principal Inspectors who were seconded to the Scheme by their respective State Governments. Things began to change at the state level from the second half of the 1970s, when the nomenclature of the heads of state secretariat was up-graded to Chief Inspector to cope with the expansion of the scheme and the subsequent increase in responsibilities.<sup>95</sup> The nomenclature was later changed to State Director. It remained known by that title till 1993 when a new approved structure changed the nomenclature to State Coordinators. Currently, the administrators of State Secretariats are called State Coordinators. The Scheme spread its tentacles to all local government areas in the late 1980s. The Scheme has also evolved a zonal system whereby local government areas in each state are grouped into zones to bring nearer home to the local communities the administration of the corps Scheme. The introduction of the zonal system for effective coordination of corps activities at the local government level and the specific roles assigned to corps liaison officers to facilitate effective communication and operational linkages between the state secretariats, appropriate local government authorities and corps members were milestone developments.<sup>96</sup>

The point should be made that the 1973 NYSC enabling Decree provided for only two governing bodies at the national and state levels. These were the Directorate and State Committees. This changed when the NYSC enabling Act made provision for a 3-tier structure, that is, Federal, State and Local Governments. At the Federal level, the Scheme now has the National Directorate comprising the Chairman, the Secretary (Director General), the representatives of the University Vice-Chancellors, Polytechnic Rectors, the Police and the Armed

<sup>95</sup>Enegwea and Umoden, NYSC, p.37.

<sup>96</sup>Asein, Call to Service, p.48.

Forces. At the state level, there is a Governing Board for each state of the Federation and the FCT. There is also a Local Government Committee at the local government level. It is to the credit of the Scheme that it has succeeded in a large measure in sustaining and reviewing in line with changing conditions for optimal performance organizational and operational apparatuses as a way of fostering its organizational cohesiveness and productivity. The NYSC recently secured approval of the Federal Government to establish an area office in each of the six geo-political zones. The offices, which have already taken off, are located in Asaba, Bauchi, Enugu, Kaduna, Minna and Osogbo. They are to coordinate NYSC activities in each of the zones and will be carrying out field monitoring and inspection as well as ensure effective liaison with relevant stakeholders among other functions.<sup>97</sup>

It is pertinent to mention that the NYSC Decree No. 24 of 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1973 placed the Scheme under the Cabinet Office, now the Presidency. Owing to frequent changes in government, the supervision of the Scheme was later removed from the Presidency. Since then, the NYSC had been supervised by various Federal Ministries. At present, it is under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development. This situation led to lack of continuity and uniformity in the administration of the Scheme since each new supervising ministry adopted a new approach. Consequently, the NYSC was subjected to the whims and caprices of successive governments and excessive bureaucratic red-tap, to the detriment of the Scheme. It is advisable that changes should only be made when they are considered imperative to make the Scheme more dynamic and relevant to the contemporary and future needs of the society.

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<sup>97</sup>S Ibrahim (2019), Keynote Address Presented at the Meeting of the NYSC Management with Representatives of State Governors held on Tuesday, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2019 at Sandralia Hotel, Abuja, p.7.

## Conclusion

In this historical journey, we have examined and analysed the transformations that have taken place in the NYSC from 1973 to the present, with focus on the implication of the changes and innovations for the scheme and the nation. From the foregoing, it is evident that the Scheme has undergone a lot of transformations in its organization, administrative, policies, role and activities. At its inception, the Scheme was limited to mobilization of corps members for orientation and primary assignment. Today, however, it performs a number of strategic roles particularly in implementing some of the cardinal programmes and policies of government and indeed non-governmental programmes in supporting reform agenda. In this regard, the NYSC is in active collaboration with national and international organizations in response to the dynamics of the society.

There is no over-stating the fact that the changes brought about by successive governments and the management of the Scheme have made the Scheme more virile and responsive to the needs of the society and subsequently, enhance its status as a grade 'A' parastatal. Several innovations have greatly enhanced the effective performance of the Scheme at the grassroots as the State and Local Governments have been assigned greater roles in the administration of the Scheme at those levels. The various positive changes have boosted the morale of corps members and staff and have facilitated the achievement of the lofty objectives of the Scheme. It is to the credit of the various managers of the Scheme through time that the Scheme has recorded impressive record of sustained growth under changing conditions within its social and political environment. The very hostile reactions to government plan for the establishment of the Scheme and widespread demonstrations across campuses and in major cities by Nigerian undergraduates have given way to excitement and enthusiasm, bringing about a situation in which even ineligible persons seek mobilization for national service by hook or by crook.

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The oral data used in this study were collected during fieldwork with stakeholders in the NYSC Scheme, including past and present staff, former and current corps members, employers of corps members, etc. The data have been found to be useful and reliable for the assessment of the major transformations that have occurred in the NYSC since 1973. The information was collected through personal interviews conducted between July 20 and August 15, 2020. Some of the most engaging informants include the following:

**Table 8: Oral Interviews**

Name	Age	Occupation	Date of Interview	Place of Interview
Barbara N. Ibiam	26+	Serving Corps Member	24/07/2020	Newspaper Corporation, Calabar, Cross River State
Benjamin Ubleble	40+	Former NYSC Staff & currently Academic Staff, University of Calabar	20/07/2020	University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State
BusariDaudau	50+	Head of Archives, NYSC National Headquarters, Abuja	10/08/2020	NYSC Directorate Headquarters, Abuja
Emmanuel Ojie	58	Reverend Minister	24/07/2020	Calabar, Cross River State
Godwin Ashiebi	60+	Secondary School Principal	15/08/2020	Bendi, Cross River State
Gregory Anyia	60+	Retired Director, NYSC	02/08/2020	Ogoja, Cross River State
Joseph Ushie	60+	Lecturer of English, University of Uyo	04/08/2020	University of Uyo, Akwaibom State.
Mustapha Abdulsalam	50+	Assistant Director of Research, NYSC National Headquarters, Abuja	11/08/2020	NYSC Directorate Headquarters, Abuja
Patience Erim	69	Lecturer, University of Calabar, Calabar	28/07/2020	Federal Housing Estate, Calabar
Patrick Odey	40	Lecturer, Department of History & Int'l Studies, University of Calabar	21/07/2020	Ekorinim, Calabar, Cross River State.
Oscar Gukas	58*	Assistant Director, Corps Certification, NYSC Directorate Headquarters, Abuja.	12/08/2020	NYSC Directorate Headquarters, Abuja

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## Chapter Eleven

# LEADERSHIP AND THE GROWTH OF NYSC SINCE 1973

**Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jr.,**

*Department of History and International Studies*

*Federal University of Lafia*

&

**Godwin O. Odeh**

*Department of History and International Studies*

*Sokoto State University,*

*Sokoto*

### Introduction

Always dream and shoot higher than you know you can do. Do not bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.<sup>1</sup>

The above assertion on personality and leadership exploits by William Faulker provides the basis for our understanding of the arguments of this chapter. The primary aim of the chapter is to isolate and analyze the critical role of leadership in the development of the NYSC scheme. The chapter is necessary because it would show the link between the essence of charismatic leadership and the functionality of institutions in the development process. It argues that the programmes of the NYSC since its inception in 1973 have revolved around the activities of successive Directors General, staff, corps members and individuals that have in one way or the other impacted on the Nigerian society. In other words, as an instrument of nation building, the NYSC scheme has, in its operations over the decades, benefitted from the actions of men, women and youths across the ethnic and religious divides, who are worthy of historical discourse and documentation.

<sup>1</sup>Personality Quotes, <https://www.goodreads.com>.

## Leadership and Institutional Transformation

There is an intrinsic relationship between leadership and organizational or institutional transformation, which although acknowledged, is hardly given the serious attention it deserves. It is assumed that although very important, leadership is like any other variable in the development process required to provoke, organize, crystallize and manage change.<sup>2</sup> Such notions of leadership while emphasizing its critical role; sees it only as a component of the factors needed for change to occur. For our purpose here, we advance the position that leadership determine success and it is a critical calculus in organizational change. As a process which comes with training and experience, it is about taking responsibility and inspiring responsibility for collective or corporate success. As has been adequately emphasized elsewhere, leadership speaks to an extraordinary capacity to influence others in a group; uniqueness, calmness and an aura that endears one to others; and the ability to lead and having the capacity to deliver on a collective vision.<sup>3</sup>

Wherever leadership manifests, it has a context on which it is anchored and within which its relevance stridently manifests. Thus, since they do not just happen, institutional leaders are not mere people. In a metaphorical sense, such persons are usually personages who are best examples of particular professions or organizations. leaders within our context connote personalities that are best representations of, and who have contributed immensely to the NYSC. These personalities are people who command respect whenever and wherever their names and the scheme are mentioned. They are unique because of the role they

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<sup>2</sup>See A. E. Olusoji *The Making of a Leader: Exploring the Skills of Effective Leadership* (Lagos: Leadership Publishing House, 2002); E. Uchendu and P. U. Okpoko, *et al* (eds.), *Perspectives on Leadership in Africa* (Nsukka, Nigeria: Afro-Orbis Publications, Ltd, 2010); I. Hagher, *Leadership and Governance: A Christian Perspective* (Jos: The Leadership Institute, 2002); And Ukoh D. Ikoni, *Nigeria: In Search of Credible Leadership: A Reflection on 50 Years of Nigeria as an Independent Nation* (Makurdi: Bookmakers Publishing, 2010).

<sup>3</sup>See Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jr., "The Concept and Philosophy of ASUU Leadership Model and its Relevance to Contemporary Socio-Political Realities" in O. O. Okpeh, Jr., B. Audu and S. Ibrahim (eds.), *Trade Unionism, Leadership and Development in Africa* (Kaduna: Nigerian Defense Academy Press, 2020), 1-15.

played or are playing in helping the NYSC fulfill its mandate to the nation. In this regard, leadership speaks to particular men and women that have in one way or the other interfaced with the scheme as founding fathers, Directors General, staff and corps members, who have distinguished themselves by virtue of their immense contributions to the transformation of the NYSC. The rest of the chapter, chronicles the contributions of this categories of people to the development of the scheme.

### **Founding Fathers of the NYSC**

This section samples specific leaders who were instrumental to the take -off of the NYSC. The first on this list is General Yakubu Gowon (rtd). He was born on the 19<sup>th</sup> October, 1934. He is a native of Pankshin, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. He was educated in Zaria and consequently became a career military officer. Like most officers of his era, General Yakubu Gowon was trained in Ghana and England at Sandhurst. As a gallant officer, he was engaged in the Nigerian military United Nations peace keeping operations in Congo in the opening years of 1960s, (1960, 1961 and 1963). After the military coup of January 15, 1966, Gowon was appointed as Chief of Staff by General Johnson Thomas Umunananakwe Aguyi- Ironsi. Consequent upon the counter coup of July 1966, Gowon emerged as the Nigerian Head of State.

General Gowon's attempt to resolve the ethnic tensions that had rocked the nation and the military proved abortive as Nigeria descended into a ferocious civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970, following the declaration of the Eastern region as the Republic of Biafra by Colonel Chukwu Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. General Gowon presided over the affairs of Nigeria from 1966 to 1975.<sup>4</sup>

The story of the NYSC as an interesting episode in the history of Nigerian youth development is intrinsically tied to General Yakubu Gowon. The NYSC officially came on board during his reign as Head of state. While we acknowledge the fact that the

<sup>4</sup>See J. I. Elaigwu, *Gowon: A Biography* (Nok Publishers, 1978)



**Fig. 11:** General Yakubu Gowon (rtd), GCFR, PhD

histories of modern national youth service schemes vary from nations to nation depending on the prevailing socio-economic and political condition of each country, Nigeria's experience was largely consequent upon the Nigerian civil war. General Yakubu Gowon remains the popular founder of the NYSC; although we should add that he never independently conceived and executed the idea.<sup>5</sup> The naming of the scheme's National Directorate Headquarters (NDHQ) after him supports the argument that General Gowon founded the NYSC.<sup>6</sup> The military government under him proclaimed the NYSC scheme in 1972, with a target

<sup>5</sup> G. O. Odeh, "Demilitarizing and Democratizing the Appointment of NYSC Director General: Forging Civil-Military Relations" in *War, Society and Leadership in Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Brigadier General Shaibu Ibrahim*, CCC. Osakwe, OE. Tangban, AO. Ahmed and L. O. Udeagbala (eds.), Kaduna: Nigerian Defence Academy Press, 2020, pp.23-25.

<sup>6</sup> The National Directorate headquarter of the scheme located in Maitama-Abuja is called Gowon House.

take off year of 1973.<sup>7</sup> On the occasion of the take-off of the scheme Gowon in his inaugural speech, declared that:

Today, Monday, July 2, 1973 marks a new epoch in our task of nation building. As all of you, young men and women, commence today your one year of national youth service, you will be fulfilling in a special way, the hopes and aspirations of a nation that puts a great premium on the moral and physical development of its youths for a better and greater tomorrow. I consider it necessary therefore that I should, on this occasion, let you know the great importance, which all the governments in the Federation attach to this Scheme.<sup>8</sup>

The unveiling of the scheme before and after the inaugural speech and the post July 1973 speech generated unfavorable reactions underscoring the fact that at its inception, the NYSC was greatly misunderstood and greeted with skepticisms.<sup>9</sup> However, Gowon was not deterred as he went ahead to launch the scheme. His foresightedness and ability to circumvent these initial hurdles qualify him as the foremost leader in the history of the NYSC. At the Second Global Conference on National Youth Service held in Abuja in 1994, late General Sani Abacha acknowledged the unique place of Gen. Gowon in the affairs of the youths thus:

I wish to...express my happiness at the presence of Gen. Yakubu Gowon, former Head of State, whose coming

<sup>7</sup> G K. Enegwea, c.76 years, Retiree/NYSC Emeritus; Interviewed at Abuja, 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2018. G

K. Enegwea, was the leader of the first batch of NYSC Experts deployed to The Gambia in 1996 to help established The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme. He was sent ahead of his team to conduct two preliminary study of the aim and expectations of the envisioned GNYSS. He was one of the NYSC President's awards winners of 1973/1974(the pioneer set of corps members).

<sup>8</sup>National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition, (Abuja: NYSC National Directorate Headquarters 2013), p.19.

<sup>9</sup> G K. Enegwea, Interview. Read G. Enegwea and G. Umoden, *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service*, Lagos: Gabumo Publishing, 1993.

also demonstrates a high degree of commitment to the affairs of the youth. Just three weeks ago, Gen. Gowon presided over the National Youth Conference here in Abuja, where youths and other concerned with youth development discussed the affairs of the youths under the theme NIGERIA IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY. Gen. Gowon is the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Yakubu Gowon Foundation which organised and held that conference. Gowon's presence, may I say, is of special symbolic significance to this conference because he was the Head of State of Nigeria at the time the Federal Government established the National Youth Service 21 years ago.<sup>10</sup>

Abacha aptly captured the iconic role of Gowon as special, symbolic and significant; meaning that Gowon has been the face and representative of the youths and the NYSC scheme.

Another unique leader of the history of the NYSC is Professor Adebayo Adedeji. Professor Adedeji was born in Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State in 1930. A very successful and distinguished academic, manager, diplomat and political leader, he who served Nigeria, Africa and the wider world for over four decades in several capacities. He has strings of honorary awards bestowed on him by about seven national and international universities.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> S. Abacha, Address By the Head of State, Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria at the opening ceremony of the second Global Conference on National Youth Service, held in Abuja on Tuesday, 11 October, 1994, p.3.

<sup>11</sup> P. Ejime, "Professor Adebayo Adedeji: An African Cassandra, head of his time", *Pambazuka News*, <https://www.pambazuka.org/>; "Prof. Adebayo Adedeji, Life Time Achievement Award for Nigeria's Most Outstanding International Economic Icon", *Hallmarks of Labour Foundation*, <https://hallmarksolabour.org>; And Curriculum Vitae of Professor Adebayo Adedeji, Member of Panel of Eminent Persons (APR PANEL) of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM).



**Fig. 12:** Professor Adebayo Adedeji

Professor Adedeji was the first head and Chairman of the NYSC Directorate Board. With the promulgation of the enabling decree that set up the scheme, he was saddled with the onerous task of drawing up detailed programmes of training and schedules for the realisation of the NYSC objectives.<sup>12</sup> In his words:

NYSC is Nigerian in outlook. I was the first Chairman of the National Governing Board, but I left in the 1976 to serve in the United Nations; though I was kept informed by Col. Ali (Rtd) then... I also attended the 10<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations of the scheme.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary...p.18.

<sup>13</sup>National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary...p.25.

This shows how closely attached he was with the scheme at its infancy stage. The teething problem of the NYSC at the time was the challenge of acceptance arising from the nature of disunity in the land, which he confronted boldly. Professor Adebayo also tackled the twenty first century argument for the abolition of the scheme against the backdrop of security challenges thus:

The problem is not NYSC; it is lack of security. Every corps member must be given protection by the Federal, State and Local Government authorities and the local communities.<sup>14</sup>

Until his death in 2018, he was an unrepentant apologist of the NYSC. His ability to surmount the initial challenges of public reactions to the scheme and the wisdom to fine-tune its principles for the smooth operations of the scheme makes him a unique leader of NYSC. He was not only a trail blazer in the NYSC, but also one of Nigeria's most outstanding personalities<sup>15</sup>, whose name appeared in the 2006 "world's 50 influential thinkers on development".<sup>16</sup>

### **Successive Directors General as Vision Bearers of the Scheme**

As indicated on Table 1, since inception in 1973, the NYSC scheme has come under the leadership of eighteen Directors General (DGs). The politics of how the NYSC DG is appointed is not our focus in this chapter. For us, it enough to examine some of the achievements of the DGs and show how these strengthened the scheme to better fulfill its mandate to the nation. In doing this, attention would be focused on their major achievements in order to ascertain their contributions to the scheme. For ease of analysis, we would take the DGs in group based on the prevailing challenges of the period they served

<sup>14</sup>National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary...p.25.

<sup>15</sup>"Prof. Adebayo Adedeji, Life Time Achievement Award for Nigeria's Most Outstanding International Economic Icon" ...

<sup>16</sup>P. Ejime, "Professor Adebayo Adedeji: An African Cassandra, head of his time"

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and the critical issues they had to address to keep the scheme afloat. The first set of leaders had their tenure of office during the first decade of the existence of the scheme (1973-1983), a period that could be appropriately described as the formative years of the scheme. The task before DGs of this period was to ensure the survival of the NYSC. The DGs of the period under review were Col. A.A. Ali (1973-5), Col. S. K. Omojokun (1975- 1979) and Col. P K. Obasa (1979-1983).

**Table 9:** Directors General of the NYSC and their Contributions to the Scheme, 1973-2020

	DIRECTORS GENERAL	TENURE/YEAR OF SERVICE	HIGHLIGHTS OF CONTRIBUTIONS
1.	Col. A A Ali	1973-1975	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Was the pioneer DG of the NYSC scheme</li> <li>▪ Developed the paramilitary component of the scheme</li> <li>▪ Generally saw to the successful take-off of the NYSC scheme</li> </ul>
2.	Col. SK Omojokun	1975-1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sustained the lofty ideals of the scheme;</li> <li>▪ Effectively contained the problems associated with the expansion of the scheme during these formative years;</li> <li>▪ Promoted discipline and professionalism in the scheme</li> </ul>
3.	Col. P K Obasa	1979-1983	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focused on expanding the NYSC;</li> <li>▪ Insisted on commitment of corps members to the scheme;</li> <li>▪ Had zero tolerance on the indiscipline of staff of the scheme and corps members</li> </ul>
4	Col. EA Akpan	1983-1987	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improved the corporate image of the NYSC;</li> <li>▪ Introduced fiscal discipline in the operations of the scheme;</li> <li>▪ Restored discipline in the scheme;</li> <li>▪ Motivated staff and corps members</li> </ul>
5.	Col. A Briamoh	1988-1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improved welfare of corps members;</li> <li>▪ Superintended the movement of the Head quarters of the scheme from Lagos to Abuja</li> </ul>
6.	Col. Hafiz Momoh	1990-1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Initiator of entrepreneurial training in the NYSC. This was to metamorphose into SAED in 2012;</li> <li>▪ Negotiated the critical synergy between the NYSC and the Directorate of Technical Aids Corps;</li> <li>▪ Introduced insurance package serving corps member;</li> <li>▪ Created an organized and more responsive scheme.</li> </ul>

7.	Brig. Gen. S A. Sofoluwe	1994-1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Deepened the policies of his predecessors, particularly those of General Hafiz Momoh;</li> <li>▪ The scheme assumed more relevance in national development;</li> <li>▪ Promoted cohesion amongst corps members</li> </ul>
8.	Col. (later) Brig Gen SM Dule	1996-1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conceptualized and designed the National Directorate Head Quarter building of the scheme;</li> <li>▪ Oversaw the award of the contract for the commencement of its construction;</li> <li>▪ Established the NYSC Foundation</li> </ul>
9.	Brig Gen KO Ogunkoya	1999-2000 and 2000-2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Expanded the activities of the scheme;</li> <li>▪ Prioritized regular interactions between the NYSC and employers of labour;</li> <li>▪ Promoted the integrity of the scheme.</li> </ul>
10.	Rev. P O. Okunromade	Jan 2002- March 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritised accountability of staff of the NYSC;</li> <li>▪ Promoted attitudinal re -orientation in the scheme through the promotion of the fear of God;</li> <li>▪ Encouraged humanitarian activities amongst corps members. Prioritised accountability of staff of the NYSC;</li> <li>▪ Promoted attitudinal re -orientation in the scheme through the promotion of the fear of God;</li> <li>▪ Encouraged humanitarian activities amongst corps members.</li> </ul>
11.	Police Com S. I. Emoikaro	March 2002- May 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promoted corporate solidarity of the NYSC;</li> <li>▪ Encouraged efficient service delivery amongst corps members;</li> <li>▪ Emphasised discipline of staff and corps members</li> </ul>
12.	Brig. Gen. W. Oki	2002-2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Attempted to reposition the scheme based on its mandate;</li> <li>▪ Enforced discipline of both staff of the scheme and corps members;</li> <li>▪ Promoted the welfare of the staff of the NYSC.</li> </ul>
13.	Brig. Gen. Y. Bomoi	2004-2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Moved the NYSC to its headquarters plot in Maitama, Abuja;</li> <li>▪ Initiated the structural empowerment of NYSC Zonal offices;</li> <li>▪ Constructed NYSC permanent orientation camps in Osun and Katsina;</li> </ul>

14.	Brig Gen M.I. Tsiga	2009-2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Prioritized the welfare and security of corps members;</li><li>▪ Improved the welfare of staff;</li><li>▪ Strengthened the grassroots administrative structure of the NYSC;</li><li>▪ Integrated monotechnics and professional institutions into the NYSC scheme;</li><li>▪ Revamped obsolete and decaying infrastructures.</li></ul>
15.	Brig Gen N.T. Okorie-Affia	2011-2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Implemented the newly approved administrative structure of the scheme;</li><li>▪ Deepened the mobilization and utilization of corps members' manpower for national development;</li><li>▪ Harmonized NYSC policies into a single document.</li></ul>
16	Brig Gen J.B. Olawumi	2014-2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Improved the service content of the NYSC scheme;</li><li>▪ Strengthened partnership between the scheme and relevant government agencies and the private sector;</li><li>▪ Established the NYSC bakery and water factory;</li><li>▪ Increased the visibility and relevance of the NYSC scheme in national development.</li></ul>
17.	Brig Gen S.Z. Kazaure	2016-2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Initiated the clamor for the improvement of corps members allowance in light of current economic realities;</li><li>▪ Improved the welfare of NYSC scheme;</li><li>▪ Expanded the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) through the establishment of more centers;</li><li>▪ Deepened collaboration of the scheme with relevant agencies and corporate bodies.</li></ul>
18	Brig Gen S. Ibrahim	2019 till date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Deepened national awareness on the mandate of the NYSC through intense enlightenment campaign on the scheme's enabling Act;</li><li>▪ Waged a titanic battle against the phenomenon of fake corps members, forging of NYSC certificates and false age declaration;</li><li>▪ Sanitized and streamlined NYSC mobilization process through the implementation of technology-aided innovative anti-fraud policies;</li><li>▪ Actualized the increment in corps members' allowance from N19,800 to N33,000;</li><li>▪ Established Six Area Offices (one in each geo-political zones) to strengthen the operational capacity of the NYSC scheme at the grassroots;</li><li>▪ Strengthened collaboration with critical stakeholders through constant advocacy, interfacing, partnership, trust and confidence building between the scheme and government agencies, the private sector and international bodies;</li><li>▪ Constitution of NYSC State Governing Boards (so far in 19 states) to improve coordination of the activities of the scheme;</li><li>▪ Improved the corporate image of the NYSC through sustaining a close and mutually benefiting relationship between it and major media houses;</li><li>▪ Resuscitated NYSC moribund industries like the NYSC farms, bakery and water factories;</li><li>▪ Established the NYSC Cultural Troupe and rejigged the NYSC Sports and Cultural Festival;</li><li>▪ Generally improved welfare of the staff of the scheme.</li></ul>

**Source:** Researchers Field work, 2020

Col. Ali was the pioneer Director General of the NYSC. He managed and operated the scheme between 1973 and August, 1975. With Professor Adebayo Adedeji, he designed the paramilitary component of the Scheme Orientation Course. To enhance quality, he toured Britain and the United States to learn

how similar schemes were operated. In Nigeria, he visited universities and states to delivered lectures on the gains and prospects of the newly birthed NYSC. He, thus, helped in quelling protests against the scheme across the country.<sup>17</sup> He did the enlightenment visits and talks along with the likes of General Gowon and Professor Adebayo. The pioneering role of Ali is best captured by Adedeji in his assertion that:

The scheme would not have taken off so smoothly in so short a time, across so vast and diverse a country, without the hard work, determination and vision of Colonel Ali.<sup>18</sup>

Col. Ali was saddled with the enormous task of starting the scheme at the most difficult time in nation's history. Nigeria just survived a war of disintegration and NYSC was designed to heal the country of the scars of war. The role Ali played in preparing the stage for subsequent leadership of the scheme is captured by Enegwea thus:

If there is a Director General that deserves to be an icon of the NYSC, it should and must be Col. Ali. He came in at a turbulent time and put the scheme on the path of success, which successive DGs appeared to have been building upon. Ali, therefore, qualifies as and remains one of the icons of the NYSC.<sup>19</sup>

Col. Ali was succeeded by Col. S. K. Omojokun in 1975. He generally continued with the policies of his predecessor and was able to lay a sound footing for the scheme to thrive. He would be remembered for the discipline he instilled on both staff of the scheme and corps members during his tenure of office. It is also a

<sup>17</sup> "The many colours of a Rainbow: A Review Ahmadu Ali's biography, <https://www.thecables.com>.

<sup>18</sup> G.K. Enegwea and G.E.Umoden, *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service*, Abuja: NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, 1993, p.121.

<sup>19</sup> G.K. Enegwea, Interview.

credit to his charisma and leadership that some of the challenges associated with the expansion of the scheme during this period were resolutely tackled. Col. S. K. Omojokun handed over an NYSC scheme whose future of effectively contributing to the development of the country was guaranteed.

Col. P. K. Obasa assumed leadership at the wake of the Second Republic, during which the country was already feeling the full weight of the plummeting of petrodollars, as the economy was experiencing strains. Coupled with the burden of financing the presidential system of government and what appeared to be the recklessness of the political leaders of the time, it was clear that a recession was in the offing which was to have its toll on the operations of the NYSC. Col. Obasa devoted his time on the policy of expanding the scheme which was started by his predecessors. He would be remembered for insisting on the professionalization of the scheme through the promotion of discipline amongst staff of the scheme and corps members. Although the twilight of his tenure of office was quite turbulent,<sup>20</sup> Col. Obasa did his best to mainstream the NYSC in the development process during the period under review.

It was against this background that the second category of the touch bearers of the scheme emerged between 1983-1999, a period characterized by growth of the scheme and rapid expansion of its policies and programmes.<sup>21</sup> The DGs of this era include Col. E. A. Akpan (1983-1987), Col. A. Briamoh (1987-1990), Col. Hafiz Momoh (1990-1994), Brig Gen S. A. Sofoluwe (1994-1996) and Col. (later) Brig Gen S. M. Dule (1996-1999). The focus of the leadership of the scheme during this period was to reposition the NYSC to meet emerging challenges of national

<sup>20</sup> There were allegations and counter-allegations of corruption which negatively affected the image of the scheme. We must add that these allegations appear to be part of the general perception of office holders during the Second Republic which became part of the justification for military coup of the time. For details of some of these see G K. Enebwea and G. E.Umoden, *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service*; T. Falola and J. O. Ihonvhere (eds.) *The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic, 1979-1983* (London: Zed Books, 1985).

<sup>21</sup> The period is generally considered the Golden Era of the NYSC because of the remarkable restructuring it experienced and its quantum contributions to nation building.

development. In order to do this more effectively, the DGs of this period focused on the NYSC as a social institution, the need to reinvigorate its structure against the backdrop of expanding population of corps members, and more importantly, the imperative of instilling discipline and commitment. Thus, while Col. Akpan is noted for improving the corporate image of the NYSC; introducing fiscal discipline in the operations of the scheme; restoring discipline in the scheme; and motivating staff and corps members; Col. A. Braimoh is noted for improving the welfare of corps members and facilitating the movement of the headquarters of the scheme to the Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. A charismatic DG, Braimoh operationalised a transparent way of carrying out the business of the NYSC scheme.

Col. H. Momoh took over the National leadership of the NYSC between 1990 and 1994. Under his watch, the scheme witnessed a lot of radical and fundamental changes some of which are itemised below:

- a. He was the first to bring entrepreneurial training to the scheme through involvement of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), which was to become Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship and Development (SAED), erroneously believed to have begun in 2012;
- b. He spearheaded and actualised upward review of corps members allowance by 100 per cent, first in the history of NYSC;
- c. He was the first to have negotiated with the Directorate of Technical Aids Corps for the engagement of exceptional and successful corps members in youth development programmes within and outside Nigeria, thereby laying the foundation for graduates' participation in Africa and other form of overseas volunteers programmes;
- d. Introduction of insurance package that guarantee compensation to families in the event of the death of a serving corps member;

e. The tenure witnessed the promulgation of Decree 51 of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1993 that repealed NYSC Act Decree 24 of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, 1973, which is today referred to as NYSC Act CAP84 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004.<sup>22</sup>

The Act on its own brought about a lot of blessings to the scheme by revolutionising it in the following ways;

- i. It made adequate provisions for the establishment of Zonal offices thereby drawing the activities of corps members to the grassroots, in addition to the establishment of Local Committees across the 774 Local Government Areas in the country;
- ii. The Committees it created ensures the security and welfare of corps members, which would go a long way in mitigating the security challenges confronting the scheme in the twenty first century;
- iii. It changed the office designate of the leadership of the scheme from National Director to Director General (thereby making the military to take proper hold of the scheme.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, it was during his tenure that the First Global Conference on National Youth Service was held in Racine, Wisconsin, USA, from 18<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> June 1992. This conference was to remain a reference point in the history of the NYSC. Major General Hafiz Momoh himself, Gregory Kas Enegewea (now an Emeritus of National Youth Service), Mr. E.S. Essien and other participants from fourteen countries attended the conference. It was at the conference that Nigeria was given the privilege of

<sup>22</sup>"NYSC pays tribute to General Hafiz Momoh" Prnigeria.com. delivered. G O. Odeh, "Demilitarizing and Democratizing the Appointment of NYSC Director General: Forging Civil- Military Relations", pp.24-26. *National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary...pp.15-17.* National Youth Service Year Book, 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition, Abuja: NDQH,2018, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> G O. Odeh, "Demilitarizing and Democratizing the Appointment of NYSC Director General: Forging Civil- Military Relations" p.25. "NYSSC pays tribute to Gen.Hafiz Momoh" Prnigeria.com.

hosting the second edition in 1994.<sup>24</sup> Against the backdrop of the above achievements, among others, the current Director General of the NYSC, Brigadier General Ibrahim, described, Momoh, thus:

A dynamic and charismatic officer who initiated a lot of positive changes during his tenure as Director-General, thus deepening the relevance and contributions of the scheme to the overall national development.<sup>25</sup>

A visionary with to the core, Col. Hafiz handed a more responsive NYSC to his successor, Brig. Gen. S. A. Sofoluwe in 1994.

Between 1994 and 1999, the beginning of the new democratic dispensation, the NYSC was headed by Brig. Gen. Sofoluwe and Col. (later) Brig. Gen. S. M. Dule. This period coincided with the agitations for democracy and the withdrawal of the military from the political process. The NYSC keyed into the transition activities of the period and contributed through its programmes and the patriotic activities of corps members to the realisation of a smooth transition to civil administration in 1999. Brig. Gen. Sofoluwe completed some of the radical policies and programmes of General Momoh and is noted for promoting internal cohesion between corps members across the country. Brig. Gen. Dule conceptualised and designed the National Directorate Head Quarter building of the scheme and also facilitated the award of the contract for the commencement of its construction. This is in addition to establishing the NYSC Foundation. These are undoubtedly modest contributions that repositioned the scheme for further greater attainments.

<sup>24</sup> G.O. Odeh, *Nigeria NYSC's Role in the Founding of The Gambian National Youth Service, 1996- 2004*, A PhD Dissertation Submitted to the Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, 2019, pp..107-113. See also, 1992 and 1994 conferences, see, S.A. Sofoluwe, Circular, 1994 Global Conference on National Youth Service, NYSC/DG/153/ 5.9/Sec/Vol.VI/391, 20th July, 1994. Nigel Watt, *Conference Communiqué -Towards Global Youth Service 1994* (NYSC Archive, National Directorate Headquarters, Abuja: GC/94/ 21).

<sup>25</sup>"NYSSC pays tribute to Gen.Hafiz Momoh" Prnigeria.com

Regarded as one of the most unstable periods in the leadership history of the NYSC, the era between 1999-2009, experienced five personalities at the helm of its affairs. These include Brig. Gen. P. O. Ogunkoya (1999-2002); Rev P. O. Okunromade (Jan - March, 2002); Police Commissioner S. I. Emoikaro (March - May 2002); Big Gen W. Oki (2002-2004); and Brig. Gen. Y. Bomoi (2004-2009). In addition to the appointment of paramilitary officers and civilians to head the organisation, the period was marked by leadership instability as a result of which very little innovative changes occurred in the operations of the scheme.<sup>26</sup> While General Ogunkoya is noted for expanding the scheme's programmes, facilitating a regular interface between the NYSC and employers of labour and promoting accountability in the scheme's head quarters; Reverend Okunromade encouraged accountability of staff of the NYSC, promoted attitudinal re-orientation in the scheme through the promotion of the fear of God and facilitated increased humanitarian activities amongst corps members. On his part, Police Commissioner S. I. Emoikaro focused on efficient service delivery of the NYSC, corporate solidarity and corps members discipline. Brig. Gen. Oki attempted to reposition the scheme in line with its pristine mandate, enforced discipline of both staff of the scheme and corps members. He also promoted the welfare of the staff of the NYSC.

Brigadier General Yusuf Bomoi became the NYSC DG at a time the scheme was in desperate need of far-reaching reforms.<sup>27</sup> He was the second former corps member to pilot the affairs of the scheme after General Oki. The question of NYSC's relevance which began under General Oki became loudest during his tenure, and this is probably because of the hangover of the challenges from the previous administrations, particularly the immediate one. The following, among others, are General Bomoi's major achievements:

<sup>26</sup> In the year 2002 alone, such instability saw some of those appointed to head the organization serving for just few months. This was the case of Police Commissioner S. I. Emoikori and Rev. P. O. Okunromade.

<sup>27</sup> M. Onochie, "Ex-NYSC DG Bomoi Dies at 60" *Daily Trust*, <https://dailytrust.com.ng>.

- a. Moving the NYSC to its headquarters plot in “Gowon House” Maitama, Abuja;
- b. Reinvigoration of NYSC moribund projects and programmes such as President's Awards, NYSC Sport/ Cultural festival, Corp Forum, etc.;
- c. Initiation of structural empowerment of NYSC Zonal offices;
- d. Constructions of NYSC permanent orientation camps in Osun, Katsina, among others;
- e. Deployment of media outlets to intimate people about development in the scheme, thereby building confidence and creating a sense of belonging among stake holders in the scheme;
- f. Increasing the number of projects embarked upon by corps members in rural areas;
- g. Increment of the allowances of the corps members and the staff;
- h. Reduction in cases of rejection of corps members by employers of labor;
- i. Clearing of backlogs of promotion and recruitment of over 1000 senior staff.<sup>28</sup>

In light of the above and other achievements, a former DG of the scheme, Tsiga, describes Bomoi as, “a pragmatic and inclusive leader whose sense of innovation and compassionate disposition endeared him to the hearts of all”.<sup>29</sup> He is also described as a “think tank and a welfarist of no mean standing.”<sup>30</sup> Idoga sums up the personality of General Bomoi as follows:

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<sup>28</sup> A. Idoga, Interview. A C.Ani, Interview. G. F. Anyia, Interview. J. Oba, “Adieu, Bomoi, NYSC Programmatic DG”, *Blue Print*, <https://www.blueprint.ng>. The author served in Abuja and personally observed some of development during Bomoi's years. The development fired his ambition to write a book titled; *The National Youth Service Scheme and Challenge of Nation Building in Nigeria (1973 - 2008)*. The book ends with the debate question, “Should NYSC Remain?”.

<sup>29</sup> A. Adedigba, “Ex-NYSC Yusuf Bomoi is dead” in *Premium Times*, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com>.

<sup>30</sup> A.C.Ani, Interview. G.F. Anyia, Interview.

Brigadier General Yusuf Bomoi was pragmatic and a lover of human beings. Prior to Bomoi's administration, no NYSC staff could boast of owning car or having built a house. With his coming however, the whole place at the NDHQ became awash with cars. He had a pragmatic touch with the people.<sup>31</sup>

1999 to date is could generally be regarded as the era of great reforms and quantum leap in the fortunes of the NYSC scheme and its contributions to nation building. This is notwithstanding the teething challenges the nation had to contend with in this era. In the period under review, the scheme had five pragmatic DGs who were/are all reformers in their own right. They include Brig. Gen. M. I. Tsiga (2009-20011), Brig. Gen. N. T. Okorie-Affia (2011- 2014), Brig. Gen. J. R. Olawumi (2014-2016), Maj. General S. Z. Kazaure (2016-2019) and Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim (2019 to date). We should add that the great strides of the period was due largely to the relative stability in the leadership of the NYSC and the impact of the transformation agenda of the military as an institution on the scheme. This is in addition to the leadership style of these DGs and their commitment to the scheme. For example, while Brig. Gen. Tsiga is reputed to have prioritized the welfare and security of corps members; improved the welfare of the staff of the scheme through incentives and promotion exercises; strengthened the grassroots administrative structure of the NYSC; integrated monotechnics and professional institutions into the NYSC scheme; and revamped obsolete and decaying infrastructures. These undoubtedly impacted positively on the performance of the scheme.<sup>32</sup>

Brig. Gen. N. T. Okorie-Affia succeeded General Tsiga and he is remembered for implemented the newly approved administrative structure of the scheme; deepening and

<sup>31</sup> A. Idoga, Interview.

<sup>32</sup> M. Onochie, " Looking at Reforms in NYSC under Tsiga", *Daily Trust*, <https://dailytrust.com> accessed on 23/3/2021.

strengthening of the mobilization and utilization of corps members' manpower for national development; and harmonizing NYSC policies into a single document. This is besides ensuring compliance with profession ethics and code of conduct of both staff and corps members. Okorie-Affia handed over the Brig. Gen. J. R. Olawumi who is noted to have improved the service content of the scheme, ensured the welfare and safety of corps members and staff, enhanced partnership for greater impact, funding and support; and increased the visibility and relevance of the scheme.<sup>33</sup> He has been described as a real leader who could go to any length to save the life of corps member and staff.<sup>34</sup> He was also reputed to have established the NYSC bread and bottle water factories in Kubwa, Abuja.<sup>35</sup>

Brigadier Sulieman S. Kazaure took over from Brigadier General Johnson Bamidele Olawumi in 2016. His administration was epochal in the history of the NYSC in light of emerging nation building problems in the country. Inflationary rates had soared making a mess of corps members allowance; insecurity across the country was on the increase thereby implicating the mandate of the scheme, which is selfless service to the nation; and there was a general dwindling of national sentiments arising the inability of the democratic experience to deliver on key promises.

<sup>33</sup> "Change of Guard at NYSC", *ThisDay*, [Thisdaylive.com](http://Thisdaylive.com).

<sup>34</sup> Opinion gathered from diverse sources suggests that General Johnson Bamidele Olawumi possessed essential leadership qualities which endeared him to the staff of the scheme and corps members.

<sup>35</sup> A. C. Ani, Interview. J. Odeh, c30 years, Lawyer and Ex-corps member, interviewed at Abuja on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2020.



**Fig. 13:** Handingover Ceremony from Maj. Gen. Kazaure to Brig. Gen. Ibrahim, May 2019

Against this backdrop, Brigadier Kazuare articulated his administration's policy direction as focusing on the following areas:

- a. Consolidating on the achievements of previous administrations and breaking new grounds;
- b. Motivation of staff through enhancement of welfare provisions;
- c. Improving the welfare and security of corps members; and
- d. Expanding the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) through establishment of more centers, and greater stakeholder involvement for skill and material support.<sup>36</sup>

The DG initiated a number of projects which his successor carried to their logical conclusions. Of these, he is noted for the creativity he brought to mobilisation and orientation strategies of streams 1 and 2 of batches (A, B and C) and sustaining of the routine operations of the scheme despite corps population increase. This is in addition to initiating the move for an upward review of corps members allowance.

Brigadier General Shuaibu Ibrahim whose administration is still ongoing assumed the leadership of the NYSC scheme in May 2019. It is generally agreed that the scheme has been experiencing a new lease of life at all fronts since he took over as DG. On assumption of duty, General Ibrahim rolled out a 5-point policy thrust, with a view to making the NYSC scheme more relevant, in accordance with the provisions of its founding Act. He has been pursuing this vision of his administration vigorously and with fervor. First, General Ibrahim has relentlessly waged war against the presentation of unqualified persons for mobilization for national service, especially by some institutions of higher learning across Africa. This effort has drastically minimized the participation of unqualified persons in national service earned the NYSC accolades from both local and foreign universities.

Another milestone recorded within this short period is the revamping and rebranding of NYSC's Ventures for revenue generation. The quest has resulted in complete turnaround as a result of which NYSC table water and bread are presently out there in the market. In the same vein, the scheme's garment factories in Niger and Anambra states, as well as NYSC farms across the country are being re-invigorated for greater productivity. Under his watch, the scheme has extended its tentacles to the creative industry through the production of NYSC movie titled "NYSC: A Call to Service" and restructuring the NYSC entertainment initiatives which is presently registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission as "NYSC Wood", thereby exposing corps members to the limitless opportunities which abounds in this sector. Through these modest efforts, it is

on record that the NYSC generated over 280 Million Naira for the nation's coffers.<sup>37</sup>

Other spectacular achievements of Brigadier General Ibrahim include but not limited to:

- Pursuance of the upward review of Corps members' allowance from N19,800.00 to N33,000.00.
- Galvanizing Corps members ingenuity towards the national efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic as characterized by production and free distribution of face masks, antiseptic liquid soaps, hand sanitizers, automated disinfection/decontamination machines, sample collection booth, online lessons for students in exit classes nationwide as well as sensitization and distribution of palliatives to indigent persons across the country.
- Creating a well mobilized and sensitized corps members who are happy to serve the country in whatever capacity. The excitement and zeal with which corps members operate in their areas of primary assignments has been associated with the quality of leadership of the scheme and particularly, the DG's commitment to corps members' welfare.
- Establishment of take off Area Offices in the six geographical zones to be manned by GL-17 officers of the scheme.<sup>38</sup>
- Strengthening of inter-agency collaboration between the NYSC and other government agencies and between NYSC and international bodies. Such collaborative efforts are already yielding positive results across the country.

General Ibrahim's take on the NYSC Act stands him out and puts him on track as a peer of Brig. Momoh. This is because there is an intrinsic nexus between the capacity of an organization

<sup>37</sup> Interview with the Director of Special Duties (DG's Office), 10/03/2021, Abuja

<sup>38</sup> B. J. Audu, "Brig. Gen Shuaibu Ibrahim and the reinvigoration of NYSC" in *War, Society and Leadership in Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Brigadier General Shaibu Ibrahim*, C. C. C. Osakwe, O E. Tangban, A. O. Ahmed and L. O. Udeagbala (eds), Kaduna: Nigerian Defence Academy Press, 2020, pp.11-15. D. Akpala, Interview. A. Idoga, Interview. G F. Anyia, Interview. J. Odeh, Interview.

such as the NYSC and the extent to which it adheres to its founding laws. Running an institution without recourse to its enabling laws is tantamount to using electronics without the operator's manual. This is the premise of the DG's titanic confrontation with fake institutions of higher learning in Nigeria and neighboring West Africa countries. Also, his administration has been able to address such nagging issues like mobilisation in error, being mobilised for service after having served up to or over nine months in the military or the paramilitary, and other related problems which were prevalent prior to his advent.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, monthly clearance for corps members being carelessly handled had to stop through the full deployment of information technology. Currently, all such issues are handled electronically following the full digitization and connection of NYSC state offices with the National Directorate Headquarters, Abuja, thereby transparency, accountability and productivity.<sup>40</sup>

Fig. 14: Past Directors General of NYSC, 1973 - Date



<sup>39</sup> D. Akpala, Interview.

<sup>40</sup> D. Akpala, Interview.



Col. A A Ali  
(1973-1975)



Col. SK Makojunla  
(1975-1979)



Col. PK Obasa  
(1979-1983)



Col. Akpan  
(1983-1987)



Col. A. Briamoh  
(1988-1990)



Brig. Gen. H. B.  
Momoh  
(1990-1994)



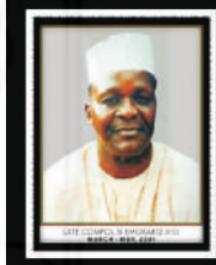
Brig. Gen. S. A.  
Sofoluwe  
(1994-1996)



Col. (later) Brig Gen S. M.  
Dule  
(1996-1999)



Brig Gen K. O. Ogunkoya  
(1999-2000 & 2000-2002)



Police Com S. I. Ewokan  
(2002-2002)



Rev. P. O. Okunromade  
(2002-2002)



Brig. Gen. W. Oki  
(2002-2004)



MAJ GEN SZ KAZAURE, DSS PhD FCSN  
DIRECTOR GENERAL  
NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS

Brig. Gen. S. Z. Kazaure  
(2016-2019)



BRIG GEN S IBRAHIM, BSC RSA MANGDIE PhD MTRN  
INSPECTOR GENERAL  
NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS

Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim  
(2019 - Date)

Against the backdrop of the foregoing, it is clear that Brigadier General Shuaibu Ibrahim has achieved so much within a short time in such a turbulent period. His charismatic leadership during the COVID-19 lockdown is generally believed to be at the very centre of the accolades the scheme received from a broad spectrum of Nigerians and even abroad.<sup>41</sup> For this reasons and many more, a feschriften was recently put together in his honour by his colleagues.<sup>42</sup>

### NYSC Staff as Leaders

Apart from the categories we have examined in the preceding sections, there are career NYSC staff that have made their marks that eminently qualify to be described as leaders of the scheme.

<sup>41</sup> A. Idoga, Interview. G F. Anyia, Interview. We must add that the exemplary performance of corps members in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic across the country would remain a major achievement of the NYSC under the leadership of General Ibrahim.

<sup>42</sup> The book is titled, *War, Society and Leadership in Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Brigadier General Shaibu Ibrahim*, edited by CCC. Osakwe, OE Tangban, AO. Ahmed and HQ.

Though picking a few persons as outstanding staff out of a legion may be problematic, we must add that the contributions of those selected are not in doubt. For our purpose, Chief Gregory Kas Enegwea retired, Mr. Anthony Chinwuba Ani retired, Victoria Ango and all members of the NYSC technical team sent to The Gambia to help establish and run the country's National Youth Service, among others; have distinguished themselves as key drivers of the scheme.

Enegwea joined the services of the NYSC as a career staff in 1976 as Inspector I and rose through to the rank of a Director in January 1989 before retiring on May 14, 2003. Chief Enegwea therefore had an outstanding career that spanned twenty-seven years. At the National Directorate Headquarters, he served in different capacities in directorate positions and was a State Director in old Bendel State, Benue and Bauchi Secretariats.<sup>43</sup> A Director General of the NYSC once described him thus:

As a pathfinder, Chief Enegwea pioneered a number of Community Development Service (CDS) projects comprising the NYSC shoe factory, auto-mechanic workshop, and the production of KOPAVITA (a cassava derivative), borne out of his concern for the post service employment career of serving corps members.<sup>44</sup>

The above have continued to inspire a lot of similar innovations in the area of skills acquisition and preparation of corps members for the challenges of the post service year.

He also pioneered a six-man technical team of the NYSC drawn from the six geopolitical zones, which helped to establish and run The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme which took off in 1996. This was considered a momentous achievement. Prior to the arrival of the team, he was sent for six weeks preliminary investigation of the aim and expectation of the

<sup>43</sup> See the back cover of *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service*. Current Vitae of Gregory Kas Enegwea.

<sup>44</sup> P R. Imienwarin, *Press Release, Pioneer NYSC Member Appointed Administrator of Gambia Youth Service, NYSC/NDHQ/PRD/T.2, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1996*. (Chief Enegwea Personal File).

scheme.<sup>45</sup> As a veteran television programme presenter and short story writer, his celebrated co-authored work titled, *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service* (1993) remains one of the most foundational resource materials on the scheme. At seventy-nine, Chief Enegwea is still widely consulted in his chosen career of the National Youth Service.

Next is Mr. Anthony Chinwuba Ani who joined the NYSC as Agricultural Officer I through transfer of service and was later swopped to the Inspectorate cadre from where he rose through to a Directorate in 2012.<sup>46</sup> He retired from the service of the scheme in 2017. While in service, Ani served in different capacities at the National Directorate Headquarters and at different state Secretariats. Outstandingly, Mr. Ani was the first Director of Information and Communication Technology Department. He has also served as state Director in Kano, Lagos, and Nasarawa, respectively.<sup>47</sup> He is noted for the following innovations:

- a. Provision of ICT facilities to all departments at the National Directorate Headquarters;
- b. Digitalisation of mobilisation processes in a manner that helped to solve the cumbersome nature of the manual one, thereby eliminating the problem of gathering all foreign graduates in Abuja, the risks involved in prospective corps members traveling to get call-up letters, fraudsters getting fake call-up letters, serving by proxy due to lack of picture on call-up letters, among others;
- c. Introduction of biometrics for camp registration;
- d. Introduction of the distribution of kits on platoon basis, rather than gathering corps members at one spot;
- e. Accommodation of corps members before kits collection;
- f. Introduction of drill competition that serves as motivating factor for self-practicing parade by corps members;

<sup>45</sup>P R. Imienwarin, *Press Release, Pioneer NYSC Member Appointed Administrator of Gambia Youth Service*, NYSC/NDHQ/PRD/T.2, 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 1996. (Chief Enegwea Personal File).

<sup>46</sup>See Curriculum Vitae of Mr. Anthony Chinwuba Ani.

<sup>47</sup>National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.. pp.135-136.

- g. Revival of cultural heritage with the late Mr. Frank Ekpunobi through initiation of the ideas of wearing cultural attire/dress by corps members every last Saturdays of the camping programme;
- h. Generating revenue for the scheme, particularly through the NYSC-Private Sector Partnerships and;
- i. Getting Kano State Government to construct one of the best orientation camps in the country in 2007.<sup>48</sup>

The above are significant achievements that have aided in the running of the NYSC and would no doubt go a long way in the overall development of the scheme. Apart from being regarded as a leader of the scheme as a result of the meritorious services he had rendered to the system, he has received commendation from the NYSC Secretariat in Kwara State in 1988, Staff Merit Award in 1993 from the Lagos State NYSC Secretariat, NDHQ NYSC Merit Award in 1993 and Lagos State Commendation, 2010.<sup>49</sup>

There is also Mrs. Victoria Ango who was employed as an NYSC staff on the rank of an Inspector and rose through the ranks to become a Director.<sup>50</sup> A particularly gentle and diligent woman, Mrs. Ango served in different capacities including NYSC state Coordinator in Yobe and Kaduna in 2012, and was also a member of the first batch of NYSC experts deployed to The Gambia in 1996.<sup>51</sup> In her characteristic assiduousness and resilience, Mrs. Ango embarked on corps mobilisation and re-opened camps across the nation in the face of COVID-19, undermining the general fears prevalent at the time and in so doing, demystifying the dreadful pandemic. This feat stands her out as a woman of indomitable courage and substance. She is remembered as the courageous Director of Mobilisation who gave hope, encouragement and courage to

<sup>48</sup> A.C.Ani, c63 years, Retired NYSC Director, Interviewed at Enugu 21<sup>st</sup> December, 2020. *National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary...*pp.134-135.

<sup>49</sup> *National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary...* p.136.

<sup>50</sup> Mrs. Ango Victoria Curriculum Vitae.

<sup>51</sup> *National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary...* pp.221-222.

both corps members and staff at a moment of a great anxiety and uncertainty.

The members of the four batches of the NYSC experts deployed to The Gambia between 1996 and 2004 aptly fit into this category of leaders who built the NYSC scheme. Though some people have argued that politics had a hand in the selection process, the fact remains that this critical assignment which was an aspect of Nigeria's diplomacy, elevated these personalities as patriotic Nigerians. Secondly, since the nomination was done without the knowledge of the officers, and anchored on their resourcefulness, innovativeness and the culture of discipline at work, all of which were expected to be reproduced in the West African sub-region; we can confidently say the process was on merit. Finally, the country to which they were deployed saw them as models and perfect representatives of the NYSC, an image they sustained throughout their stay and even till date as they are still being remembered and celebrated in the Republic of The Gambia. Mbaye further buttresses this point when he declares thus:

The team of NYSC experts sent to The Gambia to help establish and run the Youth Service portrayed well the image of Nigeria and the scheme beyond the shores of the biggest African democracy and economy. They are icons of GNYSS and we see them as icons of NYSC too, because of the symbolic roles they played to the two schemes. They were honored here and we still honor them and the NYSC. No Gambian of the Ministry of Youths and Sports travelled to Nigeria including our minister returns home without going to the famous Yakubu Gowon House to thank successive NYSC Directors General and greet members of the team that are still in service. We still have the contacts of the members of the NYSC team and do call to greet and thank them for the great work and epic representation.<sup>52</sup>

The above observation underscores the critical role played by this team of experts, divided into four batches. The first batch (1996- 1998) comprised: Gregory Kas Enegwea, retired (identified and discussed already) Mr. Anthony A. Enweonwu (of blessed memory), Mr. E. E. Akinola, Mr. Nuhu S. Kwaghe, Solomon O. Ochim (retired) and Mrs. Victoria Ango (also identified and discussed already). The second batch (1998-2000) was made up of Gabriel Ojo Alonge (retired), Habibu O. Kurawa (retired) and the late Miss. Dorothy Ogbudu. The third batch (2000-2002) was composed of Miss. Funke Eniola O. Ambekemo, Chief Gregory Anya and Mr. Adamu Emmanuel, while the fourth and final batch (2002 - January, 2005) was made up of Mr. Aloysius O. Idoga and Miss. Tete Ukpong.<sup>53</sup>

Back home, while some may argue that there is nothing spectacular in sending people to The Gambia, it should be noted that any country that wants to be internationally recognised does not have to necessarily solve all her problems before helping others and commanding respect globally. Emphasising this point, Professor Bolaji Akinyemi notes that:

It is true that we have slums and untarred roads, and it is true that we have social problems. But is there any country that is free of these problems? Is there any country that has finished solving all its social problems before it has to concentrate efforts on creating a nation that commands respect? That's the word: a nation that commands respect.<sup>54</sup>

Therefore, the historic role the team played and the respect they commanded in the founding of the National Youth Service for the Republic of The Gambia qualifies them as leaders in the NYSC.

<sup>53</sup> G.O. Odeh, *Nigeria NYSC's Role in the Founding of The Gambian National Youth Service, 1996- 2004*, pp. 116-123.

<sup>54</sup> G. Umoden, *The Babangida Years*, Lagos: Gbinston, 1992, p.188.

Finally, our list of leaders in the NYSC would be incomplete without a word on those who, for want of a better word we will refer to as “silent achievers”. While the activities of some leaders may be visible, there are always invisible and intangible services and sacrifices that staff of the scheme in various capacities and levels may have made since 1973 that are not immediately noticed or even acknowledged. In other words, leaders abound in every segment of the Directorate, some from the rank of drivers and/or cleaners to the rank of middle cadre administrators. These are our silent achievers without whose efforts the scheme would not have attained its current status as a foremost change agent in contemporary Nigeria.

### The NYSC President's Honours Award

President's Honours Award is an essential component of the NYSC scheme inaugurated and practiced since the era of the pioneering set of the corps members. It is different from Local Government and State Awards. As a deliberate policy targeted at motivation of corps members, the President's Honours Award revolves around four main programmes of the of NYSC namely; Orientation Course, Primary Assignment, Community Development Service (Group and Individual) and the Winding-up and Passing-Out Parade.<sup>55</sup> Since it is a development - engineering programme, the bulk of the award winners are expected to come from rural areas where there are enormous development needs. Thus, the evaluation, monitoring and selection process starts from Orientation Course through the Local Government /States and the best nominee(s) are then forwarded to the NYSC National Directorate Headquarters (now in Abuja) for final screening by the National Selection Committee.<sup>56</sup> To make the selection process objective, the National Selection Committee is composed of independent and multilayered body drawn from vital stakeholders of the nation's

<sup>55</sup> National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary...p.299.

<sup>56</sup> D. Akapala, Interview. National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary...p.299.

economy that are relevant to the mechanics of the NYSC scheme. The Committee is composed of the representatives of the following:

- a. Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (OSGF-Presidency);
- b. NYSC Supervising Ministry (Federal Ministry of Youth Development and Sports);
- c. The Nigerian Army;
- d. The Nigerian Police;
- e. Committee of Vice Chancellors of Nigerian Federal Universities;
- f. Council of Heads of Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology in Nigeria;
- g. Citizenship and Leadership Training Centre (CLTC);
- h. Nigerian Employer Consultative Association (NECA);
- i. National Council of Women Societies (NCWS);
- j. All Nigeria Confederation of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPSS);
- k. Two Ex-(former)NYSC Directors and;
- l. Director, Corps Welfare and Inspectorate Department, NYSC NDHQ.<sup>57</sup>

Central to the above composition is the principle of objectivity as earlier noted, and also quality assurance in the bid to reward deserving corps members that have distinguished themselves from their peers in all the phases of the NYSC programmes. The essence of the honours award is aptly captured by Ibrahim Babangida as follows:

Honours awards and ceremonies of this nature have become part of our national development process. This administration recognises the roles of incentives as they serve as rewards for selfless and patriotic service. But beyond that, awards and ceremonies of

this nature should be seen as fora to carve role models and to expose committed people for other citizens to emulate.<sup>58</sup>

Since the inception of the President's Honours Award in the 1973/ 1974 service year, many Nigerian youths have distinguished themselves in the selfless and patriotic service to the nation and have been rewarded. To avoid the cumbersome task of listing the names of the President's award winners, the table below may serve to provide an idea regarding the subject.

**Table 10:** Number of Winners of President's NYSC Honour's Award Since 1973/1974 Service Year

S/N	Service Year	Total number of winners
1	1973	10
2	1974/75	12
3	1975/76	10
4	1976/77	19
5	1977/78	19
6	1978/79	19
7	1979/80	19
8	1980/81	19
9	1981/82	19
10	1982/83	19
11	1983/84	20
12	1984/85	20
13	1985/86	20
14	1987	20
15	1988	22
16	1989	22
17	1989/1990	20
18	1990/91	25
19	1991/92	20
20	1992/93	26
21	1993/94	25
22	1994/95	26
23	1995/96	24
24	1996	35
25	1997	31
26	1998	33
27	1999	35
28	2001	21
29	2003	29
30	2004	28
31	2005	28
32	2006	34
33	2007	35
34	2008	33

35	2009	32
36	2010	51
37	2011	52
38	2012	55
39	2013	52
40	2014	57
41	2015	60
42	2016	52
43	2017	56
44	2018/2019	110
	Total Awardees	1,374

**Source:** *National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition*, (Abuja: NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, 2013), p.300. *National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition*, (Abuja: NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, 2018), p.297. Office of the Director, Corps Welfare and Inspectorate, NDHQ, Abuja.

From the above table it is clear that out of four million, eight hundred thousand, five hundred and sixty-eight<sup>59</sup> (4,800,568) graduates mobilised since 1973 (i.e.1973-2019), one thousand three hundred and seventy four (1,374) corps members have distinguished themselves. The table further indicates that the award figure and chart has continued to maintain an upward trajectory, a practical demonstration that mobilisation increases competition as the scheme continues to grow. On the whole, the award mechanism of the scheme which is designed to give incentives to graduates in form of cash, employment and scholarship, is a good initiative that should be sustained to bring the best out of Nigerian graduates. While we commend the reward mechanism of the award, we submit that the government should give more attention to it in order to avoid delay and backlogs experienced overtime.

**Conclusion** The chapter has considered three fundamental elements in the leadership contributions of the National Youth Service Corps to national development, namely; the Director Generals, the staff and the corps members. The chapter clarified

<sup>59</sup> Office of the Director of Mobilization, NYSC National Directorate Headquarters (NDHQ), Yakubu Gowon House, Maitama, Abuja-Nigeria.

the notion of leadership and explained how it has been studied over the years. On the basis of this premise the chapter examined the activities of some leaders, NYSC Director Generals, staff and corps members with the aim of ascertaining their roles in the development of the scheme. The chapter isolated General Yakubu Gowon and Professor Adebayo Adedeji as the founding fathers of the scheme. All the eighteen Director Generals that have overseen the affairs of the scheme since inception were x-rayed. We also sampled some staff whose contributions whose contributions significantly impact the scheme. For the corps members, only 1, 374 have distinguished themselves out of 4,800,568 corps members mobilised since 1973. In conclusion, the need to reward excellence in service was emphasized in the operations of social institutions such as the NYSC scheme.

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## Chapter Twelve

# TRENDS IN NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS UNIFORM, 1973-2020

*Zara Emmanuel Kwaghe*

*Department of History & International Studies  
Federal University, Lafia*

### Introduction

Uniforms are essential part of mankind and are widely worn in our society for the purpose of identification by different categories of people. The history of uniform is both interesting and diverse. In Nigeria, uniforms are worn every day by school children distinguishing them from pupils/students of other schools; different security agencies such as the Nigerian Police, the Nigerian Military, the Nigeria Customs Services, Nigeria Immigrations; medical personnel, paramilitary, private security personnel, firefighters, club members, sports men and women, personnel of some corporate organisations and many others. Besides distinction from the rest of the population, uniform promotes a sameness of appearance and homogeneity to an otherwise heterogeneous group of people.<sup>1</sup> However, despite its importance and daily usage, few works on uniform exists; (Craik, Cole, Pfanner and Stephenson)<sup>2</sup> but many have been written on fashion and clothing. Authors peripherally mention uniforms when writing on institutions, organisations or companies that use uniforms. Perhaps the reason for this lack of serious documentation on uniforms is because most people are

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<sup>1</sup> Toni Pfanner, "Military uniforms and the Law of War" *International Review of Red Cross IRRC*

March 2004, Vol.86, No.853, 93.

<sup>2</sup> Craik Jennifer, *Uniform Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression* (Berg Publishers, 2005); Toni Pfanner "Military uniforms and the Law of War" *International Review of Red Cross IRRC* March 2004, Vol.86, No.853; Stephenson, Kate. "A History of British Uniform", PhD Thesis, University of York, January 2016.

used to seeing them being worn every day that they could describe them off head without much ado. Be that as it may, uniforms are integral part of the corporate image of institutions that use them. It reflects not only the history of a group, institution/organisation, but also the institutional values and fosters cooperative image and national pride.<sup>3</sup> It speaks volume to both wearers and non-wearers. It inspires fear, conformity, subversion, discipline, order, love, danger, merriment, social class, etcetera. Such communication clandestinely or overtly affects the way wearers act and how non-wearers respond. As aptly put by Sterman, 'communication of the message of clothing has a very strong societal, social, economic and political influence'.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore pertinent for authors not to mention it peripherally or as the subject of a narrow focus.<sup>5</sup> This chapter focuses on NYSC uniform: its origin, fabrics, design, nuances, importance and current trend. The discourse is hinged on understanding and interpreting the rationale behind the choice of uniform and the changes that have challenged the existence of the uniform overtime. Even though there is abundance of literature on the evolution, achievements, challenges and prospects of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), very minimal attention has been devoted to the history and trend of NYSC uniform. This chapter, therefore, seeks to address this historiographical gap. The study relies mainly on primary data derived from oral interviews and questionnaires distributed to corps members, ex-corps members in different parts of the country and NYSC staff in Plateau State NYSC Secretariat and the NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, Abuja. Besides the primary data, secondary sources on uniform and NYSC were also utilised.

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<sup>3</sup> Sonja Sterman, "The Protective Role of Uniforms and their Communication Power in Society", *TEDI- International Interdisciplinary Journal of Young Scientists from the Faculty of Textile Technology Vol.1* (2011), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Sonja Sterman, "The Protective Role of Uniforms and their Communication Power in Society", 9.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid; 9.

## The Concept and Evolution of Uniform

The concept of 'uniform' is derived from a combination of two Latin words, *uni* (one) and *forma* (form) which means 'one form' or 'having only one form or shape'<sup>6</sup>. It is defined as a special set of clothes with a particular design, colour and insignia that are worn by all members of an organisation or a group at work, or by school children at school, military, police, nurses etcetera.<sup>7</sup> The concept of uniform depicts two major things: unity and togetherness. Evidence of the use of uniform especially among Mesopotamia soldiers dates back to about five thousand years ago.<sup>8</sup> Due to the dominance of warfare in the life of Sumerians in the third Millennium BC, soldiers wore cloaks, fringed kilts and metal helmets as uniforms during war.<sup>9</sup> Many of these soldiers were volunteers or militia armies. A more centralised army began to surface with the emergence of the Roman Empire. At the time of Emperor Augustus, the Roman army numbered more than half a million men. They were professional soldiers wearing clothing and equipment clearly identifying them as belonging to it.<sup>10</sup> Also, soldiers made extensive use of heraldic signs and symbols for identification in the Middle Ages, the period of the Crusaders and the Renaissance. However, with the establishment of large armies in Europe after the Peace of Westphalia and the development in military equipment in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the need for distinctive uniform on the battlefield spread throughout Europe.<sup>11</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century, the concept of military uniform became acceptable in all European armies. It suffices to mention that through colonialism, the traditions of European armies influenced the military history of the United States and other

<sup>6</sup>[www.etymonline.com/word/uniform](http://www.etymonline.com/word/uniform). Accessed November 27, 2020.

<sup>7</sup>[www.lexico.com/definition/uniform](http://www.lexico.com/definition/uniform); Toni Pfanner, "Military uniforms and the Law of War" ..., 95.

<sup>8</sup>Toni Pfanner, "Military uniforms and the Law of War" ..., 95.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid; 95.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid; 98.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid; 98.

<sup>12</sup> "History of U.S Army Uniform" <https://www.military.com/army/uniforms.html>. Accessed September 20, 2020.

nations of the world especially Africa.<sup>12</sup> Today, despite different geographical environments, the similarities in military uniforms, accessories and insignia are easily recognisable.

The use of uniforms in Europe was not peculiar to the military. It was also a common feature in the educational sector. The first recorded use of school uniforms is in England in 1222.<sup>13</sup> Students wore a robe like-outfit known as *cappa clausa*-introduced by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The 1307-1308 account of Westminster School also recorded that pupils were provided with gowns in school.<sup>14</sup> Same was also said of Winchester in the school statutes. As observed by Stephenson;

Over time such garments transformed into the gowns worn by academics today, which preserve some of the length and style but became open at the front and developed more decorative sleeves from the late fifteenth century onwards.<sup>15</sup>

It was only in the sixteenth century that students began to wear modern uniforms at a larger scale. By the eighteenth century, it became a way of life in Britain and in other countries of the world.<sup>16</sup> The gowns were replaced by the blue jacket. Blue and yellow was used for designing uniforms because they were the cheapest dyes at that time. The oldest school uniform still in use today in Britain is that of Christ Hospital School in Sussex.<sup>17</sup> The uniform has remained unchanged for over 460 years.<sup>18</sup> In the United States, the use of school uniforms began in the early nineteenth century for the parochial and private schools. By the 1980s, it was introduced in public schools. France introduced

<sup>13</sup> Meleen Michele "History of School Uniforms"[https://kids.lovetoknow.com/wiki/History\\_of\\_School\\_Uniforms](https://kids.lovetoknow.com/wiki/History_of_School_Uniforms)

<sup>14</sup> Stephenson, Kate. "A History of British Uniform" ..., 24.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 25.

<sup>16</sup> Pandey Krishna Babu "Who and Why Invented the Uniform?"<https://www.listsworld.com/who-and-why-invented-the-school-uniform>.

<sup>17</sup> "The History of Corporate Uniforms"  
<https://www.wiseworksafe.com/blog/view/the-history-of-corporate-uniforms>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

school uniform only between 1927 - 1968 and Poland 1988.<sup>19</sup> In 1834, Russia under Tsar Nicolas I(1796-1855) first introduced a female court uniform called a "Frenchified sarafan" to be worn by women at the court.<sup>20</sup> The dress continued to exist at the Russian court without modification until 1917.<sup>21</sup>

Workplace uniforms started appearing in Europe between the 1500s and 1800s<sup>22</sup>. Court servants were given gowns bearing the colours, forms and decorations of the house the servant belonged to. The uniforms signified the rank and distinction of the wearer as well as the social ranks, ambitions and financial status of the master. The uniform also bore the coat of arms of the household in the style of a badge. Badges very quickly became a form of, or addition to, uniform as it gave clear indication of status, affiliation or occupation.<sup>23</sup> As industrial revolution gave rise to industries and corporate organisations, the use of uniforms moved from the courts to industries and corporate organisations mainly to distinguish employees from the rest of the people. The 1880s saw the first Thomas Cook staff also known as Interpreters, wearing 'long dark blue coats with peaked black hats while working in train stations across the United Kingdom, Europe, Alexandria, Beirut and New York.<sup>24</sup> It was the European colonisation of most parts of the world such as the Americas, Asia and Africa the advanced the spread of the use of uniform in the schools, security and medical sectors, etcetera. In Africa for example, the history of modern uniform was traced to the imposition of European colonial rule. European colonial powers directly enforced her culture on the Africans. One of the European cultures imposed on Africans was the European styled uniform, which was adopted in schools, security and

<sup>19</sup>Pandey Krishna Babu "Who and Why Invented the Uniform?"

<sup>20</sup>Raisa Kirsanova "Russia: History of Dress" <https://fashion-history.lovetoknow.com/clothing-around-the-world/russia-history-dress>.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> "The History of Corporate Uniforms"  
<https://www.wiseworksafe.com/blog/view/the-history-of-corporate-uniforms>.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

medical services. More so, the introduction of western education by European Christian missionaries facilitated the adoption of school uniform. School uniforms were used to differentiate children at the missionary schools from the ones at home. Its use in schools was prevalent during the colonial and continued since the attainment of independence. Today, the use of school uniforms is more prevalent in Africa than anywhere else in the world.<sup>25</sup> The same could be said of uniforms used by the armed forces, emergency service organisations (police, firefighters), prisons and medical personnel etcetera. They were all introduced to Africa by Europeans during colonialism.

### **Importance of Uniforms**

The importance of uniform goes beyond identification, creation of similarities, covering the body from harsh weather, accident and other negative occurrences. Uniform ensures that a company's branding is etched on the customer's mind. It advertises the company and helps the customer remember the company. It also builds trust between the company and the customer. Uniform fosters a sense of pride, unity and solidarity among members. This helps to create an atmosphere where team work is encouraged and performance is increased. Uniform distinguishes members of certain organisation from the rest of the public. Uniform communicates power, economic status and what kind of services to expect from the wearers - for example, soldiers, police officers, nurses' and lawyers' uniforms.<sup>26</sup> In the military for instance, uniform is worn for identification, pride, creating bonds and *an esprit de corps*.<sup>27</sup> Soldiers are obliged to wear their uniform with a sense of discipline, pride and order.

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<sup>25</sup> Meleen Michele "History of School Uniforms"

<sup>26</sup> Sonja Sterman, "The Protective Role of Uniforms and their Communication Power in Society", 12.

<sup>27</sup> Toni Pfanner, "Military uniforms and the Law of War" 5. 99.

...discipline is judged in part, by the manner in which a soldier wears a prescribed uniform, as well as the individual's appearance. Therefore, a neat and well-groomed appearance by all soldiers is fundamental to the army and contributes to building the pride and *esprit* essential to an effective military force.<sup>28</sup>

Wearing uniform in any other way other than the prescribed manner attracts punishment or fine as the case may be. Most organisations/ institutions that wear uniform have regulations on uniform policy and unlawful wearing of the uniform by members and non-members could attract penal laws. A soldier as posited by Pfanner for example, could be punished for unlawful wearing of a specific military uniform. 'Military regulations usually prescribed the appearance of uniforms and insignia and how they are to be properly worn by officers and enlisted personnel of the armed forces'.<sup>29</sup> It is equally wrong for civilians to wear military uniform of any kind. In fact, the Nigeria Criminal Code Act **Section 110 and 111** states the following;

### **110. Unlawfully wearing the uniform of the armed forces**

Any person who

[L.N. 112 of 1964. 1967 No. 27.]

(1) not being a person serving in any of the armed forces of Nigeria, wears the uniform or any part of the uniform of such forces, or any dress having the appearance or bearing any of the regimental or other distinctive marks of such uniforms; or

(2) not being a person holding any office or authority under the Government of Nigeria or of any part thereof, wears any uniform or distinctive badge or mark or carries any token calculated to convey the impression

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>29</sup> Nigerian Criminal Code Act. Chapter 12.

that such person holds any office or authority under the government, is guilty of an offence and is liable to imprisonment for one month or to a fine of ten naira, unless he proves that he had the permission of the President or of the Governor of a State to wear such uniform or dress, badge or mark or to carry such token: Provided that this section of this Code shall not apply to the wearing of any uniform or dress in the course of a stage play or in any bona fide public entertainment.

**110. Selling, etc., uniform, etc., to unauthorised persons** Any person who sells or gives any uniform, or part of a uniform, or any dress, badge or mark, as in section 110 of this Code to any person who is not authorised to wear the same, is guilty of an offence and is liable to the penalties prescribed in the said section.<sup>30</sup>

### **History of NYSC and the Choice of Uniform**

The National Youth Service Corps was established by the military government of General Yakubu Gowon in 1973 as a post-civil war interventionist agency. It is a one year compulsory programme for Nigerian youths, designed to promote the cause of national unity and speed up the healing processes of Nigeria after the thirty-month civil war. The objectives of the Scheme include among others: inculcation of discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work and of patriotic and loyal service to the nation in any situation they find themselves; to develop in the Nigerian youths, attitude of mind acquired through shared experience and suitable training which will make them more amenable to mobilisation in the national interest.<sup>31</sup>

The Scheme has four cardinal programmes designed to equip the youths with strength, knowledge, skill and comradeship. The programmes are Orientation Course, a three-week course comprising physical training, intellectual

<sup>30</sup> *Nigeria Criminal Code Act, Chapter 12*

<sup>31</sup> *National Youth Service Corps Yearbook 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition, 2018/20*

activities, sports and social event in a regimented environment; Primary Assignment which gives the Corps members the opportunity to contribute to national development, Community Development Service - a package of activities initiated by Corps members to address felt needs of their host communities and Winding up/Passing –out Programme - the final phase of the service year during which Corps members are reassembled to exchange ideas and reappraise the Scheme.<sup>32</sup>

As the founding fathers designed the above programmes, they were also not oblivious of the fact that such programmes would not only exert a lot of energy from Corps members but would also be rigorous; thus the need to fashion out a suitable uniform that would withstand the pressure of the different programmes and at the same time give them an identity. Bearing in mind the para- military component of the Orientation Course and the principal objectives of the Scheme which is "... to emphasise the spirit of oneness and brotherhood of all Nigerians irrespective of cultural, social backgrounds and to promote national unity and development"<sup>33</sup>, the founding fathers especially Professor Adebayo Adedeji and the pioneer director, Colonel (Dr.) Ahmadu A. Ali opted for a military-style uniform to enable Corps members participate freely in the programmes and to also avoid coming to camp with different kinds of outfit thereby giving room for the promotion of affluence and other whims rather than national unity.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, since the uniforms were meant to be worn throughout the one-year service period, extra care was taken to get fabrics that have properties to withstand daily wears in various weather conditions and to take care of emergency situations.<sup>35</sup> Based on the above, the founding fathers decided to

<sup>32</sup> National Youth Service Corps Yearbook 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition, 24.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel O. Asein. *Call to Serve: Twenty Years of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme 1973- 1993*(Ibadan: Sam Bookman Educational and Communication Services, 1993), 23.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Sonja Sterman, "The Protective Role of Uniforms and their Communication Power in Society", 10.

go for the carton colour (brown) khaki fabric, white soft vest and jungle boots which could resist wear and tear. Khaki (means dust-coloured) fabric is a special fabric that originated from India in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>36</sup> Khaki is generally made from cotton, however, there are still some that are made from synthetic fibers combined with cotton. It was originally used for military clothing because of its relatively light characteristics which is suitable for fighting or marching. Its brown colour makes it easy for soldiers to conceal themselves without fear of being detected in war front.<sup>37</sup> The khaki fabric is suitable for all ages, men and women, environment and weather condition.<sup>38</sup> It was its suitability that contributed to it being chosen for NYSC uniform.

### The NYSC Uniform

The NYSC uniform which is also referred to as kits include the following: khaki trousers and shirt; crested vest; white vest; a pair of white shorts; a pair of zebra-striped socks; a pair of jungle boots; a pair of canvas; belt and face cap. The complete uniform is also called seven-over-seven (7/7). The garment factories in Minna and Calabar are responsible for producing the uniforms. As posited earlier, the texture of the uniform was chosen because of their suitability for the kind of programmes drawn for Corps members. The paramilitary component of the Orientation Course involves military drills and parades, physical education activities, Man O'War type leadership and citizenship training...<sup>39</sup> The uniform enables Corps members to comfortably participate in the military drills, parades and physical education with ease. The khaki trouser is sewn with four large pockets on the back and either sides of the trouser while the shirt is long

<sup>36</sup> "The concept of Khaki fabric? And their salient features in the uniform industry"  
<http://vinatevsc.com/news/textile-new/the-concept-of-khaki-fabric-and-their-salient-features-in-the-uniform-industry-803.html>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Gregory Enegwea and Gabriel Umoden (eds) *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service* (Lagos: Gabumo Publishing Company, 1993), 54.

sleeved with front buttons, two front pockets and shoulder straps. The initial colour of the khaki fabric used was carton brown but in recent times it has changed to different shades of brown and now green.<sup>40</sup>

Even though the colour of the fabric has been changing overtime, the style and design of the uniform still remains the same (see Fig. 1). The white crested vest is a round neck T-shirt with two green stripes on the neck and on each of the short sleeves (unlike the first generation NYSC crested vest which had collar) (see Fig 2 and 2.1). The acronym NYSC is boldly written on the T-shirt with the crest embossed below. The crest is the emblem of the Scheme (see Fig.3). It is made up of three dominant objective symbols: "the national flag enclosed within the outline, in black, of the map of Nigeria with a torch standing in the background. Two enclosing concentric circles define the margin of the crest with the corps motto "Service and Humility" imprinted in black against the golden band in the lower section and the full corps scheme name in bold caps in the upper arc".<sup>41</sup>

The symbols on the emblem are surely not without meaning. The gold within the concentric circles represents cheerfulness, while the black of the circles and of the torch stands for 'dedication' and 'discipline'. The torch symbolises leadership roles and finally, the white background and the map of Nigeria, stands for 'peace and unity' which is Nigeria's motto.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Mrs. Ruth Bakka, Director Procurement at the NYSC Headquarters, Garki Abuja on August 10,2020.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 24.

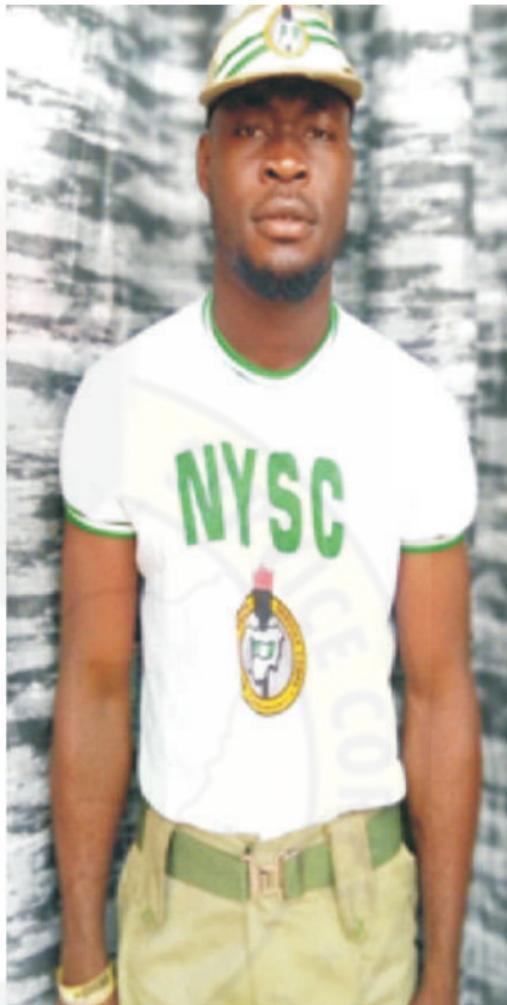
<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 24.

**Fig. 15.1:** Serving Corps Member in NYSC Khak Uniform Circa



Source: Field Work, September 8, 2020.

**Fig. 15.2:** Serving Corps Member in NYSC Crested Vest Circa 2020



Source: Field Work, September 8, 2020.

Fig. 15: Corps members in NYSC crested vest circa 1990 (Note the deep green colour as opposed to the one above)



**Source:** Authors Archives, 2020

Fig. 16.1: NYSC Crest

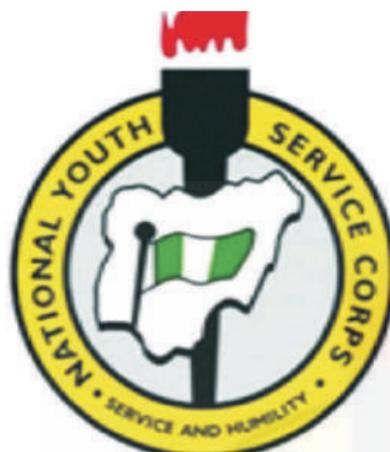


Fig. 16.2: NYSC Face Cap



Source:

<https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2019/05/21/>.

Accessed, July 23, 2020

Source: Field Work, September 8, 2020.

The NYSC face cap is one of the seven uniforms used by Corps members. The style of the cap has also changed overtime. The very first NYSC face cap was made of net-like fabric with the NYSC crest embossed on its top, but it is now made with khaki fabric to perhaps suit the khaki trouser and shirt. Wearing of the face cap is compulsory and is not to be worn facing backwards. The only official time the NYSC face cap can be worn facing backwards is during Man-O-War parade. The top of the face cap has the flag of NYSC sewn on it instead of only the crest as it used to be. The flag is another NYSC accoutrements. The flag is a "two diagonal green stripes superimposed on a cream background colour against which the NYSC crest is mounted". The cream background colour symbolises 'Youth and Service', green colour- 'growth and agriculture' and the white colour stands for 'peace and unity'.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 24.

Fig. 17: First NYSC Face Cap



Source: <https://www.nairaland.com/2698283/what-nysc-cap-looked-like>.

Accessed July 23, 2020

Fig. 18: NYSC Jungle Boot



Source: <http://www.pointblanknews.com/artopn1971.html>  
Accessed July 23, 2020

The jungle boot is one of the iconic symbols of NYSC. It is designed like military boot to match the khaki uniform and to withstand both wear and tear and the harsh Nigerian weather. Its top is made of brown khaki and the sole is made of durable rubber. Corps members are expected to wear it for parade, Man' O'War, Community Development Services (CDS), Endurance Trek and any other NYSC function. The NYSC belt is one of the accessories needed to complement the NYSC khaki trouser and shirt. It is used to hold up the trousers and add beauty to the uniform. Just like the other uniforms, the belt has also changed

with time. The previous belt was made from khaki fabric with round buckle and 'NYSC' inscribed on the surface of the buckle; while the present one is green in colour with flat buckle.

**Fig.19:** NYSC Belt



**Source:** Field Work, 2020.

### **Where and How to wear the NYSC Uniform**

NYSC has rules and regulations governing the use of uniforms by Corps members and unauthorised members of the society. The National Youth Service Corps Act, Chapter 84 section 14 entitled "Illegal wearing of service corps uniform" states as follows:

Any person who, not being a person serving in the service corps or duly authorised so to do, wears the uniform or any part of the uniform of the service corps is

guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine of N1,000 or to imprisonment for a term of six months or to both such fine and imprisonment.<sup>44</sup>

The above law clearly condemns the wearing of the uniform or any part of it by non-Corps members. Just as the law frowns at illegal wearing of service corps uniform, NYSC Dress Code rules frowns at Corps members wearing any other uniform for NYSC activities other than the approved uniforms. The NYSC Dress Code states where and how to wear the uniform in the following terms;

- a. No Corps member is allowed to shape his/her khaki to slim fit, crop tops, or three-quarter shorts.
- b. The hijab isn't part of the kits given to Corps members by the NYSC.
- c. The use of skirts/or gowns by Corps members during camping is not acceptable.<sup>45</sup>

The approved NYSC dress code for all activities are as follows:

### (i) Orientation Camp

The orientation camp is where most NYSC activities take place and all Corps members are expected to dress in a particular manner depending the occasion. Violation of dress code could lead to sanctioning. The regular approved camp wear is white short, white round neck T-shirt, white socks and white canvas. It is worn to everywhere – parade, drills, kitchen, seminar, camp market etcetera. Immediately after registration, corps members are to put away their mufti and put on the approved dress for staying in the camp. They are also required to put on their NYSC state tag at all times. The NYSC face cap is to be worn along with the white short and shirt. It is to be worn facing front and not backwards. Waist pouch is allowed for keeping of phones and other valuables but not supplied by NYSC.

<sup>44</sup>The National Youth Service Corp Act, Chapter 84

<sup>45</sup> <https://nyscinfo.com/nysc-dress-code-for-all-activities-camp-ppa-cds-pop/>

Fig. 20: Regular Camp Uniform



Source: <https://theglittersonline.com.ng/corps/>

Accessed July 23, 2020

## (ii) Swearing-in-Ceremony

The dress code for swearing in ceremony is the NYSC ceremonial outfit which is popularly known as six-over-seven (6/7). For this purpose, Corps members are to put on six out of the seven items given to them – NYSC face cap, crested vest, NYSC belt, khaki trouser, NYSC zebra-striped socks and jungle boot. The seventh wear which is the khaki shirt is not needed. The crested vest must be tuck-in at all times and the base of the khaki trouser tuck into the socks and if possible padded. Swearing-in-ceremony marks the formal commencement of the Orientation Course. It involves the administration of the oath of allegiance to participants and their declaration of the National Pledge.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Gregory Enegewa and Gabriel Umoden (eds) *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service*, 54

Fig. 21: NYSC Swearing-in-Ceremony



Source: <https://thenationonlineeng.net/nysc-swearing-in-ceremony/>  
Accessed July 23, 2020

### (iii) Man-O-War Parade

The uniform for Man-O-war parade is – seven-over-seven (7/7) that is the complete uniform. It is the only official time NYSC cap is allowed to be turned backwards. Apart from Man-O-War parade, the complete uniform is also worn during endurance trek. Complete uniform is used because of the paramilitary drills and Man-O-War training involved. The complete allows free movement for Corps members during training.

**Fig. 22:** Man- O- War activities at Benue State Orientation Camp, 2016 Batch B.



**Source:** NYSC HQ Nigeria [https://twitter.com/nysc\\_ng/status/829323435495059458](https://twitter.com/nysc_ng/status/829323435495059458).

Accessed July 23, 2020

#### **(iv) Passing out of camp Day/Winding-up and Passing out Parade (POP)**

The dress code for Winding-up and Passing out parade is the same as that of the swearing-in- ceremony, that is 6/7- khaki trouser, crested vest, belt, zebra-striped socks, face cap and jungle boots.

**Fig. 22.1:** Passing out parade at Ilorin Kwara State circa. 1990 (Note the colour difference with the current khaki uniform below).



**Source:** Author's archives.

**Fig. 22.2:** Passing out parade



**Source:** <https://guardian.ng/features/nysc-expelled-graduates-and-dress-code-controversy/>

Accessed July 23, 2020

### (v) Community Development Service (CDS)

The CDS is an important NYSC official activity. It is held once a week and it is expected that Corps members appear in their 6/7-khaki trouser and shirt, crested vest or white T-shirt, belt, face cap and jungle boots. Slippers, cover shoes, skirts etcetera are not allowed. Any Corps member found violating the CDS dress code would not be allowed to participate in the activities. Sometimes, they are sent back home to go and change. Failure to comply may lead to punishment such as not being cleared for the monthly allowance.

## Significance of NYSC Uniform and Its influence on Corps Members and the Public

The NYSC uniform as remarked by the Director General, Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim is a mark of identity, honour, solidarity and pride of the Scheme.<sup>47</sup> Many Nigerian graduates look forward to wearing the uniform to serve their fatherland. In fact, mere wearing of the uniform suggests to the public that the wearer is a graduate of a university or polytechnic. This confers prestige to Corps members especially in the eyes of the public.<sup>48</sup> The uniform has played important role in shaping the opinion of the public about Corps members. First, the public see them as government representatives and for that reason treat them with respect. They are also seen as agents of development because through the Community Development Services, communities benefit from Corps members' projects.<sup>49</sup>

The uniform also makes the general public to readily accept Corps members into their host communities. The sensitisation programmes conducted by the Scheme before the deployment of

<sup>47</sup> Selected Speeches and Strides of the 18<sup>th</sup> NYSC Director -General, Brig. Gen S. Ibrahim (Abuja: The Special Duties Department, NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, 2020), 221.

<sup>48</sup> Interview held with Ginika Okoroafor Ex- Corps Member 2012/2013 on July 21,2020, State of Service- Akwa Ibom; Interview held with Kwembe, Comfort N. Ex- Corp Member 2016/ 2017 on July 21,2020, at Jos, State of Service- Plateau state, Age: 30.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with John Tikon. Ex-Corps Member 2014/ 2015 on July 21,2020, at Jos State of Service- Niger, Age 30+; Interview held with Egonu Calistar. Ex- Corps Member 2018/2019 on July 21,2020, State of Service- Plateau State.

Corps members to their place of primary assignment help the public to assist Corps members and treat them with honour, concern and respect.<sup>50</sup> It is important to note that NYSC uniform is seen all year round, worn by Corps members in all the 774 Local Government Areas and state capitals in Nigeria. This has helped in presenting the Scheme in a positive manner amongst the populace. Therefore, its influence on the general public cannot be overemphasised. Moreover, the attractiveness of the uniform helps to motivate younger children to aspire to be like the Corps members living around them or teaching in their schools. "The uniform makes one who isn't educated desire to go to school or further his/her education".<sup>51</sup> Their desire to one-day wear the NYSC uniform encourages them to study hard. In fact, almost all the data collected from ex- and serving Corps members agreed that the NYSC uniform is attractive and was one of the motivating factors that encouraged them to aspire to serve. They were eager to wear the prestigious NYSC khaki uniform. Ikegh, an ex-corps member said; "I had always wanted to put on the NYSC uniform and be recognised also as a Corps member".<sup>52</sup> Udu also opined that "NYSC uniform has influenced the general society or public by upgrading the mindset of the youths to know the importance of education".<sup>53</sup>

The uniform encourages friendliness and favour from the populace. People are quick to greet and familiarise themselves with Corps members when they see them in the street, market place, malls, worship centres etcetera. Slangs like '*'wee'*', '*'waa'*', '*'corpershion'*', *'otondo*', are said to the Corps members in a bid to be friendly and start up a conversation even when they have not

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Mrs Ruth Bakka, Director Procurement, NYSC National Directorate Headquarters. August 10, 2020; Caroline Embu, State Coordinator, NYSC Secretariat Jos, Plateau State. July 2020.

<sup>51</sup> Interview held with Bienose Clementina Ehi. Ex- Corps Member, 2017/2018, on July 21, 2020, at Jos State of Service-Plateau State, Age: 31+.

<sup>52</sup> Interview held with Agatha Ikegh Ex-Corps Member 2017/2018 on July 21, 2020. State of Service- Plateau State. Age 30+

<sup>53</sup> Interview held with Udu, Jessica Chiamaka 2019/2020 on July 23, 2020 at Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Jos. State of service- Plateau state. Age 20+

met the Corps members before in their entire life. It is this acceptance by the public that makes people render help or direct a Corps member to their place of primary assignment. It is only on rare occasions that evil-minded people take advantage of a Corps member's ignorance to mislead him/her with the intention to harm them.

To the Corps members, NYSC uniform is their identity. The uniform announces them wherever they go. It allows them the opportunity to freely mingle with their host communities and meet new people. The uniform behooves Corps members to be responsible and disciplined since the public expect a lot from them due to the general acceptance of the Scheme. Itodo, an ex-Corps member succinctly narrates;

Being an NYSC member brought a lot of expectation from the society especially at my place of primary assignment, and I rose to the challenge and became the best Corps teacher when we passed out. NYSC made a lot of people see me as a role model and that actually made me to live a decent life with the thought that I am being watched by people and seen as a role model.<sup>54</sup>

As university/polytechnic graduates, the society expects them to be intelligent, of good behaviour, and capable of handling any task given to them. Thus, they are respected and seen as role models especially when they appear in their uniforms which is the first point of communication between the Corps members and the people. The Corps members' personality and individuality are subsumed in the uniform. Therefore, it is the responsibility of Corps members to stand out in their respective places of primary assignment. Itodo's experience as a Corps member is further explained in the lines below:

<sup>54</sup>Interview held with Itodo Unekwu – Ex- Corps member 2012/2013 on July 21, 2020.  
State of Service- Osun State

Outside my place of primary assignment especially the environment where I live, people (neighbours and children) respected me, so I was careful not to leave a bad example. I made sure my bears were well shaved at all times, my spoken English according to standard, my dressing was never out of point. This was to make sure that, the people who had utmost respect for me were not disappointed and to enable them struggle to also clad the uniform.<sup>55</sup>

The uniform also opens door of opportunities and favour for Corps members. People consciously or unconsciously offer help to Corps members once they are seen with the uniform. Many members of the host communities are willing to assist Corps members by offering them accommodation, food items and many other things they might need while serving in their community. The uniform accords the Corps member 'special passage which under normal circumstances would not be possible'.<sup>56</sup> As observed by an ex-Corps member; "during my service year, I was given free ride from Osogbo to Ore in Ondo state and free ride back to Osogbo. I was given clearance to barb free in a barbing salon throughout my service year".

It is noteworthy to mention that due to the significance of the uniform in engendering ethno-cultural integration, some unqualified persons otherwise referred to as fake Corps members often parade themselves in NYSC uniform as Corps members, deceiving the populace and giving the Scheme a bad name. However, in recent times, the Management of the Scheme has stepped up measures to block presentation of unqualified persons for mobilisation.<sup>57</sup> In the 2019 Batch 'B' Stream II Orientation course for instance, many fake graduates were

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<sup>55</sup> Itodo Unekwu.

<sup>56</sup> Interview held with Okeanyaego Ifeyinwa Courtney – Ex-Corps member 2019/2020 on July 24,2020, at National Institute for Pharmaceutical Research and Development (NIPRD), Abuja. State of Service- FCT.

<sup>57</sup> Selected Speeches and Strides of the 18<sup>th</sup> NYSC Director-General Brig. Gen S. Ibrahim

arrested, leading to a drastic reduction in the number of persons claiming to be graduates of some African institutions.<sup>58</sup>

## Trends in NYSC Uniforms

The current trends surrounding the iconic NYSC uniforms have led to many Corps members either altering the design of the uniform to suit the trending fashion or demanding for a change in the uniforms. Factors such as economy, religion, fashion and sometimes culture are responsible for this development. As earlier stated, the fabrics used for the sewing of the NYSC uniforms have depreciated overtime mainly due to poor economic growth and corruption. Nigeria's exportation of crude oil helped to create wealth that account for about 60% of government revenue but the nation's inability to diversify and improve other sectors of the economy with the oil wealth accrued affected the growth and prosperity of industries in Nigeria<sup>59</sup>. The textile industry which was one of the growing industries before the nation's total dependence on oil collapsed due to lack of raw materials and other salient factors. Cotton, being the main raw materials for textile industry, was no longer available in large quantity because agriculture was neglected. Also, high operative cost and frequent power failures further did serious damage to textile industry in Nigeria. The result of the above was drop in the production capacity and eventual shut down of many of the factories.<sup>60</sup> The closure of the textile industries such as the Kaduna Textile Limited, Kano Textile Printers; Kano Textile Industry, Bagauda Textile Industry, Arewa Textiles etcetera, led to major distributors importing cheap and substandard fabrics from overseas especially China

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Zara Emmanuel Kwaghe "Mismanagement of Petro-Dollar in Nigeria: An Albatross to National Progress and Development since 1956" in Egodi Uchendu (ed) *Nigeria Resource Wars* (Wilmington, Delaware: Vernon Press, 2020), 560.

<sup>60</sup> "Textile-Nigeria's Dying Goldmine", <https://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/5973/textile-nigeria-s-dying-goldmine>

to flood the Nigerian market.<sup>61</sup> These fabrics gradually began to replace the original and durable fabrics that once adorned the textile market<sup>62</sup>. It is on the above premise that the NYSC uniforms are now sewn with substandard fabrics<sup>63</sup>. In order to maximise profit, contractors responsible for purchasing the NYSC uniform go for cheaper and substandard fabrics imported from China which dominate the Nigerian market today<sup>64</sup>. Little wonder NYSC uniforms, especially the khaki, have been depreciating in colour and quality overtime (see Fig 8 and 10). The same goes for the vests, shorts and belts. To further buttress the above, an ex-corps member opined:

The people given the contract of sewing the uniform go to the market to purchase low quality material thereby making it to wear out on time and even begin fading before the end of the three-week orientation camp.<sup>65</sup>

The manner in which the uniforms are sewn is another factor that has contributed to the current modification of the uniform by Corps members to suit their sense of fashion. The uniforms are sewn in different shapes and sizes; large, small and medium. Corps members given over-sized uniforms are allowed to shape them but not to slim fit, crop top or three-quarter shorts. In spite of the above rules, some corps members go out of their way to shape their khaki to slim fit or to three-quarter shorts. Some even go as far as purchasing the khaki fabric from the market to sew their own style of uniform because of the poor sewing and

<sup>61</sup>Salihu Maiwada and Elisha Renne "The Kaduna Textile Industry and the Decline of Textile Manufacturing in Northern Nigeria, 1955–2010" in *Textile History*, 44 (2), 171–196, November 2013, 183-184; Kasim Madugu, Yusuf, "Collapse of textile industry in Nigeria: a study of Kano State, Nigeria", M.A dissertation submitted to the School of Postgraduate Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, April, 2019, 3.

<sup>62</sup>Salihu Maiwada and Elisha Renne "The Kaduna Textile Industry and the Decline of Textile Manufacturing in Northern Nigeria, 1955–2010", 184.

<sup>63</sup>Interview with Mrs. Ruth Bakka and Mrs. Caroline Embu, State Coordinator, NYSC Secretariat Jos, Plateau State, July 22, 2020.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid, 185.

<sup>65</sup>Bienose Clementina Ehi

inferior texture of the khaki uniform given to them. The poor sewing could be attributed to the short period given to garment factories responsible for sewing some of the uniforms. In a March 2020 report the Cross River Garment Factory was given only eight days to deliver eight thousand NYSC uniforms.<sup>66</sup> Even though they promised to accomplish the task, eight days was too short a time to allow them do quality job. It is probably such quick and urgent sewing that makes the uniform not to be well sewn. Also in August 2020, NYSC reported that its garment factory in Minna produced 57,000 corps members' kits within three months. 12,000 khaki suits, 15,000 physical exercise shorts, 15,000 crested vests and 15,000 plain vests were produced.<sup>67</sup>

In recent times, religion has equally played a very prominent role in challenging the NYSC uniform as it relates to the female gender. It suffices to mention that the NYSC uniform was not designed on the basis of gender or religion. As earlier noted, the choice of military-style uniform was influenced by the kind of programme designed for Corps members. Bearing in mind the military influence of the Scheme, the uniforms were meant to be gender-neutral. For the past forty-seven years, the uniforms were worn by Corps members without contest. However, some female corps members from both the Christian and Islamic faith began to protest against the compulsory use of trousers and shorts by both male and female Corp members during the one-year mandatory service.<sup>68</sup> They argued that it was against their religion for females to wear trousers or shorts as the case may be. Thus, for above reason they preferred to wear skirts rather than trousers. Apart from protest on wearing of skirts, female Muslim

<sup>66</sup>Imran Musa "Cross Rivers Garment Factory Contracted to make 8000 NYSC Uniform in eight days" , accessed 23/07/2020.<https://allschool.com.ng/cross-rivers-garment-factory-contracted-to-make-8000-nysc-uniform-in-eight-days/>. March 15,2020.

<sup>67</sup> Adetola Bademosi -Ab. "NYSC garment factory produces 57,000 corps kits in three months <https://tribuneonlineng.com/nysc-garment-factory-produces-57000-corps-kits-in-three-months/>

<sup>68</sup>Queen Esther Iroanusi "Group wants skirts included in NYSC uniform" *Premium Times*, January 15, 2020.<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/372799-group-wants-skirts-included-in-nysc-uniform.html>. Accessed, July 23,2020.

Corps members have also advocated for the inclusion of hijab as part of NYSC uniform which has been granted<sup>69</sup>.

Those female Corps members who felt that wearing of trousers evoke immorality and that it is against God's will for females to wear the approved khaki trouser and shorts at the Orientation Camp resorted to changing their trousers to skirt and wearing white skirts on top of their white shorts for drills. In a recent development in Ebonyi State Permanent Orientation camp, Macgregor College Afikpo, two female corps members namely, Okafor Love Obianuju, with call-up number EB/19C/0523; and Odji Oritsetsolaye, with call-up number EB/19C/0530 were de-kitted for refusal to wear the NYSC approved uniforms. One of the de-kitted female corps member, Okafor Love Obianuju, in suit No. PHC/AI/CS/93/2019 dated 29th November, 2019 sued NYSC to enforce her fundamental rights.<sup>70</sup> The whole phenomena elicited a lot of debate from the general public and Corps members which would be discussed in this chapter.

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<sup>69</sup> Olaleye Aluko "NYSC approves white, shoulder-length hijab for corps members" *Punch Newspaper*, October 1, 2019. <https://punchng.com/nysc-approves-white-shoulder-length-hijab-for-corps-members/> Accessed, July 23, 2020; "NYSC And Hijab Controversies" *The Pointer*, November 8, 2020. <https://thepointernews.com/?p=68388>. Accessed November 28, 2020.

<sup>70</sup> Iyabo Lawal "NYSC, expelled graduates and dress code controversy" Accessed July 23, 2020, <https://guardian.ng/features/nysc-expelled-graduates-and-dress-code-controversy>, November 14, 2019.

**Fig.23.1:** Female corps members' in Skirt instead of trousers.



**Fig. 23.2:** Female Muslim corps members in white shoulder-length hijab.



**Source:** <https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/283821/nysc-to-huriwa-why-moslem-corpers-wear-hijab.html>.

<https://www.thesitenews.com/news/nysc-approves-white-shoulder-length-hijab-for-corps-members/>. Accessed, July 23, 2020.

### Dress Code Controversy

The redesigning of the NYSC uniform by Corps members to conform to their fashion, religious or cultural sense in recent times is no longer news. Many, especially female Corps members, have redesigned their khaki to skirt, gown or skin-tight trousers thereby defacing the NYSC uniform. This act has been condemned by the directorate because it violates the NYSC dress code. The scheme over the years has maintained same dress code since 1973 when it was established, devoid of ethnic, religious or gender bias. Thus, "any other dress code contrary to the officially-sanctioned one will not promote the course of decency."<sup>71</sup> It is for this reason that Corps members found abusing the uniform are sanctioned according to the law. The most recent being the Ebonyi duo that were de-kitted and decamped from the orientation camp in 2019. The action taken by the Scheme elicited a lot of comments from corps members and the general public respectively. Concerned individuals like

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

Ebun-Olu Adegboruwa, SAN and The Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) condemned the action that was taken by NYSC. They opined that it was wrong for NYSC to decamp the Ebonyi duo because the same NYSC had permitted the use of white hijab for female Muslim Corps members, which must not be more than shoulder length and must be tucked into the uniform<sup>72</sup>. Based on the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended), Ebun-Olu Adegboruwa reiterated that;

The Constitution says clearly that the NYSC should not deny any corps member any benefit that other corps members enjoy and it should also not accord any benefit to any set of corps members that others are denied of, by reason only of their faith, sex, tribe or gender. If the NYSC has accorded female Muslim corps members official recognition to practice their faith through the hijab which is external to the official uniforms supplied, then it has to, of necessity, sit down with female Christian corps members, to agree on the modality for the practice of their own faith, with regard to the white underwear.<sup>73</sup>

In line with the above, some Corps members on the platform of “Serve with skirts Movement” were seen at a protest in Abuja on Wednesday January 15, 2020.<sup>74</sup> The group alleged that the use of trouser by female corps members evokes immorality. They displayed placards with captions such as; “There is a difference between the world and the daughters of God”; “Our sisters cannot dress like men, they should be decently covered” and

<sup>72</sup> Ebun-Olu Adegboruwa “THE NYSC FAUX PAS”, accessed, July 23,2020, <https://thenigerialawyer.com/the-nysc-faux-pas-by-ebun-olu-adegboruwa-san/> November 19, 2019. <sup>73</sup> Ebun-Olu Adegboruwa “THE NYSC FAUX PAS”, accessed, July 23,2020, <https://thenigerialawyer.com/the-nysc-faux-pas-by-ebun-olu-adegboruwa-san/> November 19, 2019.

<sup>74</sup> Goodness Adaoyichie. “Trousers evoke immorality,’ female corps members threaten to sue NYSC over skirt refusal” accessed, July 23,2020, <https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/trousers-evoke-immorality-female-corps-members-threaten-to-sue-nysc-over-skirt/> January 15,2020

"We are not worldly we are true children of God" among others.<sup>75</sup> The Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) also protested to the Director General of NYSC "demanding that he ordered the reinstatement of the two female prospective Youth Corps members dismissed in Ebonyi State for failing to wear trousers due to their religious belief."<sup>76</sup>

**Fig. 24:** Some Female Corps Members protesting on the platform of "Serve with Skirt Movement"



**Source:** <https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/trousers-evoke-immorality-female-corps-members-threaten-to-sue-nysc-over-skirt/71kjjmm>. Accessed July 23, 2020.

The Director General (DG) of NYSC, Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim, in response to all the hullabaloo did not fail to express his dismay over the dress code controversy albeit with understanding and firmness. Speaking through the NYSC's national spokesperson, Mrs. Adenike Adeyemi, he noted with great concern the negative perception of the scheme's dress code, arising mostly from some corps members' disobedience to the dictates of the

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Nysc To Huriwa: Why Moslem Corpers Wear Hijab: Accessed July 23, 2020, <https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/283821/nysc-to-huriwa-why-moslem-corpers-wear-hijab.html>. December 23, 2019.

code. He reiterated that the dress code remains the same since 1973. Any other dress contrary to the approved ones would not be tolerated. He further stated that "it will be reprehensible for a female corps member to embark on obstacle crossing and other physical training activities on camp, including the parade, in skirt or gown because those will expose her indecently, thus, leaving little or nothing to the imagination". He also condemned Corps members reshaping their khaki trousers, making them skin-tight, which unduly expose their curvatures, particularly the female corps members. "Some others, in the name of religion, turn the pair of trousers issued to them into skirts. The scheme, therefore, considers the unwholesome act as an affront to decency on one hand and constituted authority on the other."<sup>77</sup>

He further expressed that it was for the above reason that NYSC came up with the policy of having prospective corps members sign undertaking forms to the effect that they will not deface the NYSC uniform, but abide by the dress code for corps members.<sup>78</sup> He has also not failed to remind corps members not to deface the NYSC uniform at every swearing-in-ceremony and to warn tailors operating in the camps to observe prescribed limits while adjusting the uniform for corps members or risk being decamped. On the aspect of hijab, the Director General, Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim clarified that hijab is not part of NYSC dress code, although NYSC a long time ago permitted its use for Muslim female Corps members but must not be worn to deface the approved uniform. In the same vein, Christian corps members, particularly catholic reverend sisters, are permitted to put on veils, which must be of equal length with the hijab.<sup>79</sup>

To finally put the case of dress code to rest, banners showing approved dress code were circulated in all the orientation camps

<sup>77</sup> "NYSC DG Speaks on Dress Code Controversy", Accessed July 23, 2020,<https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/11/11/nysc-dg-speaks-on-dress-code-controversy/>, November 11, 2019.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> NYSC To Huriwa: Why Moslem Corps Wear Hijab:<https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/283821/nysc-to-huriwa-why-moslem-corps-wear-hijab.html>, December 23, 2019.

in the country, National Directorate Headquarters and other formations of Scheme.<sup>80</sup> This way corps members and the general public are acquainted with NYSC dress code. Below are images of the correct and incorrect dress code.

**Fig. 25:** Banner showing NYSC Correct Dress Code and Examples of Don'ts.



**Source:** NYSC Headquarters, Abuja. August 2020.

### Images of the abused uniform

Fig.26.1: Female Corps members in khaki skirts instead of trousers.



Source: <https://www.naijaolofofo.com/senate-rejects-bill-include-skirts-hijab-nysc-uniform/> Accessed July 23, 2020

Fig. 26.2: Slim-fit khaki Trouser



Fig. 26.3: Three-quarter overall khaki Trouser



Source: [https://m.scooper.news/2020/02/20/fashion-meets-nysc-see-stylish-ways-to-rock-your-khaki-uniform/8501004.](https://m.scooper.news/2020/02/20/fashion-meets-nysc-see-stylish-ways-to-rock-your-khaki-uniform/)

Accessed July 23, 2020.

**Fig.26. 4:** Slim-fit khaki Trouser**Fig. 26.5:** Three-quarter khaki trouser

**Source:** <https://m.scooper.news/2020/02/20/fashion-meets-nysc-see-stylish-ways-to-rock-your-khaki-uniform/8501004>.

Accessed July 23, 2020.

The current trends discussed above have negatively affected the NYSC uniform which is the mark of identity and brand of the Scheme. In the past, the uniform was worn with pride by corps members and almost every Nigerian graduate looked forward to wearing the uniform. But today, corps members violate the official dress code and even alter the design of the once revered uniform at will. This act informed the Director General's decision to ensure that all Corps members wear the NYSC uniform with pride and are disciplined for defacing or abusing the uniform. At the 2020 Batch 'A' pre-orientation meeting of Management with Area Coordinators, State Coordinators, Camp Directors, Camp Commandants and Collaborating Agencies, the DG emphasised the need for corps members to respect and cherish the NYSC uniform;

...We must do everything possible to ensure that Corps members respect the uniform and use it correctly at all times. I will continue to monitor the level of compliance during my tour of Orientation camps and on other occasions. Area Coordinators are equally enjoined to ensure that Corps members do not abuse the uniform both during and after the Orientation course. Furthermore, tailors operating in our Camps should be warned to observe prescribed limits while adjusting the uniform for Corps members or risk being decamped.<sup>81</sup>

In order for the Scheme to achieve success in ensuring that Corps members do not continue to abuse the uniform, it is important for NYSC to critically consider and analyse some of the factors responsible for the abuse of the uniform by Corps members as discussed in this chapter. The first factor that demands correction is the variation in khaki colour and quality used by the different contractors in the thirty-six states including the Federal Capital Territory.<sup>82</sup> NYSC should endeavour to check the colour and quality of the fabrics used for their uniforms by the different contractors responsible for purchasing the fabrics. One colour of fabric should be used for the entire country. If green khaki is now the official colour, then green khaki should be used by all the states. Any other colour presented by contractors should be rejected outrightly. The quality of the fabrics should also be improved upon to avoid Corps members buying and sewing theirs. This factor is one of the major reasons why corps members abuse the uniform. In a bid to ensure they have descent uniform, some of the corps members who are not satisfied with what was given to them, buy better khaki fabric and redesign the uniform. Secondly, contractors should be given enough time to sew the uniform. When they are given only eight days to deliver eight thousand uniforms for instance, poor sewing is inevitable.

<sup>81</sup> Selected Speeches and Strides of the 18<sup>th</sup> NYSC Director-General Brig. Gen S Ibrahim, 221.

<sup>82</sup> Interview held with Nnamdi Okoroafor. Ex- Corp Member – 2010/2011at Etobaba, Jos on July 24,2020. Stat of Service- Jigawa State. Age 31+

Little wonder the uniform no longer withstand wear and tear before the end of the service year. Comments from some ex-corps members on the reason for modification of the uniform by corps members suffice. "Some of the uniforms given to corps members are either oversized or under sized, which makes most corps members modify the uniform to fit their fashion styles."<sup>83</sup> "The uniforms are randomly distributed to corps members, most of the time they are either big or small when they wear it. It doesn't look good on them, that is why corps members modify it to their taste"<sup>84</sup> "It is due to the fact that different tailors are contracted for the production; that has made the quality to change".<sup>85</sup> Thus, in order to curtail or end the abuse of the uniform by corps members, the directorate must find ways of addressing the above issues.

## Conclusion

The present Director General of the NYSC, Brig. Gen. S. Ibrahim, must be commended for working tirelessly to ensure that the NYSC uniform is not abused or defaced by corps members, irrespective of fashion, culture, gender or religion. However, in order to achieve the Scheme's goal of respecting the uniform in this twenty-first century globalisation, it is of utmost importance for NYSC to continue to maintain a single tradition for all, irrespective of their religion or gender. NYSC uniform was designed by the founding fathers in 1973 devoid of ethnic, religious or gender bias, thus, allowing the use of hijab by female corps members which hitherto was not the tradition of NYSC will continue to attract religious debate over the existing uniform as seen in the case of the Ebonyi duo and "Serve with skirts Movement" in 2019. NYSC uniform, just like other service

<sup>83</sup> Interview held with Usiosefe Stanley Daniel. Ex-Corp member, 2018/2019 at Etobaba, Jos on July 24,2020. State of service – Plateau State, Age:31+

<sup>84</sup> Interview held with Ezra Loyan Barawani.Ex-Corp member, 2019/2020 at Jos on July 21,2020. State of Service, Plateau State.

<sup>85</sup> Interview held with Agbo Stephen. Ex-Corp member, 2018/2019 at Kakang, Jos. State of Service, Kano State.

uniforms (example Military, Police, Customs, Civil Defence etcetera), is a national uniform and as such must not be compromised by fashion, religion, gender or culture. It should be treated with respect, dignity and honour. Thus, if NYSC should continue to permit the use of items that are not part of its dress code, a day may come when the whole uniform would no longer be needed for the one service year.

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## Chapter Thirteen

# NYSC AND SPORTS/GAMES ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIA SINCE 1973

*Folusho Adewumi ladipo*

*Department of History*

*Bowen University*

*Iwo, Nigeria.*

### Introduction

Over the years, it has been validated by health organisations around the world, including the World Health Organisation (WHO), that the condition of a people's health is of great importance as it determines the productivity of individuals and the nation at large.<sup>1</sup> It therefore means that body and mental fitness is inextricably tied to human prosperity and success, which is possible only through a healthy and mentally alert mind that is aware of its environment. Sport is a universal phenomenon traceable to a period as far back as not less than 3000 years ago, when it involved the throwing of spears, stakes, rocks and sparring one on one with opponents<sup>2</sup>. With the first Olympic Games in 776BC which included events such as foot and chariot races, wrestling, jumping, discus and javelin throwing, the Ancient Greeks introduced formal sports to the world<sup>3</sup>. Africa, however, expanded on the sport range in response to the requirements and peculiarities of its terrain. In Nigeria, for example, though there had been varying and scanty support for sports, particularly in the colonial phase, it received

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<sup>1</sup>Maaoud,R& Day-Stirk,F. 2014. "Improving Health Worker Productivity and Performance in the Context of Universal Health Coverage: The Roles of Standards, Quality Improvement, and Regulation-Finl Draft. *Technical Working Group(TWG)7:3.*

<sup>2</sup>Bellis, M. 2019. " A Brief History of Sports." *ThoughtCo.* Sept 12, 2020. <https://thoughtco.com/history-of-sports-1992447>.

<sup>3</sup>Bellis, M. 2019." A History of Sports...  
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a systemic support and projection since the attempted tearing apart of the fragile Nigerian social fabric in 1967 under the cloud of apparent apathy and ethnic suspicion<sup>4</sup>.

Since the deployment of sports by the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) established to integrate Nigerian youths into the nation's building process, it has been a major cord that has bound the Nigerian peoples, promoted social inclusion, and indoctrinated the youths to leadership responsibilities while managing differences.

Though a plethora of definitions exists on the concept of sports/ games, for the purposes of this research, sports/ games is conceptualised as activities that involve physical, mental, and psychological exercises that require physical competition with an opponent(s), with established procedures, rules and defined criteria for determining victory<sup>5</sup>. There is a thin line of distinction between sports and games. While the former is contemporary and institutionalised, the latter inhabits the characteristics of the former. Hence, both terms would be used interchangeably in this work. The work examines the relevance of sports in the pursuit of national unity as deployed by the NYSC since 1973. It analyses the nature and dynamics of sporting activities during three distinct historical phases namely pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods.

### Sporting Activities in the Pre-colonial Nigeria

The deployment of sports for its multipurpose functions ranging from copious social relevance to individual advantages was not downplayed by the various states, empires and communities that make up Nigeria such as the Oyo Empire, the Bornu Empire, the Hausa States, the Igbo communities, among others. They were a one human entity who had interacted through peaceful and violent means, partly on foundations of having similar accounts of descent and on the basis of comparative advantages.

<sup>4</sup>Jaiyesimi, B. J. Babalola & T. Bamitale. 2016. "Critical Review of Sports as a Catalyst for Peace and Development in Nigeria." 11<sup>th</sup> UNILAG Annual Research Conference and Fair 11:2.

<sup>5</sup>Poliakoff, M.B. 1987. *CombatSports in the Ancient World: Competition, Violence and Culture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Sports were deployed to further cement relationships, encourage healthy interactions and build socially responsive and mentally alert minds that could contribute reasonably to the development of their states<sup>6</sup>.

In line with the foregoing as established in this discourse, various ethnic groups practiced sports that firmly connected with their cultural needs, environmental circumstances, and also increased their environmental awareness. The type of games engaged in was heavily dependent on age, gender and purpose. In spite of differing circumstances, the games engaged in were relatively similar though with differing names and appellations, and also served the dual purposes of recreation and competition. In spite of the priority and importance attached to the dignity of labour which had direct impact on the economy and on the economic abilities of the people, sporting activities were essential unwinding options, particularly in the case of recreation for individual purposes and fitness in developing whole and balanced individuals. Games prevalent in the various states ranged from wrestling, dance, draft, poetry chanting, hunting, and so on. There were differences in the varieties of games engaged in by different age groups as energy, exuberance, vibrancy and social roles were important determinants; hence the classification of adult and children's games<sup>7</sup>. Adult games and relaxation were highly technical, cerebral and tactical as distinct from younger age groups games.<sup>8</sup> Games for this latter category included wrestling, draft, dancing, and a host of others.

Hunting was an essential activity for the survival of the prehistoric men of Africa who began stages of evolution from being wanderers that exclusively depended on fruits, to cave dwellers that augmented their diet with protein supplements

<sup>6</sup>Awoyinfa, J& A. Oladipo. 2016. "The Contribution of Sports, Physical Education and Recreational Indices in Promoting Health and Peace among the Youth in Nigeria." *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal (LICEJ)*, nos.3:2355

<sup>7</sup>Akanbi, T.2014. "The Moral Value of Yoruba Moonlight Tales" *Open Journal of Modern Logistics*4: 481-486.

<sup>8</sup>Akanbi, T.(2014) "The Moral Value of Yoruba Moonlight Tales"...

provided by wild animals. The evolution of agriculture and settled life changed hunting from being a survival technique to a practiced sport. For recreation, young men and adults would go into the forest to hunt for games usually at daytime in company of others who kept watch. This facilitated the awareness of their environment and achieved togetherness, as games caught would be shared by all participants. For competitions, it was usually held on a large scale, drawing contestants from eligible competitors who would be required to capture wild animals with bounty or pride of place for any that catches the largest<sup>9</sup>. Usually, neighboring communities were invited to participate both actively and passively<sup>10</sup>. This sport trained contestants in mental and physical alertness, tactical calculations, stealth, and also fostered closer ties of intergroup relations, and, by so doing, feathering the one human entity nest<sup>11</sup>.

Wrestling was also replicated in many communities. The roles of wrestling in many communities and ethnic groups served as bragging opportunities for individuals with agility.<sup>12</sup> It was an intriguing game that demonstrated strength and prowess. For the Yoruba, it was a competition synonymous with the history of Offa Town in present day Kwara State. It was a competition for male adults usually of the same age range. It emanated from the cultural history of two Offa brothers who wrestled at the bank of a river on account of a piece of lost yam<sup>13</sup>. This sport unified neighboring communities who were invited to witness the infamous game, hence cementing relationships and promoting cultural knowledge<sup>14</sup>.

Also, among the Fulani, it was a social structure through which young adults were initiated into adulthood. As a process

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<sup>9</sup>Onumonu,U. Department of History and International Studies, Adeleke University, Ede, Osun state. Interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020.

<sup>10</sup>Onumonu,U... <sup>11</sup>Onumonu,U...

<sup>12</sup>Etsey Atisu. 2012. "9 Traditional African Sports that Survived Colonialism." Uploaded July 19, 2019. Accessed July 25, 2020. [Https://face to faceafrica.com/article/9-traditional-african-sports-that-survived-colonialism/3](https://face to faceafrica.com/article/9-traditional-african-sports-that-survived-colonialism/3).

<sup>13</sup> Ahmad, R. 2018. "Ijakadi: Offa's Big Wrestling Festival." *Daily Trust Online January Edition*. Accessed August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020. [Dailystar.com/ijakadi-offas-big-wrestling-festival](https://www.dailystar.com/ijakadi-offas-big-wrestling-festival)

<sup>14</sup> Ahmad, R. 2018. "Ijakadi:..

of initiation, young adults would be beaten usually in the public arena and their ability to withstand the pain qualified them for adulthood. It is remarkable to note that this process was a pre-qualification for marriage.<sup>15</sup> In the case of the Igbo, wrestling exceeded being a sport or entertainment to being used as a tool for facilitating intergroup relations. The performance of this sport was preceded by intense preparation by intending contestants as they needed to be physically and mentally fit.<sup>16</sup> In entertainment, many Igbo communities had their wrestling icons or groups that were often invited to wrestling competitions by their Igbo clans and other neighbors. The village square was the appropriate arena as the village Assembly would be constituted for invited guests to watch and be entertained. The young man that emerged winner was granted titles, social statuses and pride of place as the Dimgba<sup>17</sup>. Through this game, interrelationships were built and sustained in such a manner that ethnic inclinations were not considered as topics of discussions, but only rather welded the bonds of the pre-colonial people. Apart from the above-mentioned purposes, traditional wrestling was used to settle local conflicts and disputes between two villages<sup>18</sup>. As common to human relationships, conflict often broke out between communities over different reasons ranging from fishing rights, land acquisition, trespassing, among others<sup>19</sup>. On the basis of prior relationship, rather than resolving to violent means, both communities would propose wrestling competitions as a peaceful way to resolving their differences<sup>20</sup>. The winning side might have an advantaged position over the contentious issue, but beyond that, the game was deployed to

<sup>15</sup>Nakou, S.A. 2012. "Cultural practice and Social Initiation in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Culture of Flogging in Barugube Fulani of Benin." *Higher Education of Social Science* 3, nos 3: 50-57.

<sup>16</sup> Umenze, Albert. Traditional wrestling in Igbo land. Retrieved July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020 from [www.movenaija.org](http://www.movenaija.org).

<sup>17</sup>Etsey Atisu. 9 Traditional African Sports that Survived Colonialism...

<sup>18</sup>Umenze, Albert. Traditional wrestling in Igbo land...

<sup>19</sup>Ezenwoko,F& J. Osagie. 2014. "Conflict and Conflict Resolution in Pre-Colonial Igbo Society of Nigeria." *Journal of Studies in Social Science* 9 nos 1: 125-139.

<sup>20</sup>Anon. 2016." Traditional Wrestling in Igbo Land." Uploaded June 5,2016, Accessed August 29, 2020. <https://www.movenaija.org/traditional-wrestling-in-igbo-land/>

broker peace and bring to the fore the indispensability of co-operation, thereby dousing conflicting tensions<sup>21</sup>.

### Sporting/Games Activities in the Colonial Nigeria

The idea of sports was not strange to the colonial administrators as it had met a number of their physical, mental, health and social needs in their home country and thus was brought to colonial Nigeria<sup>22</sup>. Within the premise of discrediting indigenous ingenuity and the proliferation of Christianity, indigenous sports such as songs and dance, among others, were tagged *bad* and *immoral*<sup>23</sup>. Consequently, these sports began losing popularity, though some remained. With colonialism came European game varieties that were to be introduced to schools under the 1915 Education Policy for the purposes of formation of character and habits of discipline, thus inculcating these European styles in the colonial educational trainees who would be casual workers in British administration and teachers that would teach British curriculums in Nigerian schools<sup>24</sup>. In-spite of the aforementioned goals of the colonial administration, these sports also played the trick of unifying persons of different ethnic groups with *polo* reserved for the sons of chiefs and others who could afford it. For the other boys, however, cricket, football and aesthetics brought the staff and pupils in close touch, and consequently had the best effect in training character<sup>25</sup>. To reflect on the above stated social stratification, the courts for these

<sup>21</sup> Anon. 2016." Traditional Wrestling in Igbo Land." Uploaded June 5,2016. Accessed August 29, 2020. <https://www.movenaija.org/traditional-wrestling-in-igbo-land/>

<sup>22</sup>Mangan,J. 2000. "Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School."London:Frank Cass.

<sup>23</sup>Okeke, C, Ibenwa, C& G. Okeke. 2017. " Conflicts between African Traditional Religion and Christianity in Eastern Nigeria: The Igbo Example." *SAGE Open April-June:4*.

<sup>24</sup>Obasa, O. 2015." Sports and the Modernity of Leisure in Nigeria: Stadium Space and the Symbolisms of Expressions, 1930-1980." Unpublished Ph.D Thesis submitted to the University of Texas at Austin. 1

<sup>25</sup>Lugard,F. The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa in Obasa, O. 2015." Sports and the Modernity of Leisure in Nigeria...1

games were sited in European residential areas. Some of such courts include the Ibadan European Club established in 1902 at Onireke GRA now known as Ibadan Recreation Club since 1950. These clubs had such facilities as tar and sand tennis courts, indoor squash courts, European style swimming pool, and billiards table and recreation club. There was also the Ikoyi Golf Club of 1938 (a merger of European club and Lagos club, among others). The clubs and recreational centers were a melting pot for wealthy Nigerian elites and British administrators, particularly in the latter part of colonialism.

The European style of football, which was and is the most widely played sports regardless of social and ethnic cards, was first introduced to Nigeria in 1902 by Rev James Luke of Scotland who was the headmaster of Hope Waddell Training Institute<sup>26</sup>, a Presbyterian Mission School, Calabar. This is commonly regarded as the introduction of European football in Nigeria.

Furthermore, annual inter school sports competitions were organised with the ultimate aim of increasing the prospects of interaction among Nigerian youths who ordinarily would not have met<sup>27</sup>. The Nigerian students took advantage of the events to interact, hence bridging polarisation along ethnic and religious backgrounds. There was also the passive and active training of teachers in this school who later spread across the country, as a result of which the knowledge of sports soon spread across colonial Nigeria. Football as a sport outshone other sports introduced by the colonial administration due to its relative accessibility. On the home front, there were Nigerians such as Nnamdi Azikwe who discovered the potentiality of sports to bind, unify and, most importantly, promote the spirit of healthy sportsmanship and competition, and thus established the 1<sup>st</sup> African controlled sports club named Ziks Athletic Club (ZAC) and football team which he deployed as an alternative to the selective and racially biased British run clubs that had

<sup>26</sup>Anon. 1998. The Intersection of Sports and Politics in the Pre-colonial and Colonial Period. *Sports and Politics in British West/Central Africa*. Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2020 from laghanatogoboutsport.weebly.com

<sup>27</sup>Obasa, O. 2015." Sports and the Modernity of Leisure in Nigeria....

controlled Nigerian sports. Through this platform, Pan-African ideas were spread and the British authority was countered<sup>28</sup>.

In-spite of the prior motive of the British monopolising the knowledge of football through its owned camps, this plan was upset by ZAC and the effects of the Second World War played important roles in the expansion of the Nigerian football<sup>29</sup>. The rapid development of football led to the establishment of the Nigerian Football Association charged with the responsibility of overseeing and coordinating football matters in 1933<sup>30</sup>. Urban prosperity, a significant effect of the war, improved the purchasing ability of the people, increased social amenities and recreational times in which many Nigerian elites, especially in the urban centers, turned to football as a means of recreation through which it was projected to other parts of the country. The inter-regional competition inspired by ZAC which had proliferated in many parts of the country deepened Pan-Africanist ideas and the common identity shared by Nigerians in-spite of the divergent ethnic orientation/ regions<sup>31</sup>. The proliferation of local football clubs through which youngsters developed and sharpened their football skills contributed greatly to the pooling of national team members through the instrumentality of the NFA in 1949 in preparation for Nigeria's first international outing<sup>32</sup>.

Nigeria's first participation in an international competition was in 1934 when Nnamdi Azikwe represented her in the 440 yards (400m) at the Commonwealth Games and Empire Day competitions in London.<sup>33</sup> The country also had her first

<sup>28</sup> Anon. 2013. "Intersection of Sports and Politics in the Nationalist Period (1940s-60s); Nigerian Nationalism and Football. Accessed August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020. <http://webeninnigeriaghanatogoboutsport.weebly.com/nationalist-period.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Anon. 2013. "Intersection of Sports and Politics in the Nationalist Period (1940s-60s)..."

<sup>30</sup> Wiebe, B. "A Story of Heroes and Epics: The story of Football in Nigeria." *Business Day Online*. Uploaded June 7, 2018. Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020. [www.google.com/amp/s/businessday.ng/arts-bdlife-arts/article/story-heroes-epics-story-football-nigeria/amp/](http://www.google.com/amp/s/businessday.ng/arts-bdlife-arts/article/story-heroes-epics-story-football-nigeria/amp/)

<sup>31</sup> Anon. 2013. "Intersection of Sports and Politics in the Nationalist Period (1940s-60s);..."

<sup>32</sup> Aiyegebayo, O. The Story of the 1949 Nigerian Football Team's UK Tour. Uploaded August 6, 2016. Accessed August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020. <https://www.horebinternational.com/the-story-of-the-1949-igerian-football-teams-uk-tour/>

<sup>33</sup> National Sports Policy of Nigeria. 2009. P1

appearance in the Olympics games in Helsinki in 1952, but its first medal in the high jump through Emmanuel Ifeajuna in 1954 who won a gold medal in the Commonwealth games in Cardiff<sup>34</sup>.

## Sporting/Games Activities in the Post-Colonial Nigeria up to 1973

Since the 1951 Macpherson constitution, the regional government of the three zones in Nigeria began having increasing power to herald changes and initiate development in preparation for independence. On the strength of the immense advantages of sports in areas of human development, fostering of bonds and serving as a tool of peaceful interactions, the regions established sports councils and a National Sports Council was established in 1962<sup>35</sup>. In practicality, the Western Region led by Premier Obafemi Awolowo committed his government to the infrastructural and human developments of the sports industry as this was to create a suitable environment for sports to thrive. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, 1960, Obafemi Awolowo unveiled the Olympic Standard Liberty Stadium, Ibadan, which had a 45,000 spectator capacity with features of track and field events<sup>36</sup>. The sports complex not only demonstrated and reflected the modernity of the newly independent state, but, more importantly, it served as the first step towards a coherent policy of building sport facilities for the youths of Nigeria<sup>37</sup>. This stadium was often used by young athletes who paraded their knowledge of sports in the presence of dignitaries during festivities.<sup>38</sup> The sporting activities that would be conducted in the stadium were intended to motivate spectators and subtly persuade them to pursue a career in sports<sup>39</sup>. The cohesive roles played by the stadium framed local

<sup>34</sup>Nigerian Sports History. 2016. Information retrieved from [www.nigerian.gov.ng/nigeria's sports history on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September, 2019](http://www.nigerian.gov.ng/nigeria's sports history on the 5th of September, 2019).

<sup>35</sup>Bashir, S. 2015. "The Impact of the Nigerian Army on the Development of Sports in Nigeria." A Msc Thesis submitted to the Postgraduate School, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. 31.

<sup>36</sup>Obasa, O. 2015 . "Sports and the Modernity of Leisure in Nigeria: Stadium Space and the Symbolisms of Expressions, 1930-1980." Unpublished Ph.D Thesis submitted to the University of Texas at Austin. 1.

<sup>37</sup>Obasa, O. 2015." Sports and the Modernity of Leisure in Nigeria..

<sup>38</sup>Obasa, O. 2015." Sports and the Modernity of Leisure in Nigeria ..

<sup>39</sup>Obasa, O. 2015." Sports and the Modernity of Leisure in Nigeria..

identity in terms of speculator culture and speculator behaviour, with their subsequent discussion in the press, especially the then newly established Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) which helped to forge locally specific sporting affiliations<sup>40</sup>. The stadium and spectators contributed to the construction of Nigerian national identity through the constant comparisons being generated in the Nigerian press between the Nigerian stadium, the crowds and their counterparts elsewhere in Africa, especially in Ghana, which was Nigeria's number one rival in West Africa<sup>41</sup>. Without a corresponding support for human development, the purpose of the infrastructures would be defeated hence the Western Region government, through the instrumentality of the Western Region Development Corporation (WNDC), founded a home-based Pepsi-Cola Football Club in 1960 which later metamorphosed into the 3SC of Ibadan<sup>42</sup>. The Club has represented Nigeria in various intercontinental competitions with awards to show. For example, it was the first club to win African Cup for Nigeria in 1976. It also later won the WAFU and Nigerian Professional League in 1998/1999, among other awards<sup>43</sup>. From 2005 till date, the Club has been able to produce players such as Dele Adeleye, Soga Sambo, Abiodun Akande, Ajayi Junior and Chima Akass, among others, to represent it and project its good image at the senior and junior national teams<sup>44</sup>.

The history and development of physical education in Nigeria will be incomplete without recognising the roles that have been played by the Nigerian Army in the development and promotion of sports in Nigeria<sup>45</sup>, both in the colonial and post-colonial eras.

<sup>40</sup>Obasa, O. 2015." Sports and the Modernity of Leisure in Nigeria...83

<sup>41</sup>Obasa, O. 2015." Sports and the Modernity of Leisure in Nigeria...83

<sup>42</sup>Oyo State Government Sports Page. 2020.*Shooting Stars Football Club*. Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> of November, 2020. Oyostate.gov.ng/shooting-stars-sports-club/

<sup>43</sup>Oyo State Government Sports Page. 2020.*Shooting Stars Football Club*...

<sup>44</sup>Oyo State Government Sports Page. 2020.*Shooting Stars Football Club*...

<sup>45</sup>Bashir, S. 2015. "The Impact of the Nigerian Army on the Development of Sports in Nigeria." A Msc Thesis submitted to the Postgraduate School, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. 11.

The Nigerian Army developed interest in sports from the time they started taking part in the Empire Day Celebrations in 1914<sup>46</sup>, after which it became fully involved in organised competitive sports with the aim of providing the country's sportsmen and women for international sports competitions and maintaining a physically fit and healthy condition. Competitive sports began in 1924 between 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> November, with regimental games, closely followed by a polo tournament for soldiers with disabilities in which five teams competed and had the whole European community in Kaduna in attendance<sup>47</sup>. These games laid the foundation for sports in the Nigerian Army, which is called Army Games<sup>48</sup>. Army Games became an annual and infamously competition, incorporating track and field events till it was interrupted between 1966 and 1970 due to the civil war<sup>49</sup>. Immediately after the civil war, the Army Games were re-introduced in an elaborate form with more sporting events in 1970, and greater commitments to its re-organisation and the provision of sporting equipment and facilities. In 1972, all Army formations and units became involved in the game.

Before the military took over on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, 1966, each region was running its sports council unilaterally without synchronising with the central Sports Council<sup>50</sup>. With the creation of states in 1967, the 12 states established individual sports council, still without being in harmony with the central body<sup>51</sup>. In 1966, with the enthusiasm of Gen Yakubu Gowon who was interested in sports, Nigeria sent a strong team of sports men and women to Kingston, Jamaica, for the Commonwealth and Nigeria won 10 medals: 3 gold, 4 silver and 3 bronze<sup>52</sup>. Other subsequent games Nigeria also partook in include the 1968

<sup>46</sup>Bashir, S. 2015. "The Impact of the Nigerian Army on the Development of Sports in Nigeria..."

<sup>47</sup>Bashir, S. 2015. "The Impact of the Nigerian Army on the Development of Sports in Nigeria...24.

<sup>48</sup>Bashir, S. 2015. ....25.

<sup>49</sup>Bashir, S. 2015. ....25.

<sup>50</sup>Bashir, S. 2015. ....31.

<sup>51</sup>Bashir, S. 2015. ....31

<sup>52</sup>Bashir, S. 2015. ....32

Mexico games, 1970 Edinburgh games in which she won 2 gold medals, 1972 Munich games, 1974 New Zealand games where she won 10 medals: 3 gold, 3 silver and 4 bronze<sup>53</sup>.

For the effective coordination and unification of sporting activities in the country, the National Sports Commission was established through Decree No. 34 of August, 1971, and the body was charged with the responsibility of overseeing all sporting activities in the country<sup>54</sup>. Through the Sports Commission, Nigeria held its maiden National Sports Festival which pooled contestants across the country to compete favourably in 1973<sup>55</sup>. Through the efforts of the military, Nigeria bounced back in participating in international competitions and outings that shaped the country's identity after the civil war.

### The NYSC and the Emergence of the NYSC Games

The civil war that spanned 1967-1970 was a reflection of the buildup of injustice, hostile coexistence and unfriendly relations that had pervaded the Nigerian space since colonialism, and which magnified the differences between the various ethnic groups. The aftermath of the war needed to be treated with the right doses of peaceful interactions, hence necessitating the establishment of an agency that could be instrumental in the rebuilding of national consciousness and the de-emphasising of ethnic loyalty, mutual group suspicion and distrust in the battered polity. The Federal Military Government, after a careful review of sports development in the aftermath of the civil war, revealed that Nigerians should pay more attention to sports since it enhances the spirit of brotherhood and coexistence among the people<sup>56</sup>. In rebuilding Nigeria, the energy of the youths who had participated in the civil war needed to be pooled together and redirected to the usefulness of the country. Consequent, by Decree No. 24 of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, 1973, the NYSC

<sup>53</sup>Bashir, S. 2015. ...32

<sup>54</sup>Bashir, S. 2015. ...32

<sup>55</sup>Bashir, S. 2015. ...33

<sup>56</sup>Bashir, S. 2015...25

was founded<sup>57</sup>. The NYSC is a compulsory national service for all Nigerian graduates of Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education trained within and outside the country.

Games have constituted an indispensable part of the activities of the NYSC in its pursuit of the 3Rs since its inception<sup>58</sup> both within the NYSC confined spaces and without. Games have been adopted as a major key to achieving national unity, and this because of the fertile ground of friendship facilitated by sports, hence the emphasis on 'play the ball and not the leg'<sup>59</sup>. There are compulsory activities corps members must participate in, especially a few sports organised by partnering paramilitary agencies in the camp, ranging from early morning drills to preliminary match past. NYSC games have served the dual purpose of building strength and orchestrating unity among competitors and bequeathing necessary qualities and skills necessary for life. It creates an environment of unity of purpose and respect for others. Although it is compulsory for all corps members to participate in all the camping activities, there are some of them that are exempted, such as the physically challenged and pregnant women. In spite of the realities of their health however, concessions are still made for such people "under the mango tree"<sup>60</sup> to passively participate in sporting activities by cheering the competitors. This is in recognition of the role of sports in heralding unity. This setting was not set sail to produce cheerleaders, but rather to facilitate the spirit of oneness as victory was not to be considered as an individual win, but as a collective victory for the platoon they represented. The indispensability of youths as agents of reconstruction and as bridges between cultures, coupled with their role as promoters

<sup>57</sup>National Youth Service Corps. 2017. "About the Scheme." Accessed August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020.[Https://nysc.gov.ng/aboutscheme.html](https://nysc.gov.ng/aboutscheme.html)

<sup>58</sup>Hajia Aisha Mohammed. Assistant Director, Community Development Service. NYSC, Oyo state. Interviewed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020 at the CDS Office, Oyo state Secretariat, NYSC.

<sup>59</sup>Hajia Aisha Mohammed. Assistant Director...

<sup>60</sup> Architect Olanike Aduloju. Director, Porters' Touch Consultancy and Convener Save a Prince(ss); a Non Governmental organization. Interviewed 1<sup>st</sup> of August, 2029. at her residence; No 4, Bashorun Ogunmola Estate, Bodija, Ibadan, Oyo state.

of peace and intercultural understanding, influenced the age requirement placed on their mobilisation for the scheme which, in the first instance, affected Nigerians up to the age of 30 years who have obtained their degrees in Nigerian universities<sup>61</sup>.

An essential course of the NYSC scheme is the attendance of orientation camps for two to three weeks, which was a leveler and is usually coordinated by military officials in collaboration with NYSC officials in the states. The event usually pooled together youths from diverse cultures, religions and social backgrounds with the aims of equipping them mentally and physically, and also forging interrelationships through sports engagement, among other activities, in preparation for the challenges of the service year and further<sup>62</sup>. All these were targeted at pulling down walls of segregation and suspicion among the corps members and the nation at large. To set sail for an indispensable course for unity among the corps members from varying backgrounds and tertiary institutions, the Camp Commandant, through the platoon system, randomly divided corps members into units of 1-10<sup>63</sup>. This division on the day of arrival in camp induced operation and friendliness among corps members of same platoon and same gestures were extended to others from counterpart platoons as they were all placed on the same pedestal<sup>64</sup>. Corps members engage in official activities in the camp from the platform of their platoons.

In similarity to the military morning exercise routines, corps members were introduced to paramilitary early morning exercises, match pasts, with the immediate aim of not only instilling discipline and building up their perseverance, but also to awaken mental alertness, build up physical strength and foster unity<sup>65</sup> The pattern of early morning routines in NYSC

<sup>61</sup> National Archive, Ibadan. *Daily sketch*. Thursday May 24, 1973, no. 2838 :1.

<sup>62</sup> NYSC Admin Structure. 2018. NYSC Year Book(45<sup>th</sup> Commemorative Edition): 23.

<sup>63</sup> DrTajudeenLasabi. Lecturer, Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State. Interviewed on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020 at History and International Studies Unit, Bowen University.

<sup>64</sup> DrMoradeyoAlabi. Medical director, Tobi Hospital, Stadium Complex, and Immediate past Head of Family Medicine, University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital. Interviewed 29<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020 at No. 1, Talabi lane, Ibrahim Taiwo Road, Ilorin, Kwara State.

<sup>65</sup> Hajia Aisha Mohammed. Assistant Director...

camps have remained constant over the years with gradual expansion of different sports engaged in over time.<sup>66</sup> The wake up times and routines have remained unchanged over the years, except on Sundays when corps members are woken up at 5:00 a.m. by the military bugle and are made to report on the parade ground kitted in their complete white vest, shorts and boots/canvass<sup>67</sup>. After a brief address/morning devotion, the morale of the corps members morale is motivated by military parade songs with lyrics such as *if allawee no dey yawa go dey, if allawee no dey morale no go rise, corpers we-wa* (meaning monthly allowance is the key to a high motivation). These songs usually ushered them to the camp fields where they were engaged in body exercises coordinated by army officials. Beyond the lyrics, the songs were targeted at familiarising the corps members with the various languages in which the songs were rendered, and their acceptance as camp wide morning motivational songs resonates across board. The morning drills have instilled discipline, confidence and pride of place in corps members.

<sup>66</sup>Chief(Surv). OlapadeAkinbola. Chairman; Lekki Reality Nigeria Limited, and Managing Director Mutual Alliance Insurance Brokers Limited Interviewed September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020 at No. 1, Association Street, Association close, Ashi-Bodija, Ibadan, Oyo state.

<sup>67</sup>Hajia Aisha Mohammed...

Fig. 27: An Inter-platoon Match Past Competition in Abia state, 2016



Source: NYSC instagram page (nysc\_ng). Retrieved August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

In addition to the foregoing, different types of sports but with same patterns characterised the scheme's sporting arrangements and activities between 1973 and 1994<sup>68</sup>. Against the background of early morning participation in sports in activities until 8:00a.m., the deliberate absence of official engagements gave corps members the freewill to participate in any desired games which ranged from volleyball, basketball, ping pong, lawn tennis and football.<sup>69</sup> The atmosphere of tolerance, friendship and unity created by the NYSC initiated inter-platoon competitions even in the absence of official

<sup>68</sup>Chief (Surv). Olapade Akinbola. Aged 65years. Chairman, Managing Director Lekki Realty Nigeria Limited and Chairman Mutual Alliance Insurance Brokers Limited. Interviewed September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020 at No. 1, Association Street, Association close, Ashi-Bodija, Ibadan, Oyo state.

<sup>69</sup>Mr Lanre Odumesi. Chief Executive Officer, Fort Credit Limited. Interviewed 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, 2020 at No 12, Seye Nuga Estate, Bodija, Ibadan, Oyo state.

organised games<sup>70</sup>. Inter-platoon games have induced unity as members of the same team see participants from other platoons as opponent they must unite to win. Though those in the same team may have differences, such differences were overlooked for the common goal of winning. True sportsmanship was not about winning, but was rather about taking part and playing by the rules.

**Fig. 28:** Lagos Camp Iyana-Ipaja Inter-Platoon Football Competition



**Source:** NYSC Instagram page (nysc\_ng). Retrieved 29<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020.

The spirit of unity gradually pervading the Nigerian state inspired some corps members to take along with them to camps traditional game boards such as draft, as a tool of fostering interactions, friendships and connections among “strange bed

<sup>70</sup>DrTajudeenLasabi. Lecturer, Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State. Interviewed on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020 at History and International Studies Unit.

fellows", and by so doing, transcend divisions<sup>71</sup>. Match past is an important sport activity that all corps members were required to actively or passively participate in. The parade tested the strength and agility of corps members that could be selected to participate in the actual parades of the official camp opening and camp closing. Essential to parades were the band group that consisted of corps members who knew how to drum, injecting rhythms, sound, life and coherence to parades. The band synergises their abilities to producing harmonious tunes. Oftentimes, limited knowledge is directly proportional to biased perception and uninformed stereotypes. Hence, the introduction of endurance trek which served the intents and purposes of injecting fun, excitement, environmental awareness, exposure to their host communities while building the physical strength, mental alertness and stamina of corps members<sup>72</sup>. The trek was usually made lively by the NYSC band that played beats and provided rhythms while in transit and at resting places. While fulfilling the obvious, it was an exercise (for those willing, since it was not compulsory) for determining tenacity, agility and, importantly, providing an intended atmosphere necessary for the sail of friendships and relationships that defied ethno-religious barriers.

Not only did the NYSC inculcate the virtues of partnership and cooperation among the corps members, the scheme also internalised these virtues by transforming cooperation policy to practicality in 1995 and making a change in the running of sporting activities in camp. In that year, it began officially to organise sporting events due to the need for change of the procedure, and to partner with the Man O War, a paramilitary organisation, which eventually led to the introduction of Man O War drills<sup>73</sup>. The partnership between NYSC and this paramilitary organisation reduced the exclusive administration

<sup>71</sup>Miss Alabi, F. 2015/2016 Cross River corps member. Interviewed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, 2020.

<sup>72</sup>Hajia Aisha Mohammed...

<sup>73</sup>Surveyor Martins Akin-Adeniran. Partner, Crystal Consulting, Samonda Ibadan. Interviewed 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, 2020 at 1, Trinity Layout, Samonda, Ibadan, Oyo state.

and supervision of sporting activities in camp by the Nigerian Army officials. However, the incorporation of Man O War drills in the camping activities helped to facilitate a collaboration between the Nigerian Army and the paramilitary organisation in offering selfless services to the rebuilding and sustenance of the unity of the country.

It is important to note that although these drills are not compulsory, willing participants are required to be in their *full 7/7 regalia* (NYSC vest, khaki and Jungle boots). Besides testing and building physical strength, these drills are more of fun than being parade as different hurdles are usually set for the corps members to overcome, such as crawling through barb wires tunnels, suspended rope climbing, wall climbing, under the supervision of the Man o War commanders<sup>74</sup>. Participants were often cheered and jeered along, consequently boosting their self-esteem, perseverance and social acceptance.

**Fig. 29:** A Female Corps Member on Course Man O' War Rope climbing drill in 7/7full Regalia



**Source:** NYSC Games Lagos Orientation Camp Instagram page. ([nysc-games](#)). Retrieved 29<sup>th</sup> of August 2020.

<sup>74</sup>Hajia Aisha Mohammed. Assistant Director, Community Development Service. NYSC, Oyo state. Interviewed on the 15th of August, 2020 at the CDS Office, Oyo state Secretariat, NYSC.

The NYSC has been resourceful in responding to creativity and changing times as the game ranges in camps have gradually increased and responded to changing security circumstances and introduction of modern games that could further foster unity, healthy competition and tact among corps members. Apart from the major games examined, monopoly games, as well as martial arts, have been introduced as minors. As a policy, individual states are at liberty to adopt additional games that could achieve the purpose of sports in the camp<sup>75</sup>, hence the dissimilarities in some voluntary games across camps in the country. Monopoly is a real estate board game for two to 8 players in which the players' goal is to remain financially solvent and force opponents into bankruptcy by buying and developing pieces of property. Each side of the board divided into 10 small rectangles representing specific properties such as railroads, utilities and a host of others<sup>76</sup>. This game has promoted bonding, interpersonal relationships, and boosted mental alertness, scrupulous calculation and, more importantly, financial intelligence as in the case of Lagos Camp in 2018 where it was deployed to teaching corps members the basics of financial management<sup>77</sup>.

The dilapidating security challenges of the country ranging from incessant kidnapping, gender violence, among others, and the indispensable role of personal security in these trying times have informed the introduction, into camp sporting activities, of martial arts training in 2012, organised by the Martial Arts and Self Defense Academy. The martial arts training was meant to train corps members in defense tactics for personal security and also instill in them a sense of discipline and confidence, while leaving their bodies healthier through induced weightless,

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<sup>75</sup> Britannica. 2020. "Monopoly board games." Accessed August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020. <https://www.Britannica.com>.

<sup>76</sup> Best Man Games. 2018. "Bestman games storms NYSC Lagos Orientation Camp with Financial Literacy" Accessed August 5, 2020. <https://bestmangames.com/bestman-games-tostirm-nysc-lagos-orientation-camp-with-financial-literacy/>

<sup>77</sup> Anon. 2012. "NYSC to Train Corpses Martial Arts." Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020. <Https://www.google.com/amp/s/thebeatsonlinemag.wordpress.com/2013/03/22/funny-reality-nysc-to-train-nysc-in-martial-arts/>

healthier cardiovascular system, enhanced flexibility and body coordination<sup>78</sup>.

Apart from the regimented sports, social activities ranging from court games, cultural displays and so on were essential recreational varieties that reinforced the peaceful interrelationship that was being forged. These activities also practically projected unity in diversity. They are essential parts of conflict and conflict resolution mechanisms which are like underground rivers that run through lives and relationships, giving messages that shape perceptions, attributions and ideas of self and the others<sup>79</sup>. They expose corps members and officials to the beauty, depth and wealth of other cultures which have displaced stereotyped perceptions and notions about others. A remarkable display is the carnival festival which displays the Nigerian cultures through traditional attires on platoon basis. Cultures to be represented are randomly assigned and platoon members that are part of the train would dress in the chosen culture pattern, synonymous with the culture they represent. This has facilitated cultural representation and showcased the beauty of the Nigerian cultures.

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<sup>78</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson. 2013. "The Role of Culture in Peace and Reconciliation." UNESCO High Level Discussion 2. 3. Accessed August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020. <https://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/Multimedia/hq/clt/images/peacereconciliationeng.pdf>.

<sup>79</sup> Media Vision. 2017. "Fidelity NYSC Games." Accessed August 6, 2020. <https://mediavisionlimited.com/fidelity-nysc-games>

## NYSC Sports and its Socio-Cultural Impact



Fig. 30: Carnival in Adamawa Camp in Damare Girie

Over the years, the government's initiative of promoting unity, integration and national cohesion through the NYSC which propagates the gospel of sporting activities as a tool to national cohesion has attracted the doting support and commitment of private individuals, corporate companies and institutions. These corporate companies and institutions have assiduously supported this course with sponsorship of games through undertaking financial expenditures, awarding of cash and noncash prizes to winners and the provision of sporting facilities in the various orientation camps across the federation. Notable among these sponsors over the years were Fidelity Bank through Fidelity NYSC games inaugurated in 2012,<sup>80</sup> the Inter Platoon

<sup>80</sup> Alabi, Folusho Adewumi. 2018. "A History of Promasidor Nigeria, 1993-2017." Masters diss., University of Ibadan.

Games (TIGA) sponsored by Wema Bank through its ALAT product and service, Ajuwaya.com.ng, Sports Station, Xright, Buzzy Body, London Professional Training Centre Nigeria, Just Travels and Tours Limited, Spar Nigeria, Beats FM, Promasidor through its Cowbell Chocolate product,<sup>81</sup> Recycle NG, Premium Redd's, Guarantee Trust Bank, PharmaDeko through its Brett Mouth Wash, Sterling Bank, MTN Nigeria through MTN Pulse plan, Best man Games in collaboration with Leadway Assurance Limited, Airtel Nigeria, Infinixmobile, Merrybet Company, Naija FM, Nigeria Immigration Service (Ibadan zone), Actors Guild of Nigeria (AGN), Tecno mobile, BrillaFm, Sports Station, Scout Boxx, Mansard Axa, Diamond/ Access bank, Guarantee Trust Bank, Dominos, United African Company (UAC)<sup>82</sup>, among others.

Generally, competitive or very engaging sporting activities end as soon as the two or three weeks of NYSC orientation camp is over. However, it is important at this juncture to establish that the continued substance of sports is vital in view of its role in national integration cum nation building process. Without doubt, sports and the spirit of sportsmanship contribute to nation building as well as instill oneness and consciousness on individual and group basis, through Sports Community Development Service (CDS) Group and NYSC Band Cultural Group. The Sports CDS group is a special group of the Community Development Service charged with the responsibility of sustaining sporting activities, as their contribution to the development of their host states and the country at large. Membership of these units is subject to individuals' outstanding performances in sporting activities in camp across the different platoons. Against the background of platoon allegiance, their dedication is channeled to the team, hence fostering team spirit, bonding and, importantly, a

<sup>81</sup>Mr Eyiayo Adegbile. Lecturer, Department of Music, Bowen University, Iwo, Osun state. Interviewed 18<sup>th</sup> of September, 2020 at the College of Communication Sciences, Bowen University, Iwo.

<sup>82</sup>NYSC. 2017. "A-Z of NYSC CDS." Accessed August 15, 2020. <https://Nysc-cds.com/cds-clubs>.

mutually shared goal of contributing their collective quotas to the development of Nigeria. Worthy of mention is the excellence criterion, devoid of ethno - religious prejudices or sentiments in the selection of members of these groups which comprises volleyball, football and athletics competitors.

Sports CDS is the official sports representative of the host state in NYSC related competitions. Their services through this platform have de-emphasised ethnic affiliations, state of origin loyalty, and rather focused gaze on the collective prosperity of the Nigerian state. Through the creation of recreation avenues and healthy rivalries among corps members and the communities they serve, there have been arousal of healthy living consciousness, purposeful lifestyle and the identification and training of talents among corps members<sup>83</sup>. Providing rhythm, vigor and melody to the NYSC programs outside the camp is the band and cultural group. They produce melodious tunes from various songs, coordinated dance steps, showcasing the beauty and vibrancy of the power of unity in productive efforts.

Fig. 31: NYSC Katsina Band playing at an NYSC function in 2016



Source: NYSC instagram page (nysc\_ng). Retrieved August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020

The deployment of sports as a means of enhancing unity transcended from local visions to a national goal with expanded participation, prospects of unity and integration on a wider scale. The management in its effort to further enhance the noble objectives of the scheme instituted an annual National Sports and Cultural Festival which brings together talented corps members from the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory to compete in track and field events, notably football for males, volleyball for females, 4×100 meters relay races, and 100metre dash for both genders. The cultural competition segment comprises drama, cultural dance and standup comedy competitions<sup>84</sup>. The festival in zonal and national categories has, to all intents and purposes, foster common ties of friendships among competitors and spectators with various ethnic origins

<sup>84</sup> NYSC. 2018. "Milestones in NYSC Progression. Dance, Drama and Sports Development." NYSC Year Book, 45th Commemoration: 27

serving in the various states<sup>85</sup>. This has potential to expose all to the beauty of the Nigerian cultures, hence inducing appreciation and acceptance of diversity.

The use of sports as a means of building trust, promoting friendships and unity that defies perceptions and stereotypes, has extended to the general public through the NYSC platform, hence the need to continually project the scheme as essential necessity in the pursuit and sustenance of unity and integration in the Nigerian polity. In facilitating physical fitness, cordiality and in serving as a leveler between the military and the NYSC outside the camp, friendly matches have been organised. In attestation to this, in 2016, a friendly match was played between the Kano Nigerian Air Force Football Club and the NYSC Kano Football team on the Nigerian Air Force Base pitch in Kano State with 50 spectators<sup>86</sup>. The platform placed both clubs on the equal pedestal of playing by the rules, emphasising the equality of Nigerians regardless of discipline or occupation. Besides civil-military partnership, corps members have also demonstrated their commitment to sowing seeds of cooperation and unity among students as part of their contributions to the nation, through competitions on testing for parade knowledge, match past in slow and quick times, and band performances. The NYSC Band CDS group of Niger State in 2019 organised Children's Day interschool parade competition for secondary schools in Minna, held at the Police Training School<sup>87</sup>.

Apart from promoting sporting activities among corps members, the NYSC has demonstrated commitment to heralding integration, physical health and facilitating inter-governmental organisational cooperation and unity by participating in sporting activities for all its benefits. In 2013, the

<sup>85</sup>Kano Editorial Corps. "NYSC FC Kano Stands their Ground against Nigerian Air Force (NAF) Kano. Accessed August 20, 2020. <https://amp/s/zakeko.wordpress.com/2016/11/23/nysc-fc-kano-stands-their-groud-against-nigerian-airforce-NAF-Kano-/>.

<sup>86</sup>Akinfolajimi, Y.G. 2019." Niger Band CDS Organizes Children's Day Parade Competition for Secondary Schools in Minna." *Niger Kopi*, June/July 11.

<sup>87</sup>Hajia Aisha Mohammed. Assistant Director, Community Development Service. NYSC, Oyo State. Interviewed on the 15th of August, 2020 at the CDS Office, Oyoste Secretariat, NYSC.

scheme participated in the Nigerian Public Service Games held in Makurdi, Benue State<sup>88</sup>. The importance of intergovernmental commission competition as a means of promoting better understanding and unity cannot be over stressed. This is because of its strategic importance in promoting interactions and the true spirit of sportsmanship, which is not in winning the games per se, but in taking part and playing the games by the rules.

The use of sports as a means of enhancing unity and national integration has not only been impactful, but has also recorded far reaching achievements both at the individual and corporate levels. At the individual level, in the face of a dilapidated security architecture and apparatuses as evident from the geometrical rise in crime and criminal activities, the scheme has been and is still empowering corps members, through martial arts, with crime combating skills necessary for their defense. The high rates of kidnapping and rape, among other crimes, have made the issue of security and defense indispensable to both individuals and the society at large. The martial arts equip its subscribers with security trainings necessary for their physical and mental safety. The training has bequeathed defense skills, emotional intelligence to its trainees, a necessary skill to performing in the corporate world. It is a truism that sports has instilled discipline and perseverance among corps members, which are virtues necessary for the service year and post NYSC years. The lights out time of 11 p.m. and wakeup call of 5a.m. (with possible punishment for defaulters) have created consistency in the corps members' daily routines, such as transformed sleeping, rising and living patterns. This change in their routine has also boosted their overall wellbeing and productivity. Through the various tasks such as parades in which the corps members are required to be under the rain or shine for as long as the parade lasted, Man o War drills through which the will to persevere regardless of stress or pressure is

<sup>88</sup>National Archive, Ibadan. *Daily sketch*. Thursday May 24/1973, nos. 2838.

instilled, corps members have been exposed to the world of real experience which is different from their experiences at school. These tasks expose them to experiences that teach perseverance as the key to success. The daily exercises have resulted in physical fitness through the burning of excess fat, especially during the weeks of orientation. Through sports, the NYSC, among other things, has inculcated discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition/virtue of industry at work and of patriotic and loyal service to the nation in any situation they find themselves<sup>89</sup>. Needless to state that since the service year is a physically and mentally demanding phase of their lives, sports has become a requisite for every medically fit corps members.

Team spirit is an indispensable quality necessary for performance in the workplace and corps members gain this through their participation in sporting activities, both within and outside the camps. Through inter-platoon competitions which pull together people of diverse ethno-religious backgrounds to achieve the singular purpose of winning and projecting the platoons, a team spirit of trust and unity of purpose is upheld because success is projected in this way as collective, thus de-emphasising ethno-religious differences for the collective good. This disposition empowers participants to effectively cope with individual shortcomings, avoid pursuing cross purpose agendas at workplace, and also induces cooperation for the fulfillment of task and achievement of company goals and objectives.

Another resounding achievement of NYSC games is the discovery and projection of outstanding talents on national and international stages. The scheme has provided a platform for corps members to showcase their talents, particularly in the orientation camps, through exceptional performances usually on the platoon levels<sup>90</sup>. Through commendable performances, exceptional corps members are identified and posted to sports

<sup>89</sup>Hajia Aisha Mohammed. Assistant Director, Community Development Service, NYSC..

<sup>90</sup>Hajia Aisha Mohammed. Assistant Director, Community Development Service, NYSC..

related places for their primary assignment, and are assigned to the sports CDS group, from where they represent their mobilised states on the national stage. For example, in Oyo State, some outstanding football players of the scheme have been signed onto the Shooting Stars Football Club (3sc) on accounts of their impressive football outings against the 3sc<sup>91</sup>. Some have been appointed as members of the state sports referees, while some have been signed onto international football clubs<sup>92</sup> and national team. For example, an exceptional corps member was discovered during a football match in 2013 at the National Sports Festival and subsequently invited to the national team camp of the Super Eagles<sup>93</sup>. The discovery of talented corps members that could play the drum formed the basis of the formation of the NYSC Band group that was hitherto filled by hiring the Nigerian Police band<sup>94</sup>.

More so, games have equipped corps members with critical life skills such as money management and financial intelligence. Through monopoly games played in camp, young graduates are equipped with tactical financial skills of saving, investing, borrowing, insurance, taxation and entrepreneurship critical for a financially responsible life.

NYSC games have also proved advantageous on national and corporate levels. For example, the games have created cordial relationships between corps members, military personnel/ paramilitary agencies and the larger community. Also, there is partnership between the Nigerian Army and the NYSC in the administration of orientation camps. Moreover, the monitoring and taking oversight duties of soldiers in the administration of sporting activities have further deepened cordiality between both bodies and corps members, consequently eliminating military/civilian tension. Worthy of

<sup>91</sup>Hajia Aisha Mohammed. Assistant Director, Community Development Service. NYSC...

<sup>92</sup>NYSC. 2018. "Milestones in NYSC Progression. Dance, Drama and Sports Development." NYSC Year Book, 45th Commemoration: 27

<sup>93</sup>Hajia Aisha Mohammed. Assistant Director, Community Development Service. NYSC...

<sup>94</sup>Lagos Post. 2012. "Promasidor Sponsors Lagos NYSC Volley Ball Competition." Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020. <https://lagosposting.com/promasidor-sponsors-lagos-nysc-volleyball-competition/>

mention is the fact that these nonviolent interactions have induced emotional attachments and ultimately resulted in marital relationships. For example, in 2019, it was popularly circulated with pictures as proof of an EbonyiCorper who proposed marriage to a soldier in camp. Paramilitary agencies such as the Man O War have built productive relationships with the scheme through sports. These relationships and cooperation have further projected the relevance of these agencies to nation building.

Furthermore, seeds of hostile and discriminatory intergroup relations planted and nurtured by colonial divisive policies have been gradually ameliorated and replaced by peaceful interactions facilitated by sports. Nigeria is a country whose history since colonialism has been spiced by intense ethno-religious loyalty and suspicion, a contrasting distance to the pre-colonial relations of states and empires. The warped loyalty and suspicion laid the solid foundation for the outbreak of the major pogrom few years after Nigerian independence. In reversing the negative curve, the NYSC was created to facilitate intergroup relations, national cohesion and integration. Various NYSC activities, notably sports, have been tailored to achieving these goals. The random non selective division of corps members into platoons and their requirement in sports participation have provided perfect friendly atmosphere for intergroup relations. The desire to win in competitions have pooled corps members together, de-emphasised differences and induced a team spirit to achieving tasks. Through the sports festival, participants have been exposed to the wealth and beauty of Nigerian cultures, thereby invoking appreciation and respect for tradition. Worthy of mention is the fact that competitors at the festival do not represent their states of origin, rather the states they are deployed, hence de-emphasising ethnic loyalty. The melodious united beats and rhythms played by the Band group of diverse backgrounds resounds the unity that can be achieved when there is unity of purpose.

Also, the achievement of public private partnership dedicated to the pursuit and unification of the nation has been made possible through sports. Various individuals and corporate bodies have expressed and displayed commitments to the unity of Nigeria through their sponsorships of sporting competitions both within and outside the camps. This cooperation has made the unification of the nation a collective task that requires the commitment of all and sundry. These corporate social responsibilities have not only projected their brands, but have also promoted their continuous existence and thriving in the Nigerian market place.

In addition, NYSC sports have facilitated the improvement of the nation's infrastructural facilities. As documented above, private partnerships have achieved the deployment of individual and corporate resources to infrastructural development of orientation camps and the country at large. In promoting the spirit of team work and healthy competition in volley ball, Promasidor Nigeria, the makers of Cowbell milk under the Cowbell Chocolate brand, began the National Youth Service Corps Cowbell inter-platoon volley ball contest in 2012. It is a competition that has been consistently sponsored by Cowbell Chocolate for female Youth corps members. This competition is organised only in Lagos during the compulsory orientation. The aim of the initiative is to ignite the sporting skills of corps members as well as source for talents that could represent Lagos State and the nation at international events. Besides the sponsorship, the company also rewards the winners with #30,000, #20,000 and #10,000 for the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> positions respectively, amidst other consolation prizes from raffle draws<sup>95</sup>. The company, however, did not stop at kick starting the competition, it also provided facilities for the same course with the donation of a volleyball court to the Lagos Orientation Camp in 2012. Worthy of commendation is the role played by a former corps member Omoruyi Esenosarumsa Favour with call up number RV/16B/1780 in the promotion of sports in Rivers State.

As her individual community development project, the corps member during her service year constructed a volleyball court and established a volleyball team in KNC Buguma in Asari.Toru Local Government<sup>96</sup>.

## Conclusion

From the foregoing, the feeling of nationalism is indispensable to the process of nation building and sports have created a path for its actualisation through binding people, helping to develop a feeling of patriotism and unity that can be potently used to counter internal agitations and separation calls. On the copious instances of bonding the pre-colonial people and a proof of the one human entity, its adoption as a strategy to unify Nigerians, not only by the NYSC but also a national agenda, has built a sense of purpose and national pride, and proven to be veritable and dependable in the forging of solidarity among the Nigerian peoples. Sports is a means of building up the youths who make up the most vibrant population, who would in turn build the nation through their acquired capacities in various sectors, and fast track the country's achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), such as Good Health and Wellbeing, Gender Equality, Sustainable Cities, Communities and strong Institutions.

The familiarisation of Nigerian youths with sporting activities has helped to build and define their characters and that of the nation at large. Participation in sporting activities are bounded by rules such as teamwork, dedication, sportsmanship, discipline and a host of other qualities that have exceeded being official criteria, and have rather become internalised in the participants as lifelong qualities. In addition to individual advantages accrued from sports, its impact on the development of Nigeria has led to the emergence of public/private partnership most especially in the area of building of sporting infrastructures. In all, it could be argued that since 1973, the impact of NYSC Sports on the social integration of the youths in particular and national cohesion in general cannot be over-emphasised.

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Architect Olanike Aduloju. Director, Porters' Touch Consultancy and Convener Save a Prince(ss); a Non Governmental organization. Interviewed 1<sup>st</sup> of August, 2029. at her residence; No 4, BashorunOgunmola Estate, Bodija, Ibadan, Oyo state.

Chief (Surv). OlapadeAkinbola. Aged 65years. Chairman, Managing Director Lekki Realty Nigeria Limited and Chairman Mutual Alliance Insurance Brokers Limited. Interviewed September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020 at No. 1, Association Street, Association close, Ashi- Bodija, Ibadan, Oyo state.

Dr Moradeyo Alabi. Medical director, Tobi Hospital, Stadium Complex, and Immediate past Head of Family Medicine, University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital. Interviewed 29<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020 at No. 1, Talabi lane, Ibrahim Taiwo Road, Ilorin, Kwara State.

Dr Tajudeen Lasabi. Lecturer, Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State. Interviewed on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020 at History and International Studies Unit, Bowen University.

Miss Alabi, F. 2015/2016 Cross River corps member. Interviewed 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, 2020.

Mr Eyiayi Adegbile. Lecturer, Department of Music, Bowen University, Iwo, Osun state. Interviewed 18<sup>th</sup> of September, 2020 at the College of Communication Sciences, Bowen University, Iwo.

Mr Lanre Odumesi. Chief Executive Officer, Fort Credit Limited. Interviewed 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, 2020 at No 12, SeyeNuga Estate, Bodija, Ibadan, Oyo state.

Onumonu,U. Department of History and International Studies, Adeleke University, Ede, Osun state Interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup> of

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## Chapter Fourteen

# THE NATURE AND IMPACT OF NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS ORIENTATION CAMPS

*Kenneth T. Azaigba*

*Department of History and International Studies,  
Federal University Dutsin-Ma,  
Katsina State*

### Introduction

National Youth Service Corps Orientation camps provide ground for the actualisation of a core flagship programme of the NYSC scheme, which is the orientation course. The course is a foundational subset and one amongst three other cardinal programmes namely; primary assignment, community development service and winding-up/passing-out programme. Every State of the federation houses an orientation camp, where induction into the ethos of the NYSC scheme is done and which lasts for twenty-one days (that is, three weeks). The core essence of the camp programme is to promote social integration and build trans-ethnic consciousness amongst Nigerian graduate youths. The NYSC orientation programme is therefore couched to arrest the dysfunction in nation-building and as well shift attention of the Nigerian graduate youths away from white collar jobs through entrepreneurial skills acquisition. These constitute the objectives of the NYSC scheme. The camps are structured points where the ideals of national integration, character development and patriotism are nurtured towards building bridges across cultural and ideological divides.

The centrality of the camps in the overall attempt at retooling youths for national service undergird the series of training courses meant to reshape perceptions and expectations as well

as instill work ethics for not just self but national development. The extent to which these lofty ideals have been met continues to elicit intellection on various segments of the scheme. But not much attention has been placed on the very strategic value of camps. It is against this backdrop that this chapter particularly emphasizes the role of camps in the NYSC scheme using majorly primary sources.

For ease of analysis, the chapter is sectionalised. The first section is introduction. The second section explains the idea and utilitarian value of NYSC orientation camps while the third section isolates camp activities and dilates their specific functionality. The fourth section centres on the impact of camp activities on corps members and their environs. The fifth section highlights the core constraints diminishing the full realisation of the objectives of the NYSC orientation programme. The concluding remarks are presented in the sixth section.

### **The Idea and Utilitarian Value of NYSC Orientation Camps**

To properly contextualise the discourse, it is imperative to first explicate on what a camp is and then explain the sense in which NYSC orientation camps are being referenced. A camp, as an operational concept, is not easy to define. This is because the concept has multifaceted dimensions. For instance, there are camps for refugees, semi-carceral institutions, like migration detention centres, protest camps, there are also summer camps and so on. Nevertheless, Minca, provides a broad definition: he sees a camp “as a temporary confined space, characterized by an exceptional and ambiguous status between exclusion and protection”. Though the definition harps on the fundamental essentials of a camp, it does not adequately dilate on the multifaceted dynamics. For camps differ in a number of aspects. Migration camps, for example, are a form of forced segregation while gated communities are represented as needing protection. These dynamics also shape the duration of camps. For our

purpose, the concern is on youth camps. Myles Lynch, et al, has provided an incisive perspective that assists our knowledge of youth camps. They argue that the traditional school settings, in which high stakes testing, standardization, and rote memorization are favoured, are not effectively preparing youth to develop their own creativity which is a key component for 21century problem solving. Therefore, youth camps may provide an optimal, out of school, informal educational option for youth to enhance and develop their own creativity. Other studies have affirmed the positivity of youth camps and identified outcomes such as, development of friendship skills, improved positive identity, increased self-skills, increased self-esteem, thoughtful decision making and the ability to forge productive human relations. In this discourse, a youth camp is conceptualised as a demarcated space specifically set out to induct youths on the essentials of social cohesion, work ethics, civic maturation and societal development. In the specific context of the NYSC, the orientation camp is a paramilitary setting where graduate youths are inducted on a broad spectrum of civic ideals and self-development skills to help them optimize their potentials for self and national development.

The idea of organising orientation camps for Nigerian graduates of tertiary institutions both in Nigeria and abroad, who are deemed to be worthy in character and learning and have met the requirements for graduation as set out by the senate or academic board of such institutions is founded on some basic historical circumstances and the need to achieve some developmental objectives. At inception in 1973/1974, graduates from six feeraal universities and their affiliates were eligible for the one-year service. By 1975/1976 Decree No: 24 allowed eligible foreign Nigeran graduates who graduated in 1973/1974 and foreign graduates who graduated in 1973/1974 were allowed to participate. In 1976/1977 and 1977/1978 Nigerian graduates of HND.NCE fro~~NYSC PUBLICATION~~ 1975/1976 session were eligible until 1985 when Decree No. 21 of 1985 removed holders of NCE

from participating in the NYSC Orientation service.<sup>1</sup>

It is worth noting that, the scheme was put together as a subset of the three (3) Rs: Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation of General Yakubu Gowon's attempt at putting the country together after the end of the civil war, which lasted between 1967 and 1970<sup>2</sup>. The need to design a programme geared towards promoting national unity, healthy inter-group relations and cooperation among Nigerian youths in particular and Nigerian peoples in general based in consequences of the civil war necessitated the introduction of the 3R. Thus, the NYSC scheme was initially primarily targeted at promoting national unity and integration. However, overtime, the NYSC scheme assumed multiple mandates with main focus on youth development, national integration and development. These focus areas were shaped by the enabling laws of 1983, 1993, 1999 and 2000. The main objectives of the NYSC scheme are as follows;

1. Inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instigating in them a tradition of industry at work and of patriotic and loyal service to the nation in any situation they find themselves;
2. Raise the moral of our youth by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement;
3. Develop in the Nigerian youths the attitudes of mind acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest;
4. Enable Nigerian youths acquire the spirit of self-reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self-employment,
5. Contribute to accelerated growth of the national economy;
6. Develop common ties among the Nigerian youths and promote national unity and integration;

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<sup>1</sup>See NYSC (2014) *NYSC Magazine, The Journal of NYSC Directorate Headquarters*, Abuja: National Youth Service Corps Service

<sup>2</sup> Tyoden has articulated the thinking behind the Rs. For details see, Sonni Gwanne Tyoden (1995) *Nigeria: Youth Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, Ibadan: Sibon Books Limited

7. Remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups; and
8. Develop a sense of cooperate existence and common destiny of the people of Nigeria<sup>3</sup>. In order to realise the above objectives, four programmes were rolled out to give meaning to the mandate namely; mobilisation/orientation, primary assignment, community development service and winding-up/passing out. Of these programmes, mobilisation/orientation is the first and foundational programme meant to strategically provide orientation courses on a wide range of training themes that are planned and placed under defined time frames. NYSC camps are therefore centres where these activities take place. In simple terms, an NYSC camp is a paramilitary setting where virtues of discipline and resilience are inculcated under a command structure. Sequel to mobilisation and deployment to different States for national service, corps members are required to undergo a 21-day orientation course in a designated NYSC camp.

The orientation programme takes place simultaneously in all NYSC camps across the country and is formulated to fulfill the following objectives:

- (a) To give corps members a better understanding and appreciation of the scheme.
- (b) To familiarise corps members with the environment in their place of posting.
- (c) To toughen and prepare corps members physically and mentally for the task ahead.
- (d) To equip corps members with practical social and leadership skills that will enable them meet the challenges of the service

<sup>3</sup>See, NYSC (1983) *Summative Evaluation Report of Ten Years of the National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria*, Lagos: Directorate of the National Youth Service Corps, these objectives are well expressed in the following documents, NYSC (1993) *National Youth Service Corps Decree no.51. of 1993*. Abuja: National Youth Service Corps Service, Nigeria, NYSC (1999) *National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Handbook*, Abuja. NYSC, NYSC (2004) *The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) ACT. CAP N84 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria*, Abuja: National Youth Service Corps Service, Nigeria.

year and the nation in future<sup>4</sup>.

- (e) To enable corps members imbibe the culture of professionalism and self reliance

These objectives are quite ambitious and merit further elucidation on the underlying ideation. The fact that youth graduates of tertiary institutions are selected for camping bespeak the belief that youths are change agents and therefore need to play a pivotal role in forging national unity and cohesion. The desire to get this set of youths armed with tertiary education, vim and idealism to spin national consciousness that transcends primordial boundaries or ethnic cocoons is not only thoughtful but well-placed. It suffices to espouse that the emphasis on youths as change agents derive much impetus from the understanding that youths are products of modernity and objects of pedagogical and psychological expertise<sup>5</sup>. This conceptualisation of youth reveals two set roles: a stage model of individual development and an element of social integration processes. Youth corps members are imaged as shapeable objects, with the demand for an unproblematic integration into adult society. The belief that pedagogy and education direct the individual through a process of cultural and civic maturation which complements the biological development of a human being<sup>6</sup> underscores the choice of this demographic group.

The idea of organising orientation for corps members is to ensure that corps members are grounded in the basic rudiments of the scheme as enunciated earlier. Consequently, corps members are orientated through language seminars, socio-cultural and traditional lectures, development workshops, career mentoring programmes, religious activities, skill acquisition and entrepreneurship development programmes as

<sup>4</sup> NYSC (2011) *National Youth Service Corps: General Policy Guidelines for Orientation Courses*, Abuja: Planning Research and Statistics Department, NYSC.

<sup>5</sup> Arnett, J. J. (2007) "Emerging Adulthood: What is it, and what is it good for?" *Child Development Perspectives*, Vol. 1 (2), P.68-72

<sup>6</sup> Ansell, N. (2005) *Children, Youth and Development, Routledge Perspectives on Development*, Oxon: Routledge.

well as Man-O- War paramilitary training<sup>7</sup>. The expected outcomes of participating in these activities are: to increase self-discipline and opportunity for inter-ethnic interaction, reduce fear of the unknown, enhance knowledge of the country's development agenda, and imbibe the culture of professionalism. This was further corroborated by an NYSC camp official, who informs further that;

The orientation programme aims to familiarise corps members with the camp environment, stimulate a sense of community living. The idea of having corps members stay together, work in groups helps them to know each other, understand each other's norms, customs and traditions of the communities where the camp is; imbibe the spirit of team work...<sup>8</sup>

More so, the orientation programme in camps across the country is also structured to drive a fundamental objective which is often not expressly pronounced, perhaps because it is not emphatically stressed in the enabling legal construct of the scheme, but implied in the training protocols in camps. This is that of raising a leadership class amongst the educated youth that is patriotic, morally and physically disciplined and truly nationalistic. This expectation is grounded on the belief that having gone through the triple liberating experience of higher education, national service and exposure to other cultures, they would then act as social catalysts to take the country to a national imaginary. The triple process is also expected to liberate the informed and cultivated individual (through higher education), the dutiful citizen patriot (through national service) and the

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<sup>7</sup> See, NYSC (2018) *National Youth Service Corps Yearbook: 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Commemorative Edition*, PP.16-45

<sup>8</sup> This NYSC official pleaded anonymity because he was not authorized to grant interview. However, he obliged information. His views were found instructive. Oral Interview held with NYSC Official, 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2020, Abuja.

nationalistic subject (through exposure to other cultures)<sup>9</sup>.

In furtherance of camp orientation ideals, partner agencies such as security organisations, Central Bank of Nigeria, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Mercy Corps, Nigerian Society of Engineers, Ministry of Education amongst others,<sup>10</sup> provide enlightenment on various aspects of vocational training to corps members. The point being made is therefore that camps are avenues for internalising the fundamentals of the NYSC scheme.

It makes sense to emphasize the point that beyond the ideals of national unity and integration that the scheme promotes, NYSC camps are also centres for entrepreneurship training. The youth bulge occasioned by the increasing challenge of youth unemployment in the country, the need to train corps members on entrepreneurial endeavours became imperative. Thus, beginning from 2012, entrepreneurship training became a complementary objective and it was objectified thus; “to enable Nigerian youths acquire the spirit of self-reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self-employment”<sup>11</sup>. Consequently, two specific programmes were introduced- Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) and the War Against Poverty (WAP). The programmes are designed to train corps members on various vocational businesses and entrepreneurial skills both in and out of the orientation camp.

SAED is specifically couched to achieve the following objectives;

- (i) Sensitization and mobilisation of corps members for enrollment into the skill acquisition and entrepreneurship development programme;

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<sup>9</sup>See, Obasa, P.K. (1983) “Consolidation and After” in M. M. Owosina, S.O., et al (eds) *Compendium of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme: Ten Years of Service to the Nation*, Lagos: Super colour Production, PP. 60-122. This idea has also been expressed by Onyishi. Read, Onyishi, A. O. (2011) “Youth and National Development in Nigeria: An Analysis of National Youth Service Scheme, 1999-2019”, *International of Modern Political Economy*, Vol. 2, No. 1, PP. 87-102.

<sup>10</sup>See, NYSC (2016) *General Policy Guideline for NYSC Orientation Courses Reviewed*

<sup>11</sup>NYSC (2018) *National Youth Service Corps Yearbook* .p.36

- (ii) Entrepreneurship and hands-on training in and out of camp;
- (iii) Identification of organisations at the State level to provide training and mentoring in specific skills sets;
- (iv) Attachment of the corps members to take the various organisations for skill acquisition and entrepreneurship development
- (v) Business plan/feasibility report development and collation
- (vi) Monitoring and supervision of trainee corps Members; and
- (vii) Facilitation of access to available funding opportunities<sup>12</sup>.

As of 2018, the NYSC reported that over 1,132,409 corps members have been sensitised and reached with empowerment messages while over 764, 677 have completed post-camp training. In addition, the Bank of Industry (BOI) which partners the scheme on this programme trained no fewer than 3,927 corps members under the BOI-NYSC Graduate Empowerment Fund. One thousand and seventy -seven (1,077) of them have applied for loans in tune of about four billion naira and a total of five hundred and forty million naira had been disbursed to 325 corps members, and they have all established their own businesses in different areas of the country<sup>13</sup>. Another empowerment programme designed for corps members is christened War Against Poverty (WAP). It is an economic empowerment programme which focuses on SDGs 1&2 and targets the preparation of corps members for post-service life. It seeks to empower corps members with agro-enterprise skills and interest-free loans with a view to generating employment, reducing extreme poverty and hunger, creating wealth and boosting agricultural productivity for food security in the country. Corps members are given general entrepreneurial training in addition to specific training in snail production, bee rearing, plantain/banana sucker multiplication, mushroom

<sup>12</sup> NYSC (2018) *National Youth Service Corps Yearbook*...p.36

<sup>13</sup> NYSC (2018) *National Youth Service Corps Yearbook*...P.37

farming and poultry farming. It is reported that as of 2018, 3,266 corps members have been trained and 2,543 empowered with the sum of Six Hundred and Twenty-nine million, Seven Hundred Thousand Naira (629,700,000) as revolving loans<sup>14</sup>. The point is therefore that SAED and WAP have functioned as a social tool for reorientation at the camps as it relates to self-reliance. The significance of these programmes is better appreciated when located within the context of reducing youth unemployment.

The utilitarian value of NYSC camps could also be discerned from some auxiliary benefits of camp experience. For a 'camp is more than a location or a programme; it encompasses the affective, cognitive, behavioral, physical, social and spiritual benefits that youth receive during and after the camping experience<sup>15</sup>. For example, NYSC camps provide corps members the opportunity to develop intrapersonal skills. These opportunities prop positive developments by offering novel, challenging experiences that effectively open the learning pathways of corps members. Through the enhancement of youth's self-awareness and socio-cultural consciousness, it is expected that they become empathetic to the understanding of 'self' and 'others' as well as managing emotions and self-discipline<sup>16</sup>.

More so, the fact that the setting of camp sites is isolated from the distractions that characterize everyday environs shapes camp experiences in a plethora of ways. A considerable body of literature has affirmed the fact that natural environments are contexts for personal restoration referred to as a reduction in stress, arousal, and anxiety<sup>17</sup>. Obviously, restorative settings promote a sense of being away, that is, a change in the location

<sup>14</sup> NYSC (2018) *National Youth Service Corps Yearbook*...p.38

<sup>15</sup> Henderson, K.A.; et al (2007) "Components of Camp Experiences for Positive Youth Development", *Journal of Youth Development*, 3(1), 17-28.

<sup>16</sup> See, Garst, B. A., et al, (2011) "Youth Development and the Camp Experience". *New Directions for Youth Development*, No. 130. Retrieved 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2020. Published online in Wiley online Library. DOI: 10.1002/7d.398.P.76

<sup>17</sup> See, Stokols, D. & Altman, I. (eds.) *Handbook of Environmental Psychology*. See also, Hoboken, N. J. et al (1991) "Restorative Effects of Natural-Environment Experience", *Environment and Behavior*, 23, 3-26.

and activities of daily life, and restoration associated with natural settings is greater than restoration received from non-natural setting.

NYSC camps also promote the idea of group living. At camp, corps members experience all activities in social groups - eating, sleeping, playing and working. This helps to foster a sense of community in organisational settings and these organisational elements have a positive influence on corps members' self-identity. It is in this context that a former NYSC Director-General, Brigadier General H.B. Momoh's remarks as follows:

The NYSC orientation camp is more than a reflection of the entire nation. They are like cultural melting pots; considering that they bring together youths with diverse background from across the country for planned and systematic induction. The camp environment fosters peculiar closeness among corps members, enhances mutual interaction and understanding and helps to break down barriers arising from stenotypes and prejudices which have been the bane of our pluralistic society<sup>18</sup>.

Suffice it to add that, NYSC camps provide what could be described as an equalising context for corps members. For example, many of the status symbols (wearing certain clothing, luxurious personal effects) are less prevalent at camp. Corps members are provided with uniforms. Because youth corps members eat the same food, participate in the same activities and sleep in the same shared spaces, differences between the haves and the have-nots are minimized. The experience also helps to foster deep friendships with peers and therefore a sense of belonging and connectedness<sup>19</sup>.

The significance of traditions and rituals such as opening ceremonies, competitive events, Camp Fire night and leadership programmes also need be stressed. Traditions and ritual foster group cohesion and community building. Positive experiences

<sup>18</sup> Cited in NYSC YearBook 2018...P.69

<sup>19</sup> The researcher was also privileged to undergo training as a youth corps member and therefore his reminiscence of this experience is from a former participant perspective.

and memories such as awards received or performances shared become associated with camp traditions and rituals overtime and are imbued with emotional significance. Camp Fire ceremonies are a common feature of the camp experience and an important example of traditions and rituals<sup>20</sup>. Ceremonies like campfire programmes foster personal reflection and recognition that appear to strengthen camp participants' connection to the camp community. Indeed, NYSC campfires are symbolic and foundational to the construction of shared memories and storytelling. NYSC camps therefore provide opportunity for a pack of experiences that are critical not just for promoting intergroup relations on a national spectrum but also assist in internalizing virtues vital for transiting to adulthood. In sum, the ideation underlying the organization of NYSC camps is well thought out and promising. The extent to which these ideas have been achieved will be engaged in subsequent sections. Below is a table containing the list of addresses of NYSC orientation camps across Nigeria.

<sup>20</sup> The camp fire night experience is well laid in this document, "Interesting Activities You can be part of in NYSC camp". Retrieved on 31 August, 2020, <https://flexxzone.fcmb.com>.

**Table 11:** Showing Orientation Camps and their Locations Nationwide

S/N	STATE	LOCATION
1	Abia	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Umunna, Bende Local Government Area.
2	Adamawa	Adamawa State Polytechnic, Jimela, Yola North LGA.
3	Akwa Ibom	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Ikot Itie Udung, Nsit Atai Local Government Area.
4	Anambra	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Progressive Senior Secondary School, Umunya, Oyi Local Government Area.
5	Bauchi	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, KM 60 Wallo, Ganjuwa Local Government Council.
6	Bayelsa	Kaiama Grammar School, Kaiama, Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA.
7	Benue	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Wannure, Tarka Local Government Area, KM 35 Makurdi - Gboko Road.
8	Borno	College of Peace and Disaster Management, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Babbar-Ruga, Batsari Road, Katsina.
9	Cross River	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Obubra, Obubra Local Government Area.
10	Delta	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Former Martins TTC Issele - Uku, Aniocha North LGA.
11	Ebonyi	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Macgregor College, Afikpo Local Government Area.
12	Edo	Okada Grammar School, Okada Ovia North-East Local Government Area.
13	Ekiti	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Ise-Orun, Ise/Emure LGA.
14	Enugu	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Awgu, Awgu Local Government Area.
15	FCT - Abuja	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Kubwa - Bwari Area Council.
16	Gombe	NYSC Temporary Orientation Camp, Science Technical College, Amada, KM 21, Gombe - Bauchi Highway, Near International Airport.
17	Imo	NYSC Temporary Orientation Camp, Former Girl's Model Secondary School, Eziamaka Obaire, Nkwerre LGA.
18	Jigawa	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Opposite Army Barrack, Farisua, Dutse LGA.
19	Kaduna	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Kaduna - Abuja Road.
20	Kano	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Kusala Dam, Karaye LGA.
21	Katsina	Youth Multi-Purpose Centre / NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Mani Road, Katsina, Katsina State.
22	Kebbi	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Dakingari LGA.
23	Kogi	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Asaya, Kabba LGA.
24	Kwara	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Yikpata, Edu LGA.
25	Lagos	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Iyana-Iyana, Agege.
26	Nasarawa	Magaji Dan - Yamusa Permanent Orientation Camp, Keffi.
27	Niger	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, (Former Abubakar Dada Senior Secondary School), Paiko.
28	Ogun	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Ikenne Road, Sagamu LGA.
29	Ondo	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Ikare - Akoko LGA.
30	Osun	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Aisu College Hospital Road, Ede, Ede North LGA.
31	Oyo	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp Iseyin, Iseyin Local Government Area.
32	Plateau	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Mangu Local Government Area.
33	Rivers	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Nonwa-Gbam, Tai LGA.
34	Sokoto	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Wamakkko LGA.
35	Taraba	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Sibre Airport Road, Jalingo.
36	Yobe	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp Dazigau, KM 5 Potiskum-Kano Road, Nangere Local Government Area, Yobe State.
37	Zamfara	NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Beside FRSC Office, Tsafe Local Government Area.

The table above indicates that while some NYSC camps are temporary camps, others are permanent orientation camps. This parity has implications for the quality of camp facilities and this will be considered subsequently. However, our set task in this section is to identify and explicate on the thought-frame underlying the organisation of NYSC camps and the complementary values they imbue in corps members.

## **The Organisational Frame and Nature of Camp Activities in the NYSC Camps**

NYSC camps are systematically organised to give effect to the objectives for which the camps are set up to attain. The engagements in camp are organised around four major activities;

- (i) Admission of prospective corps members and commencement of registration.
- (ii) Closure of registration at cut-off date and time (usually 12.00 midnight of the second day of registration)
- (iii) Official opening ceremony during, which corps members are sworn-in and;
- (iv) Closing of ceremony at the end of which corps members are issued posting letters for onward departure to their various places of primary assignment<sup>21</sup>.

In-between these major activities, there are also a number of very important events aimed at properly registering corps members and organising them into groups for easy administration of the camp and induction. Before isolating specific camp activities for emphasis, it makes sense to highlight salient procedural planks for admission of corps members in the camps and explicate on the role of NYSC bureaucracy as it relates to induction and all other activities. This is important because the organizational framework has serious implications for how well camp objectives are met and how the human resources on camp are managed.

<sup>21</sup> See, General Policy Guideline for NYSC Orientation Courses Reviewed 2016, PP1-40.

On arrival at the camp gate, every prospective corps member is subjected to manual and electronic security checks before passage into the camps is granted. The purpose of the check is to ensure security of the camps and also prevent unauthorised persons from infiltrating the camps. A call-up letter is therefore the first form of identity. After gaining entrance into the camps, prospective corps members are required to undergo a number of registration protocols namely; scrutiny of certificates and other required identifications, Issuance of State registration number, issuance of identity cards, opening of bank account and so on. On completion of registration protocols, corps members are organised into platoons. A platoon usually consists of a hundred corps members. Each platoon has a platoon officer who is an NYSC official, a Drill Instructor, a Physical Training Officer and Platoon Leaders elected by the Platoon members<sup>22</sup>. The point is that corps members are organised in manageable compartments and camp activities are filtered through these groups. It is therefore important to stress the special duties of platoon officers who by design are in-charge of the day to day management of corps members on camp. They are saddled with the following specific duties;

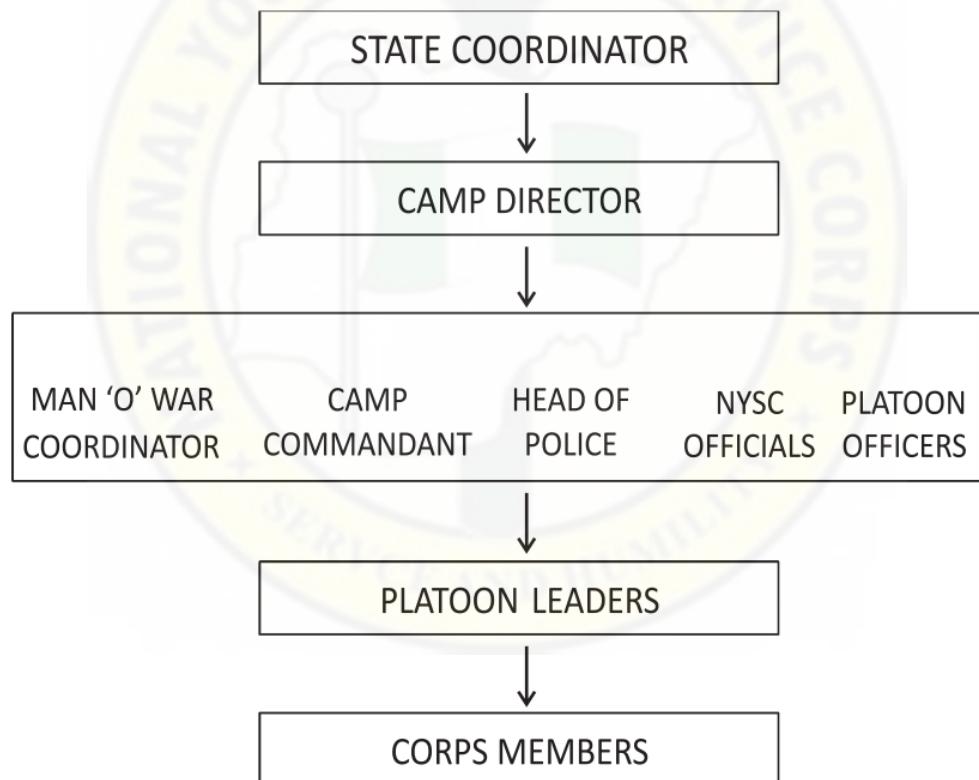
- (i) In-charge of all corps in his/her assigned platoon
- (ii) Maintain a register of all corps members in/ his platoon
- (iii) Ensure that corps members in his/her platoon attend all camp activities regularly and punctually and take their attendance
- (iv) Take charge of the welfare of corps members in the platoons
- (v) Supervise their participation in the routine camp activities, security, sports and games, etc.
- (vi) Take roll call of corps members in the platoon both at morning and afternoon to ensure that corps members are present in the camp at all times.
- (vii) Endorse all correspondences emanating from the corps members in the platoon to higher authorities.

<sup>22</sup> See, General Policy Guideline for NYSC Orientation Courses Reviewed 2016, p.11

- (viii) Endorse all correspondences emanating from the corps members in the platoon to higher authorities
- (ix) Shall be in charge of general coordination of the platoon.
- (x) Perform any other duties that may be assigned from time to time by Camp Director and State coordinator<sup>23</sup>.

From the above set of responsibilities, it is obvious that platoon officers ensure that corps members internalise camp values and, indeed, they are quasi managers. Platoon officers are in turn responsible to a pyramid of officials from which instructions and directives flow. The camp organogram below depicts the line of command and communication in the camp.

**Table 12: National Youth Service Corps**



**Source:** NYSC Secretariat, Abuja, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> See, *General Policy Guideline for NYSC Orientation Courses Reviewed 2016*, P.8

The chart above deserves elucidation particularly as it concerns the roles of NYSC officials on camp. The State Coordinator is the Chief Coordinator of the camp and is responsible for the overall coordination, supervision, arrangement and organisation of the orientation camp. He or She is a senior official of NYSC. There is also a Camp Director. The Camp Director, who is usually an NYSC staff not below the rank of an Assistant Director, is appointed by the State Coordinator. He/she is in-charge of the general well-being of corps members and camp officials and also supervises all camp activities. The Camp Commandant who usually is military personnel (not below the rank of a Captain) is responsible for the Para-military training and discipline in the camp. He is responsible to the State Coordinator through the Camp Director and ensures that no open conflicts ensue between soldiers and other camp officials. The Man 'O' War Coordinator is usually a senior officer deployed from the Citizenship and Leadership Training Centre Headquarters. He /She is in-charge of leadership and citizenship training activities such as organizing campfire night, endurance trek and physical exercises. The Head of Police is responsible for security in the camp. There are also other security agencies that complement the Police like, Nigeria Security Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC), Department of State Security (DSS) and National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA). The NDLEA carries out surveillance on camp with a view to preventing the sale and consumption of illicit drugs and educating corps members on the consequences of consuming illicit drugs. The Army handles drills and parades<sup>24</sup>. The security architecture on NYSC camps is therefore elaborate and synergized in a manner that ensures reasonable protection for corps members and camp officials.

Aside these core officials, there are a number of very important supporting staff though not captured in the chart, they play critical roles in ensuring that the camp environment is serene and the day- to-day basics are met. The role of camp

<sup>24</sup> See, General Policy Guideline for NYSC Orientation Courses Reviewed 2016, P.13.

hands like labourers, cooks, and camp marketers stands out for mention. The cooks are engaged for cooking of corps members' meals, the casual labourers for camp cleanliness though corps members also give a hand. The camp marketers sell at camp markets under a regulated regime to avoid exploitation and unwholesome activities.

Another saliency that needs to be mentioned in the organizational frame of NYSC camps is the fact that there are administered camp committees. The core essence of forming camp committees is to ensure that NYSC officials, collaborating agencies and corps members work in sync and camp activities are participatory. Organising camp committees also lightens the task of coordinating the large population in the camps. The committees are formed at least one week before the commencement of camping activities. In each of the committees, NYSC officials are appointed as Heads of the committees. For convenience, the committees are highlighted below;

- (i) **Registration Committee:** The committee comprises the Head of Mobilisation as Chairman, with at least six NYSC officials, including the Resident officers as members. The committee handles registration of all eligible corps members in the camp and ensures posting of the corps members as indicated in the posting policy.
- (ii) **Lecture/Programme Committee:** this committee has the responsibility of drawing up daily programme and distribution of agenda to all principal officers and Heads of committees a day preceding the date (at least by 5.00pm) to enable them know the programme for the next day. They collaborate with the Public Relations unit to ensure that the lectures go on as planned.
- (iii) **Publicity Committee:** This committee is headed by the Head of Public Relations unit with other Public Relations officers as members. The committee also comprises corps members selected by the Public Relations unit. This committee is also in charge of all information

dissemination on camp Orientation Broadcasting Service (OBS), printing and distribution of identity cards through platoon officers, as well as distribution of all NYSC publications. It also handles all duties of Master of ceremonies in all functions.

- (iv) **Food Committee:** this committee usually has six corps members and at least six other persons drawn from the NYSC officials. The committee is also headed by a senior NYSC staff.
- (v) **Cooking:** Experienced cooks are hired by State Coordinators in accordance with the NDHQ approved number of cooks for each camp. The cooks form the nucleus of the camp kitchen staff who handles the cooking under the supervision of a responsible, matured and experienced matron appointed from among the cooks. Corps members also participate in the daily cooking, and on platoon basis.
- (vi) **Social Committee:** The committee comprise corps members and course officials with the Head of Social committee as the Chairman. The committee plans activities such as film shows, inter-platoon dance/drama competitions, welcome party for the corps members, variety night and other social activities as deemed fit. The committee interfaces with sponsors on behalf of the NYSC.
- (vii) **Utility/Maintenance Committee:** The Head of the camp maintenance committee is an NYSC official. The membership is selected from two course officials and seven corps members from relevant disciplines such as Electrical, Plumbing and Mechanical Engineers (5 males, 2 females). The core responsibility of the committee is to undertake minor repairs in the camp.
- (viii) **Health Committee:** This committee is made up of an NYSC official as chairman, two other course officials and seven corps members in the medical field. The task of this committee is taking care of the sick and injured corps

members.

- (ix) **Transport Committee:** The transport officer serves as the chairman. Other members are the drivers in the secretariat.
- (x) **Sanitation Committee:** An NYSC official not below SGL12 chairs the committee with at least two other NYSC officers, camp hands and corps members are selected from platoons. The committee is responsible for the general cleaning of the entire camp.
- (xi) **Camp Court:** The Camp Director is the Chairman, The Camp Commandant, Resident Officer, Head of Police, Man 'O' War Coordinator, NYSC staff of legal unit and four corps members including at least two corps lawyers and two platoon leaders as members. The camp court trials erring corps members.
- (xii) **Accommodation Committee:** The Chairman is usually an NYSC official not below SGL14, while the Chairman of Utility Committee, the Chairman Sanitation Committee, and three corps members are members. The committee is responsible for providing accommodation for all course participants.
- (xiii) **Camp Market Committee:** The Chairman is the Camp Director, while NYSC Accounts Officer, Public Relations Officer, Chairman Utility Committee, Head of Sanitation Committee, Camp Manager and two corps members are members. The committee allocates stalls to market operators, standardises prices of commodities and also ensures the non-exploitation of corps members by the traders.
- (xiv) **Sports Committee:** This committee has an NYSC official as Chairman. Two other NYSC officials, Camp RSM, one member of Red Cross, four corps members (including two females), and two PE instructors as members. The committee organizes all inter-platoon sports competitions in the camp.
- (xv) **Evaluation Committee:** This comprises the PPRS

Schedule officer as Chairman, all platoon leaders (male and female), corps statisticians and four course officials. The committee is in charge of issuance of thirty percent form 4a questionnaires to corps members. This committee evaluates the entire orientation course using appropriate approved format.

**(xvi) Orientation Steering Committee:** This committee comprises all Heads of collaborating agencies, Heads of Committees and other key NYSC officials. The committee holds meeting every week to appraise all aspects of camp activities and the State Coordinator chairs all meetings<sup>25</sup>.

An extrapolation of the responsibilities of various sub-committees indicates how elaborate, collaborative and indeed participatory the camps are organised. The fact that corps members are involved in virtually all the committees indicates the representative nature of camps. The involvement of corps members also offers them the opportunity of mentorship in organizational techniques. More so, given that the responsibilities of the various committees are well spelt out allows for easy coordination and efficiency. More striking is the fact that there is an evaluative committee that meets to appraise activities in camp, identify challenges and proffer solutions.

Camp activities are regimented such that they follow a prescribed path. Immediately after registration and documentation, the first important ceremony which is prepared for is the official opening ceremony. The prospective corps members are trained on how to conduct parade to receive a governor or his representative billed to swear in corps members. After the swearing in ceremony, camp orientation activities begin in earnest with the blowing of the bugle by 4.00am the next day. The bugle is used to summon corps members to the parade ground where the Camp Director alongside the Camp

Commandant welcomes corps members formally and reels out the camp rules as well as intimate them on lines of communications and the training activities. At the parade ground, corps members file up according to platoons and the National Anthem, NYSC Anthem are sung to usher in daily activities.

The activities comprises mainly lectures, seminars, symposia, drills and physical training. The lecture topics cover wide issues including history and culture of the Nigerian people, language, national, political, social and economic issues. Innovative cultural programmes are organized by the social committee on platoon basis<sup>26</sup>. Because of the limited time for orientation course (21 days), it is often difficult for corps members to participate in all the lecture series. This constraint necessitates choice of programmes to participate in by corps members. Ngozi Eze, a 2016 Batch 'A' Corps member who served in Bauchi State laments;

My experience in camp during lectures was funny. I used to jump from one hall to the other. I hardly completed any lecture because I wanted to listen to all of the lecturers. So I will go to the hall, listen to who is presenting, if the English is not sweet, I move on to the next hall... the problem with going up and down was that I never really followed any programme to the end...<sup>27</sup>

Another important component of the orientation course is the drills and martial art exercises. Corps members are trained on a number of drill types. These drills are meant to enable them gain physical fitness and be mentally alert. Some of the drill types include; Attention, Stand at Ease, Saluting, Turning, Marching and Halting in slow and quick time, Turning and Saluting at the halt, Formations, Turning on the March, Silent Drill, Marching,

<sup>26</sup> See, General Policy Guideline for NYSC Orientation Courses Reviewed 2016, P.24

<sup>27</sup> Oral interview, Ngozi Eze, 20<sup>th</sup> August, 2020, Abuja.

Turning and Halting ceremonial drills. Exercises specifically targeted at physical training, Groundwork, Games Organization, potted sports, obstacle training. Martial art is an extensive system of codified practices and tradition of combat for self-defense. It is an infusion of Taekwondo, Karate, Kick Boxing and Boxing<sup>28</sup>. This form of exercises helps corps members imbibe techniques and combat strategies for self-defense and protection. Man 'O' War Bay activities include circuit training, principles and techniques of fire- fighting and prevention, First Aid, Road-walk, Road and Rock Climbing, Games and Mapping. The exercises are quite numerous and corps members are expected to select except for mandatory ones. Inter-platoon drill competitions are also organized and awards presented to winners.

Allowance is also made for religious activities on NYSC camps. The programme recognises the need for spiritual growth and development and is sensitive to the religious inclinations in the country. Consequently, three major religious formations are recognised and allowed space to operate in the camps. There are National Christian Corps Fellowship (NCCF), National Association of Catholic Corps (NACF) and Muslim Corps Association of Nigeria (MCAN)<sup>29</sup>. This faith based organisations play very important roles in camps. Aside mentoring their members spiritually, they also provide support to them in terms of accommodation and finances. It is important to add that their activities are regulated to avoid inter-faith misunderstanding.

Skills acquisition training is another very important camp activity that has gained prominence. The objectives of SAED which is the skills acquisition flag programme had earlier been stressed in the ideation on the essence of having NYSC camps. However, it is important to re-emphasise the point that the contemporary NYSC scheme lays emphasis on this component of training because of its capacity to stimulate life skills

<sup>28</sup> NYSC (2019) Benue KOPA Orientation & Service Guide, Batch "B" Stream 1 Service Year.

<sup>29</sup> See, General Policy Guideline for NYSC Orientation Courses Reviewed 2016

necessary for entrepreneurship development and cultivation of self-reliance spirit amongst corps members. The import of a skills acquisition programme was also well stressed in the 2011, African Youth Report;

The need to invest in human capital through education and skills development for young people remains of paramount importance...because of the return on education and the contribution to poverty reduction and achievement of the MDGs...young people need an enabling environment politically, economically and socially to thrive...They need to be empowered so that they can be represented and participate in decision making processes that affect their lives<sup>30</sup>.

This articulation reinforces the strategic relevance of skills acquisition as a cardinal camp activity. The extent to which the programme has impacted corps members will be measured in the subsequent section. The interest here is to stress its place as a camp activity.

At the peak of camp activities, a camp fire event is organized. This is a very important social activity that takes place in the night and is characterized by all sorts of contests, from beauty pageants, fashion parade, Mr &Mrs NYSC, Mr. Macho, Mr. Ugly, Food competition, etc. All the platoons in the camp participate in the contests and the best platoon is awarded prizes. The significance of this activity lies in the social interaction it forges. More so, it assists in defusing stress and tension among corps members.

**Impact of NYSC Camps on Corps Members and their Environs**  
A useful and convenient template for appraising the impact of orientation camps on corps members is to locate and highlight the effects within the contextual milieu of the objectives of the orientation programme. And then identify what effects cascade

<sup>30</sup> See, *Africa Youth Report (2011) Assessing the Youth Education and Employment Nexus in the Global Economy*, Addis Ababa, UNECA.

down to the host community. A central aim of the NYSC scheme is to promote the ethos of unity and cultural integration so as to address the national identity question that became pronounced sequel to the civil war. To achieve this core objective, the series of lectures on the cultures of the different Nigerian people and the mingling that the camp environment enables have helped to reframe erroneous perceptions about some ethnic groups in Nigeria profoundly. In an interview, Adejo Alexander Johnson, a former Corps Member from Benue State under 2019 Batch 'B' Stream II avers his camp experience thus;

I was posted to Anambra State but had intention to relocate. I heard a whole lot about Igbo people and how they segregate and prefer theirs to yours... The most threatening thing I heard about them is that they eat humans. My mum told me about her relation that was killed. I had a senior colleague in school who they said was "killed" during his service year in Enugu. When I got to camp, the first thing I did was to make my intention to redeploy known to the coordinator. But he said he saw the potential in me that i will do well in the State. I was really not convinced. But in the course of the orientation, I had opportunities to do so many things. I was camp MC and handled so many social activities as well as repair of camp gadgets. After that, it was a whole different perception. The hospitality, I received in and outside camp was amazing.<sup>31</sup>.

Adejo's experience speaks to how well-couched interactions on camp could change misperceptions about a people's culture and reset the frame of mind of corps members. Interviewees have enacted similar stories indicating how the camp reconstructed their understanding of ethnic dynamics of the country<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Interview, *The Nation Newspaper*, July 23, 2020

<sup>32</sup> Oral interview, Mati Suleiman, Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State, 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2020, Oral Interview, Habibu Adamu, Dutsin-Ma, 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2020, Oral Interview, Ndulue Okuludo, Makurdi, 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.

NYSC camps are regimented and youth corps members are compelled to imbibe the culture of discipline. Obviously, the mechanism of discipline which the NYSC Habitus and associated training protocols allows for control at a distance that justifies the need to build and enforce disciplinary structures. Indeed, the presence of military officers in NYSC camps; the command and control nature of activities forges orderliness amongst corps members. James Job, a 2019 youth corps member who served in Adamawa State affirms;

To start with, every corps member lived a regimented lifestyle. Everything was controlled, even siesta was regimented. However, as stressful and oftentimes annoying as these processes seemed, they had their merit and demerits. For instance, for the first time in a long while, I observed a kind of discipline in uniformity...In camp, failure to adhere to some rules and directives would warrant punishment. In sum, the strict adherence to the rules helped us to be disciplined<sup>33</sup>.

The strict timeliness that ties camp activities has helped in no small way in instilling discipline. It is worth stressing that the discipline in camp has helped corps members to correct, improve their overall conditions, moral character with behavioral patterns that are in tune with the requirements of the job market. Discipline is an essential part of life necessary for orderly conduct. Discipline shapes the individual towards achieving the goals of life. In fact, a society without the proper discipline encourages unsocial activities. Therefore, the strength of a nation lies in discipline. Respondents have lent credence to the fact that the disciplinary values in camp helped them to reset their conduct and imbibe the virtue of self-discipline which is a necessary requirement for not just self but societal development<sup>34</sup>. The fact that development rests squarely on

<sup>33</sup> Oral Interview, James Job, Kaduna, 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Oral Interview, David Igba, 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2020.

individual discipline has never been more apparent than it is in contemporary times. Research evidence has shown that societies in which discipline is at its highest are also the fastest to develop whilst the least disciplined societies only witness ever worsening conditions<sup>35</sup>. Corollary, in a recent address on discipline, the Ameer and Missionary-in-Charge, Maulana Noor- Muhammed Bin Salih stated that a country may have all the mineral resources in the crust of its lands, all the petroleum resources of its sea coast, the greenest of forests and the best human resources yet that country will continue to be in abject poverty unless it adopts a disciplined approach into harnessing these resources together to the benefit of its people<sup>36</sup>. The emphasis on discipline is indicative of how important and strategic it is for youth and national development.

The Para-military drills and accompanying sanctions force adherence to deadlines. This has impacted positively on work ethics not just in camp tasks but has prepared corps members for the job market. This is a very important requirement for not only self but national development. Indeed, time management is critical for the attainment of set goals. It helps in meeting deadlines and appointments, it reduces procrastination, maintains professional reputation, avoids financial penalties, reduces wastages and sets a better work and life balance to mention but a few benefits. Habiba Mohammed, a former corps member, who served in Katsina reveals that;

Every morning, we were expected to be at the parade ground by 4.30am. yes, I really mean 4.30am in the morning. If you do not want to do frog jumps. Waking early was a prerequisite for getting water to bath...our period in camp was during the cold season, so to beat

<sup>35</sup> The role of discipline in stimulating development is well stated in studies, See for instance, Wilsi, J.F. & William, K., (1982) Principles of Effective Discipline, Boston: Allyn & Bacon. See also, Nichols, J. D., (2004) An Exploration of the Discipline and Suspension Data, Journal of Negro Education, 73(4), 408-423.

<sup>36</sup> Read, Abdul-Wahab Issah, (2015) "Self-Discipline- A Panacea to National Development" [www.mkaghana.org](http://www.mkaghana.org), Retrieved, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2020.

the 4.30am time most corps members took their bath in the night while others went to the parade ground without taking their bath. This has helped me greatly, I now wake up 4.30 and I go to work early...<sup>37</sup>

Another camp activity that has impacted on corps members fundamentally is the physical fitness and mental alertness and preparedness. These forms of exercises are useful for emergencies and indeed, have prepared corps members to confront emergencies when such occur. Emergencies such as fires and explosions are reoccurring challenges that need be prepared for in order to minimise the impact. The import of this activity could further be gleaned from the fact that emergencies occur often in work places and therefore the need to prepare ahead of emergencies cannot be underestimated. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines an “emergency as a state...in which normal procedures are suspended and extraordinary measures are taken in order to avert the impact of a hazard on the community”<sup>38</sup>. Thus, WHO also recognises that work places must prepare for emergencies in order to prevent them from advancing and causing maximum damages.<sup>39</sup> A further impact of camp activities on corps members could be inferred from the spirit of tolerance that is infused in them while undergoing training in the camps. They are made to live together in hostels and learn to endure and tolerate one another. This has encouraged connectedness, dialogue, cooperation and negotiation. This has also helped in forging friendship across ethnic boundaries and narrowed lines of division. This point is better appreciated when viewed from the prism of national unity and integration. Chioma Ezenwa, an indigene of Imo State, who served in Zamfara pontificates along this line of thought this way;

<sup>37</sup> Oral Interview, Habibu Mohammed, Katsina, 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2020

<sup>38</sup> See, WHO-World Health Organization (2011). *Disasters*. Also read, Gibson, G. A., (2003) *Emergency Preparedness; Encyclopedia of Occupational Health and Safety*, ILO, Geneva.

<sup>39</sup> WHO-World Health Organization (2011) *Disasters*.

For the first time in my life I was compelled to live in a hostel with ladies who were Muslims. At first, I felt somehow; we had to learn how to respect their prayer periods, be sensitive to their religious practices and so on. Within one week, I became best of friends with Aisha. In fact, she was my best friend in camp and it so happened that we did our primary assignment in the same local government and the friendship continued...<sup>40</sup>

This insight speaks of how productive the idea of mixing-up corps members irrespective of their religious inclinations and ethnic backgrounds could be and how it potently stimulates friendship across lines.

It is important to also make the point about the security component of camp activities and how it impacts on corps members. The military drills in camp are geared towards arousing security consciousness amongst them. During camp activities, corps members are encouraged to join camp police where there are tutored on security tips. This training has helped in scaling up their level of security consciousness. Also, leadership and citizenship lectures also prepared them for participation in decision-making and encouraged team work. The inclusion of youth corps members in almost all the communities provides practical training grounds to put in use all that had been theorized. Sport activities also impacted on the socialisation process in camp. This again has assisted the building of bonds across cultural divides.

The impact of the Skills Acquisition Programme on corps members deserves interrogation. The Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development programme (SAED) attempts to mitigate unemployment challenges and shift emphasis from white collar jobs to self-employment, most especially after the mandatory one-year national service. The entrepreneurship training impacts on corps members in a variety of ways. First, it

prepares them psychologically by reshaping their post-graduation expectations as it concerns the labour market. Secondly, it equips them with skills pertaining to independent start-up. Though there are notable challenges with the SAED programme; like the lack of inadequate instruments to engage in hands-on training sessions, training space constraints, choked nature of activities, However, there is a great deal of evidence indicating that a number of corps members have benefited from the programme and have set-up their own businesses. Ifeanyi Ike, a former youth corps member who served in Benue State lends support this fact. He remarks thus;

I am from Enugu State and served in Benue State. I first learnt how to repair phones in the Wanune camp. Though the period for training was short but because I was determined, I concentrated and continue the training after camp. Today, I am gainfully employed. I have my shop, I do not just repair phones, I also sell phone accessories and I have employed a sales girl...<sup>41</sup>

The point in emphasis is that the skills acquisition programme has had some reasonable impact on corps members and several other NYSC documents have attested to this fact.

The impact of camp activities on the host environment could be deduced from the benefits accruable to host communities. NYSC camps generate some local economy centred on camp markets<sup>42</sup>. Majority of the marketers are members of the host community. The commercial gains derivable from the camp markets are therefore enjoyed by the participants<sup>43</sup>. In this sense, NYSC camps heighten the tempo of commercial activities in the host communities.

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<sup>41</sup> Oral Interview, Ifeanyi Ike, Makurdi, 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> NYSC camp markets are also called "mammy markets", the name is a slang borrowed from the fond name for military barrack markets. The mammy market in military barracks is traceable to Mrs Mammy Ochefu who is said to have started the market selling traditional soft drinks. For details see, "History of Mammy Market, NYSC News", [www.nyscnews.com](http://www.nyscnews.com)

<sup>43</sup> Oral Interview, Grace Aga, Food Vendor, Wannune Camp, Wannune, 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.  
Oral Interview, Msuega Atser, Barbar, Wannune Camp, Wannune, 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.

Another area of benefit is that the camp hands that is, the labourers, cooks, local vigilante men are sourced from the host community. Transporters around the camp environs also experience a boom in their businesses during camp periods. This fact is better appreciated when one considers the opportunities and linkages that are created. More so, the creation of training streams necessitates the convening of orientation programmes at short intervals. Thus, the camp environment benefits immensely from orientation camps.

### Core Challenges of NYSC Orientation Camps and the Youth Development Question

Despite the utilitarian value of orientation camps and their impact on corps members, there are notable challenges that continue to undermine the realisation of objectives of NYSC scheme. A perfunctory glimpse at Table 1 suggests that about Ten States carry out Orientation programme in temporary sites. The improvised camps in effect also imply that the facilities are also improvised. In fact, even at permanent camps, the question of inadequate facilities continues to elicit lamentations and this particular challenge is as old as the NYSC. To buttress the seriousness of the problem, a number of examples suffice for mention. A youth corps member who underwent training at Taraba State NYSC permanent Orientation camp, Sibre, Jalingo, decried the state of facilities thus;

It was at the camp I learnt how to ease myself in a bowl and use my hands to throw it over the fence because the toilets were so terrible I still feel sick anytime I recall my days at the camp...While the camp appeared neat, the sanitary condition at the lavatory was really appalling mainly from poor maintenance and attitude of some of our colleagues...<sup>44</sup>

This lamentation is true for some camps. The former NYSC Director General, Major General Suleiman Kazaure,<sup>45</sup> also had

<sup>44</sup> Oral Interview, Abdullahi Sani, Dutsin-Ma, 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2020

<sup>45</sup> Nigerian Tribune, November, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018.

course to decry the dilapidated conditions of facilities at an orientation camp in Paiko, Niger State during a visit to the 2018 Batch 'C' stream two Corps members. He expressed his frustrations over the state of facilities and described it as the worse at the time. It is important to point out that the National Youth Service Corps ACT CAP N84 Laws of the federation vests the responsibility of providing functional orientation camps for corps members use on State governments<sup>46</sup>. However, there is a sense in which corps members also share the blame particularly in the misuse of facilities. The tale on facilities is not just that of lamentations, there are also examples of orientation camps with relatively standard facilities. Ngozi Frances who had her orientation at Keffi camp affirms;

I will say Keffi orientation camp is one of the best camps in the country. It has basic facilities like electricity, water, security and many more. To me, the only issue could be the location of the camp, which is along the Keffi-Abuja express way. It gives corps members' easy access to town...<sup>47</sup>

A related challenge is the increasing number of graduates who are mobilized annually across institutions in the country. These increasing numbers overstretch facilities and make the camps very uncomfotting for activities and camp administration. The question of facilities has long been a sour point since 1973 and springs basically from the level of funding which is a function of the disposition of funding agencies.

Security of orientation camps particularly those in volatile States is a teething challenge. In 2012 for example, camp activities could not hold in three States namely Borno, Yobe and Bayelsa States<sup>48</sup>. In Borno and Yobe States, the postponement of

<sup>46</sup> See, NYSC (2004) *The National Youth Service Corps ACT. CAP N84 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria Abuja*.

<sup>47</sup> Interview in *Leadership Newspaper*, 14<sup>th</sup> December, 2020

<sup>48</sup> Read, Utomwen, D. (2012) Tackling NYSC's Security Challenge. <http://www.pmnigeria.com/2012/12/10/tackling-nysc-security-challenge/> Retrieved on 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2020.

the orientation course was for security reasons. The corps members posted to Borno State had their camp at the Benue State orientation camp at Wanune, Tarka Local Government Area. Those for Yobe State held their orientation course at the Keffi camp in Nasarawa State. For Bayelsa State, the postponement of the orientation course was because of flooding in the State and the subsequent accommodation of displaced victims in the NYSC orientation camp in Kaiama<sup>49</sup>. However, the orientation courses still held at the Kaiama camp but at a later date. The Point to note here is that the NYSC sometimes make adjustments to dates for orientation courses in some States due to security and logistics reasons.

A major fault line is the funding gaps in the programme. This has remained a major constraint since the birth of NYSC. It has affected all planks of NYSC programmes including camp activities. Properly put, it is at the root of almost all inefficiencies in the programme. The increasing number of prospective corps members has compounded the challenge and triggered calls for a suspension of the entire exercise. The NYSC 2018 Yearbook notes this disturbing challenge thus;

It is a concern that while the number of corps participants has been on the upswing, in the last few years, there have not been conscious efforts by the State governments to expand the various Orientation camps at least the 5000 capacity types. This gap in facilities has resulted in the segmentation of batches of corps members into streams, with attendant negative health implications for the managers of the Scheme, who, literally, spend great part of the year in the Orientation Camps...<sup>50</sup>

Though the quotation above appears to have singled out the State governments for emphasis, it is important to add that all three tiers of government (Federal, State and Local

<sup>49</sup>Daily Trust Newspaper, November, 3, 2012.

<sup>50</sup>See, National Youth Service Corps Yearbook 2018...

governments) are statutorily obliged to fund the programme.

The new normal occasioned by Covid-19 pandemic has triggered calls for the suspension of orientation activities in camps for at least two years. The Economic Sustainability Committee in its report submitted by Vice-President, Yemi Osinbajo recommended the direct mobilisation of prospective corps members to their places of primary assignment. He argued that the suspension of the camping exercise was recommended to maintain social distancing as part of measures to stop the spread of the virus<sup>51</sup>. This development poses a new challenge that might undo the spirit and letters of Decree 24 of 1973. It is worth noting that, the idea of the scheme was to reawaken patriotism, propagate unity and revive the culture of discipline and endurance. It was in the orientation camps that the foundation for these ideals was cultivated and somewhat practicalised. Thus, suspending camps and posting corps members straight for primary assignment, though expedient given the current circumstances, will in the main undermine the essence of orientation and wind-off the benefits. It is a considered view that Covid -19 protocols can be extended to the camps while provisions are made for medical personnel, Paramedics, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), hand-washing facilities, sanitizers and if possible, isolation centers and other safe guards. But this would require massive investments in camp facilities. No doubt, it is a tall order but the fact that it is doable cannot be denied.

The challenges enumerated above ignite a conversation around the youth development question particularly that NYSC camps are meant to provide some foundation for building youth capacities. It is important to reiterate that the NYSC scheme attempts to stimulate both youth and national development. To this end, NYSC camps are supposed to give expression to youths as instruments of change by helping to shape the virtues of national unity and integration in corps members. Thus, the NYSC environment (camp) need be equipped with adequate

facilities and human resources to enable the realization of the youth development objectives which the camps are expected to nurture. This is important because the state and quality of facilities have implications for how well or extent to which the effects of the orientation courses will impact corps members.

The core challenges also expose the gap that exists between the triad of policy, practice and implementation of youth development policies. Without a doubt, the philosophical construction and policy direction of the NYSC scheme is well thought out. However, the funding and implementation commitments continue to be problematic. This also bespeaks the level of commitment of successive governments to youth development.

It is worth adding that NYSC camps provide pathways for corps members to develop skills and social capital necessary to transit to work places. This is why it is the first major activity of the NYSC scheme. But the challenges enumerated above continue to dim the full realisation of the ideals of youth development. More so, considering the fact that skills acquisition and entrepreneurship training which take place first in the camps prepare corps members to be more disposed to being self-reliant, independent entrepreneurs, resourceful and employers of labor, demands that the NYSC scheme is adequately funded. The African Youth Report, 2011 stresses the importance of funding Youth programmes thus; The need to invest in human capital through education and skills development for young people remains of paramount importance...because of the return on education and the contribution to poverty reduction... young people need enabling environment politically, economically and socially to thrive in our countries. They need to be empowered so that they can be represented and participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup>See, *Africa Youth Report (2011) Assessing the Youth Education and Employment Nexus in the Global Economy*, Addis Ababa, UNECA.a

This articulation reinforces how important funding the NYSC scheme is; particularly that it holds much promise for youth development.

The security crisis in the North East has had tremendous implications for youth development in the region. Aside frustrating the idea of fostering cultural integration and interaction across the country, it has created *youth -flation* in the other political zones of the country<sup>53</sup>. The implication is that the North-East is under represented in youth capabilities for development; whereas the more stable regions experience varied dimensions of youth capital thereby hampering integrated development.

The sum point is therefore that a plethora of challenges buffet the full realisation of objectives of the orientation programme, though it has on scale impacted positively on the development of corps members. Critical stakeholders in the NYSC project must therefore organise around the challenges and strengthen the scheme.

## Conclusion

NYSC orientation camps are a foundational subset and critical in realising objectives of the scheme. The chapter provided an analytical perspective for properly appreciating the philosophical ideation of NYSC camps. It deconstructed the thought process and utilitarian value of confining youth corps members in a regimented space and dilated on the organisational structure and nature of training activities. It argued factually that, indeed, NYSC camps have assisted in

<sup>53</sup>See, Dereck, O.A., (2015) "Youth in Development: Understanding the Contributions of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to Nigeria's National Development", *PhD Thesis*, School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED), Institute of Development Policy and Management (IDPM)

forging national integration amongst corps members and blurring divisive lines as well as reshaping the dynamics of nation-building for national development. It also noted that the camps have provided training grounds for inculcating entrepreneurial skills amongst corps members. This has helped in shifting the proclivity of graduate youths for white collar employment. The communities where NYSC camps are located have also benefitted from the entrepreneurial advantages that camp markets offer as well as the job opportunities camps generate. However, the chapter noted that several challenges are undermining the full realisation of the objectives of NYSC orientation camps. These challenges include among others, lack of adequate facilities and poor funding. Nevertheless, the fact that NYSC camps are indispensable in the fulfillment of the ideals of the scheme has been well stressed. Therefore, funding agencies are invited to make concerted efforts towards equipping designated NYSC camps for optimal performance. The stark realities of Covid-19 pandemic make the dire need for an aggressive funding of camps even more compelling.

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## **SECTION FOUR: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**



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## Chapter Fifteen

# THE NYSC AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA, 1973-2020

*Evelyn Onwaniba*

*Nigerian Army Resource Centre Abuja*

### Introduction

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) has been a major component for the enhancement of unity and development in Nigeria since its creation in 1973. Through its cross-cultural deployment of graduate youths to various communities in Nigeria and programmes initiated as they evolved, the scheme has to a large extent fostered understanding, tolerance, friendship and peace among the peoples of the nation. However, the goal of national integration is an unending process, especially in the face of increasing conflict and insecurity that characterised the 21<sup>st</sup> century following wide spread internal skirmishes occasioned by insurgency, global terrorism and other violent activities. All these have become major threats to not only Nigeria's peace and security, but also the world's at large. Insecurity is a natural threat to national integration as it threatens the unity of the people. Nigeria, like other pluralistic states in Africa, has been grappling with the problem of national integration. The quest for national integration has been a major post-independence agenda of every government that has emerged in the country since 1960. Meanwhile, Nigeria is not left alone in this ultimate search. The pursuit of national integration has dominated states with multiple race, ethnics, religions and ideologies across the world. Every continent, including Europe, America, Asia and Africa has experienced one form of challenge or the other as a result of NYSC PUBLICATION  
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individual states or at the regional level where multiple states converge, nations have struggled to harmonise their peoples, economies and policies for the overall development of their countries, region or continent. This could be seen in the emergence of different regional organisations such as the European Union (EU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) now African Union (AU), the Southern African Community (SADC), Arab League (AL) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), among others. Most entities that embarked on the national integration aim at uniting the peoples, culture/race and economies for development.<sup>1</sup> Given the diversity of cultures in a country and the inclination to have parochial allegiance as against national patriotism, the need to pursue the goal of national integration becomes imperative as it gives room for wider cooperation and harmony which is needed to move the country forward. Since the attainment of political independence in 1960, successive governments have introduced several structural mechanisms geared towards national integration. One of these structural means was the introduction of the NYSC scheme in 1973. It is against this backdrop that this chapter attempts to discuss the NYSC and national integration in Nigeria.

**Conceptualisation of Terms: Integration and National Integration** As a term national integration is derived from the words *nation* and *integration*. By nation is meant a historically organised community of people; with different ethnicity, religion and culture, among others, constituting a sovereign state; while integration simply means unification. That is, an act of bringing together different components to form a whole part. Integration is a process of making undivided, entirely whole or complete.<sup>2</sup> What this connotes is that there are varied

<sup>1</sup>See Desmond Dinan . 2014. *Europe Recast: A History of European Union*. SECOND EDITION. USA; Lynne Rienner pp.1-10

<sup>2</sup>Etymology offline English Dictionary

components that are required to be made into one piece. This definition of integration shows that a country that cannot unify its peoples and ideologies cannot be said to be a whole or complete nation.

Integration could be cultural, communicative or normative; whereby different cultures, ideas, services, and peoples, among others, are brought together for a common purpose. It could also be a deliberate effort by a constituting authority or state to unite its population, or by natural processes through some levels of interactions including migration, inter-marriages, resettlement, trade and so on.<sup>3</sup>

Integration in a social group or a nation is an unending process of bringing the diverse people into equal participation. This means it is a course of action and not an end in itself. In other words, it is a phenomenon that is hinged on many factors to harmonise the peoples of a country to aid national development. Hence, it is determined by the degree to which members and groups in a plural society adapt to the demands of national norms that enable them to co-exist harmoniously. As a gradual process, its gains are consolidated overtime but it requires the efforts and cooperation of all groups concerned to not only accept the goals of creating a common identity, but to also work towards achieving it. It requires a conscious attitudinal change by all stakeholders and a push to achieve a common purpose. Through such effort the socio-cultural, economic, and political dynamics of the diverse groups are harmonised and peaceful interrelationship is built for national development. While it is the duty of the state to chart a national course for the people, it is the responsibility of every citizen and groups to uphold same and avoid divisive tendencies that could jeopardise the nation's peace, unity and progress.

National integration is the awareness of common identity amongst the citizens of a country and the recognition by people

<sup>3</sup> Landecker W. J. 1951. "Types of Integration and their Measurement" in *American Journal of Sociology and Language* 20. Pp.23-36

of different ethnics, beliefs, ideology domiciled in a nation-state that regardless on their differences “we are one”.<sup>4</sup> It entails “creating a mental outlook which will promote and inspire every person to place loyalty to the country above group loyalties and the welfare of the country above narrow sectarian interests.”<sup>5</sup>

National integration is aimed at re-invigorating national consciousness and pride by establishing norms and commitment by the varied constituents to achieve it. In other words, national integration is not just an abstract concept, but also a conscious effort that involves the building or development of the mind of people to arouse the same national consciousness, which can be done through education. This is based on the understanding that literacy enhances understanding, which in turn breeds tolerance, acceptance and fosters peaceful ethno-religious relations, security and the harmony that is intended, among others. Hence, it entails a socio-psychological and educational process through which a feeling of unity and harmony is developed in the hearts of the people and a sense of common citizenship or feeling of loyalty to the nation(-state) is fostered among them, rather than parochial allegiance.<sup>6</sup>

National integration helps “to forge a collection of national identity, so that the citizens are able to see their citizenship in the nation as being more important than citizenship in ethnic nationalists.”<sup>7</sup> Hence, it entails the harmonising of varied groups' economies, territories, ideology, religion, culture and other fragments to forestall allegiance to a particular race,

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<sup>4</sup>Odeh Lemuel E. Ethno-Religious Issues and National Integration in Nigeria. in *Human Views on God not Monotony: Essays in Honour of Ade P. Dopamu*. Pp 199-200

<sup>5</sup>Dorothy Simpson. “National Integration and secularism”. MODULE - 4 National Integration and Secularism Contemporary India: Issues and Goals. pp. 202-219

<sup>6</sup>H.A. Gani in National Integration Conference in Ratnaprava Barik and Jayanta Kumar Dash. “Political Science 3<sup>rd</sup> Semester Paper-XIII: Society and Polity on India” p.25 also available in Gupshups

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/gupshups.org/national-integration/amp/> accessed 19 December, 2020

<sup>7</sup> Ole Frahm. 2012. “ Defining the Nation: National Identity in South Sudanese Media Discourse” in *Africa Spectrum*, 2012, Vol.47, No. 1. Pp.21-49. Accessed at [www.jstor.org/stable/23350430](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23350430), 11 September 2020

ethnicity or culture, but enhance loyalty to the state for the common purpose of national development. However, that purpose must be defined or articulated by the state and embedded in the constitution.

The process of merging the diverse entities of a state is gradual and involves deliberate moves not only through the promulgation of laws and policies, but also through strong political will and commitment to implement same, and most importantly, citizenry's participation and cooperation. Thus, in the process of creating a homogenous political society, national integration progressively reduces socio-cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities.<sup>8</sup>

Several strategies to aid national integration include but are not limited to education and constant orientation of the citizens, deliberate mobilisation of the people to relate with one another through different avenues, continuous propaganda on all media, good governance, economic and political stability, provision of basic infrastructure in both urban and rural areas, equality, inter- tribal/ethnic -marriages, national festivals, strong political will and commitment to implement laws/reforms and administer justice, and accountability across all sectors of the country, among others.<sup>9</sup>

However, this is not achieved by one strategy alone, but a combination of several other factors in addition to freedom of movement, settlement and resettlement, freedom to trade and own property in any part of the country, indiscriminate policies on the basis of culture or/and religion, synchronization of cultural festivals and other valuable culture to form a national cultural identity. In other words, national integration in Nigeria would involve an amalgamation of complex factors to harmonise the diverse representations into a Nigerian identity with articulated ideology.

According to Bala Mohammed, there are three types of

<sup>8</sup> Coleman J. Rosberg C. (1964) definition of national integration in "12 Years of NYSC" accessible at the NYSC Archives, Abuja

<sup>9</sup> Jawad Sha and Waseem Ishaque. 2017. "Challenges of National Integration in Pakistan and Strategic Response" ISSRA Papers, 2017 Pp.3947

national integration. They are: mutual integration, revolutionary integration and radical integration. Mutual integration means a national awareness that engenders peaceful co-existence. The radical type of integration occurs when the youths are compulsorily mobilised and objectively supervised by the mobilisers to force a national behaviour and bring about dynamic changes in various areas of their assignments. And revolutionary integration sets in afterwards when youths are given meaningful roles to play in an attempt to make changes that would impact on all the citizens and promote unity in diversity.<sup>10</sup>

Mutual integration, which entails a reciprocated kind of relations would in itself not foster peaceful relations. This is because the interactions among peoples in a country, whether they belong to the same or different groups, are not always peaceful. Conflict is bound to exist as ideas, perceptions, and interests among individuals may differ. Conflict is inevitable and so reciprocated relations, tolerance, understanding and acceptance should guide relations among diverse entities in a polity. The idea is to foster social harmony and promote socio-economic and political wellbeing by removing hatred, strife, inter-ethnic and religious conflicts among diverse groups.<sup>11</sup>

All the three types of national integration mentioned above are aimed at rapid socio-economic and political development of a nation and are intrinsically interwoven. During interaction, the mobilisers, the mobilised and the society are expected to surrender to the objectives of the country for maximum impact. In other words, for a nation to radically integrate, the mobilisers, the mobilised and all citizens must be patriotic, hardworking, efficient and committed to the national objectives. According to the Native Nations Institute, the diverse groups in a country must put in efforts to increase their capacity for development

<sup>10</sup> Bala Mohammed. "Exploring Different Concepts and Approaches to Youth Mobilization for National Development" a manuscript obtainable in NYSC Headquarters Library, Abuja. pp.22-24

<sup>11</sup> Desmond Dinan . 2014. *Europe Recast: A History of European Union* SECOND EDITION. USA; Lynne Rienner pp.1-10

and constructing a national identity.<sup>12</sup> This is what is needed to bring about meaningful national development.<sup>13</sup>

Mobilisation could be in segments such as farmers' mobilisation, teachers' mobilisation and youth mobilisation so as to harness such groups for effective developmental projects. National youth integration promotes youths' desire to participate in the interest of national development. It involves radical mobilisation of youth for a common course to project and pursue national integration policy throughout the country. The motivation for youth mobilisation may be for political, social, economic, military or a combination of any of these. However, the general objective is usually for political stability and national development.<sup>14</sup> This would not only unite the different entities and their economies, but also build the capacities of the people to attain such goals. In Nigeria, while various forms of mobilisation have been pursued over time, the national youth mobilisation has proven to be more enduring in uniting the different factions of the country.

National integration is the ultimate goal of every pluralistic society. A pluralist society is a society that comprises several ethnic groups, cultures, religions, and ideologies, among others. Thus, the pursuit of national integration is mostly peculiar to every multiethnic state.

The goal of national integration is development; whether social, economic or political. The development of the nation is invariably the development of people as enabling environment would be created for the people to thrive. In other words, "national integration is consistent with development in which diverse section of the society are provided with identical prospects and equal rights to enjoy several amenities devoid of

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<sup>12</sup> Native Nations institute in Evelyn Onwaniban. 2019. "The Military and Nation Building" in *RIMA International Journal of Historical Studies (RIJHIS)* ISSN:2672-4871, Vol 3, No. 1, 2019, P. 333. (pp.330-352)

<sup>13</sup> Bala Mohammed. "Exploring Different Concepts and Approaches to Youth Mobilization for National Development" pp.22-24

<sup>14</sup> Folorunso Kila, "Youth Mobilization for National Development. The Tanzanian Experience" p.34

any discrimination.<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that no society can thrive where there is discord and strife. This is because ethnic chauvinism, religious extremism, intolerance, hatred, discrimination, marginalisation, prolonged neglect, (extreme) poverty, illiteracy, inequality in economic status, education, provision of amenities and development, among others, bribery, corruption and lack of accountability, exploitation of national resources by internal and external forces, poor governance and mistrust of governance among others, create strife and are habitats of disunity and underdevelopment. However, good governance and the ability of government at different levels to provide a strong sense of national identity and an enabling environment for attracting investors and equal rights would, among others, breed cohesion and cooperation among multi groups which will in turn aid communal, regional and, invariably, national unity, peace, and progress. In other words, an enabling environment provided by leadership at different levels fosters national socio-economic and political development.

The policy of national integration has been pursued in Nigeria since independence. Some scholars argue that Nigerian's effort at achieving national integration has remained largely unrealised. Such scholars are also of the view that the problem of Nigeria has been one of national integration, pointing at ethnic identity politics, ethno-religious crises, minority crises, indigene-settler question, poor governance, resources control agitations and militancy/ terrorism in the country to buttress their point.<sup>16</sup> While these situations have characterised the Nigerian society since independence, the problem of Nigeria has been more of leadership issues than national integration, though the two go hand in hand in that leadership influences the peoples' decision to either unite or

<sup>15</sup> Jawad Sha and Waseem Ishaque. 2017. "Challenges of National Integration in Pakistan and Strategic Response" *ISSRA Papers*, 2017. Pp.35-48

<sup>16</sup> Wonah I. Emmanuel. 2016, " Identity politics and national integration in Nigeria" in *Open Science Journal 1(3)*, <https://doi.org/10.23954/osj.v2i1.376>. Ifeanyachukwu M. I and Nwagwu J. 2009. "Democratization and National Integration in Nigeria" *Research Journal of International Studies*, Issue 9, January, 2009.

disintegrate.<sup>17</sup> Nigerian leaders, especially the politicians, have exploited the differences between and among the different ethno-religious groups to canvass support for their political agenda at the centre rather than emphasise the unity and harmonious relations that permeate the country spanning over four centuries before colonialism.

Studies on Nigerian history have shown that the issues that threaten national cohesion in Nigeria are rather political, and manifest especially during national elections when politicians exploit the religious and ethnic differences to achieve their selfish goals. At the social-economic angle, the different groups work in tandem and relate with one another in a relative peaceful way. Worthy of note is the fact that certain institutions in the country, such as the military, have been able to achieve this goal of national cohesion in near totality. What remains is to translate the gains into the larger polity.

National integration is not only about peace and unity among diverse entities in a nation(state), but much more about their ability to fight against any tendencies that would jeopardise such peace, unity and progress. A country that has achieved this goal is able to confront intending and prevailing internal and external challenges effectively as its factions are able to pull forces together to fight for their common national interest.

Several integrative mechanisms have been put in place by successive administrations (civilian and military) towards national integration in Nigeria since independence. These integrative mechanisms include state creation, centralisation of powers, promulgation of laws, creation of unity school and mobilisation of certain interest groups, among others.<sup>18</sup> The

<sup>17</sup> Onwaniban Evelyn. 2019. "The Problem of Nigeria" in *Evelyn's Search Life*<https://sucheevelynonwaniban.blogspot.com/2019/05/the-problem-of-nigeria.html> retrieved 23 December, 2020

<sup>18</sup> Nigerian Army Information Briefs, September, 2008. "The Nigerian Army and National Integration: A Case Study of Murtala/Obasanjo Regime 1975-1979. Pp. 5-7. Note: while states were created to manage the problems of minority question which partly bred ethnic rivalry and tensions, it has not solve the problem of minority, it has rather widened the gap of national consciousness.

establishment of the NYSC is one such ways to effectively enhance national integration in the country. The need for national cohesion became a focal point in the 1960s when the separative movements threatened not only the unity of the state, but also the existence of Nigeria as a sovereign state.

## Post-Independence Nigeria and the Challenge of National Integration, 1960-1973

As a multi-ethnic state, Nigeria comprises over 300 peoples with different histories of migrations and culture domiciled in their present locations - traditional or ancestral homes - for two or more centuries.<sup>19</sup> Prior to the amalgamation of 1914, the diverse ethnic groups operated relative independent states and had varied interactions, ranging from friendly to hostile relations through trade, migrations, re-settlement, inter-marriages, conflicts and war, among others. Thus, in the various regions, several powerful kingdoms, empires, and acephalous societies emerged, and dominated socio-economic and political activities. For instance, Oyo Empire, Benin Kingdom, Bornu Empire, the city-sates of the Niger-Delta, Sokoto caliphate, Nupe Kingdom, Kwararafa State, Jukun empire, Igala Kingdom, Birom, Tiv societies, Igbo and Ibibio confederacy, comprised the independent nations, among others. All these states were forcefully merged together by the colonial government into one geographical entity in 1914 for the economic and political interests of the British government.<sup>20</sup>

The foundation for the division of Nigerian peoples along ethnic and political lines was laid during the colonial period. According to Tamuno Tekena, foreign rule itself was an avenue

<sup>19</sup> Abdul Raufu Mustapha. 2006. *Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector in Nigeria*. United Democracy Governance and Human Rights Programme Paper, 24 November, 2006, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Switzerland. P.iv. See also "Full List of all 371 Tribes in Nigeria, States where they Originate" in *Vanguard News*, May 10, 2017 10:45pm, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/category/national-news/> accessed 22 December, 2020

<sup>20</sup> National Archives Kaduna, Ilorin Profile, 2700. Report by Sir. F.D. Lugard on the Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria and Administration 1912-1919.

for discord among the peoples of the country as they were forcefully brought under one political setting.<sup>21</sup> This development was facilitated by the Richards Constitution of 1946, which led to the division of the country into three separate regions, namely: northern, western and eastern regions. With the creation of regions in the country, Nigeria became geographically, ethnically, and religiously divided with the northern region housing most of the Muslim group and having Hausa and Fulani as the dominant ethnic group; the west with mixed religion was mostly Yoruba and the eastern region having mainly Christians has as its dominant ethnic group, the Igbo. This composition in itself pitched the major ethnic group against the minority groups who clamour for fair representation at the helm of affairs, recognition, access to basic facility and economic inclusion, among others. Regionalism became a tool of exploitation for the politicians who exploited the cultural and religious divide to their advantage.<sup>22</sup>

Regional politics that preceded the independence of the country revealed the wide sentiments and divide among the various groups of the nation. This was manifested in the various political parties that were founded, which had regional and ethnic affiliations. They were National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC), later renamed National Council of Nigerian Citizens, Northern People's Congress (NPC), Action Group (AG), which metamorphosed from EgbeOmoOdududwa, Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU), United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), among others. Each of these political parties dominated the politics of their respective regions in the period between 1950 and 1960. However, there were other factors including minority agitation, neglect, underdevelopment of the rural areas, segregation

<sup>21</sup> Tekena N. Tamuno. 1970. "Separatist Agitations in Nigeria since 1914" in the *Journal of Modern Africa Studies*, Vol. 8, no. 4, December, 1970. Pp.563-584 accessed in <https://www.jstor.org/stable/159090>

<sup>22</sup> Tekena N. Tamuno and J.A. Atanda Eds. *Nigeria Since Independence: The First Twenty Five Years Volume IV Government and Public Policy*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria Ltd, 1989.

policies and land disputes that created problems which tended to undermine age long peaceful relations among the people. Tamuno Tekena added that foreign rule itself was an avenue for discord among the peoples of the country as they were forcefully brought under one political setting.<sup>23</sup>

With the attainment of political independence in 1960, the pursuit of national integration became one of the political objectives of the government of the First Republic, 1960-1966. The government of the First Republic promoted national integration through the introduction of Republican Constitution in 1963, adoption of federalism by the 1963 constitution and the creation of Mid-West Region in 1964. The process of national integration during the First Republic was hampered by the kind of politics being played by the Nigerian politicians during this period. Major political developments that occurred in Nigeria with major negative consequences on the pursuit of national integration during this Republic include the issue of irregularities and malpractices in the 1962/1963 census figures and the 1964-1964 Federal and Western Regional elections among others. The tensions that emanated from these created chaos that disrupted the peace and unity in the country. Politics at the centre was marred by selfishness, godfatherism, nepotism, political rivalry and intimidation as politicians tended to pursue individual gains rather than represent the interest of the people at large. The process of national integration was compounded by ethno-religious clashes and loyalties, intra-party conflict, corruption, poor leadership and the absence of a strong national ideological magnet that would sustain mass appeal.<sup>24</sup> The main consequence of these political crises and disorderliness was the collapse of the First Republic and the emergence of military rule in 1966, occasioned by the January 15, 1966 coup. With the emergence of military rule in 1966, the pursuit of national

<sup>23</sup>Tekano N. Tamuno. 1970. "Separatist Agitations in Nigeria since 1914" in *The Journal of Modern Africa Studies*, Vol. 8, no. 4, December, 1970. Pp.563-584 accessed in <https://www.jstor.org/stable/159090>

<sup>24</sup>Tekano N. Tamuno. 1970. "Separatist Agitations in Nigeria since 1914" in *The Journal of Modern Africa Studies*, Vol. 8, no. 4, December, 1970. Pp.564-567 accessed in <https://www.jstor.org/stable/159090>

integration took a new dimension. The emergent Head of State, Gen. Aguyi Ironsi, introduced a unitary system of government which was short lived, as the existence of factions in the military led to a counter coup that ushered in Gen. Yakubu Gowon as the Head of State. Soon after his appointment and following inter-ethnic crises in the north, threats of secession in the south and deterioration of relations between various factions in the military and governance, Gowon divided the regions of the country into twelve states to address the problems of minorities and political representations. However, lingering ethno-religious and political problems, the military coup and counter coup and distrust among ethnic groups soon led to riots and indiscriminate killings of Igbo in the north which eventually led to a secessionist bid by the Igbo, led by Ojukwu Odumegwu, which plunged the country into a civil war.<sup>25</sup>

The protracted civil war fought in 1967-1970, following the declaration of Biafra Republic by the Igbo, did not only widen the gap between the various ethnics; it also devastated the country in terms of massive loss of lives, money and infrastructures, among others. During the civil war, Gen. Gowon successfully deployed troops to fight and reunite the country. In the face of the multiple challenges to the sovereignty that resulted from the bloody civil war and the need to reintegrate the varied factions of the war, it became imperative to reunite the various peoples and cultures together. Hence, it was to avoid the political pitfalls of this early period, restructure the economy and reunite the peoples of the country that the policy of Restructuring, Re-integration and Re- organisation was launched. Gen. Gowon established the Universal Primary Education (UPE) and, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in 1973 as post-war strategies to achieve this goal; to utilise the youths by indiscriminately deploying them to different part of

<sup>25</sup> Alabi-Isama Godwin. 2013. "Forward I" *The Tragedy of Victory: On the Spot Account of the Nigerian Biafran War in the Atlantic Theatre*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books. P.45-55, see also, "Independent Nigeria" in Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nigeria/independent-Nigeria> accessed 21 December, 2020.

the country to boost cultural understanding and tolerance, resettlement, development and to inculcate the spirit of oneness and a clear sense of identity among the diverse ethno-religious groups.<sup>26</sup> The reviews of the scheme by various scholars and several others have affirmed that the NYSC no doubt has aided the fulfillment of national integration, although certain factors have continued to inhibit the progress of the programme.

## The NYSC and National Integration in Nigeria

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) is a deliberate policy that was promulgated in 1973 to foster a spirit of national consciousness among the people in the country. Its rationale was driven by the need to forestall ethnic chauvinism and conflicts, self-determination bids and possible disintegration of the country, especially following the experience of the country after the civil war of 1967-1970.<sup>27</sup> Following Decree No 24 May, 1973, promulgated under the government of General Yakubu Gowon, the Head of State at the time, the NYSC was introduced. According to Decree No. 51, June 1993(revised), the NYSC was charged with the task of imbuing in Nigerian graduate youths the spirit of selflessness and the virtue of oneness regardless of their socio-cultural, economic and religious background; instilling in youths the virtue of discipline, hard work, self-reliance and patriotism; developing communities, improving the spirit of cooperation and peaceful co-existence among the diverse groups in the country, and promoting national unity and cohesion, among others.<sup>28</sup> The NYSC marks the completion of the first degree educational process in Nigeria as those who have passed the assigned age are issued letters of exemption from the scheme. By the above policy, "youths were to be assigned to states other than their origins as representatives of the country to

<sup>26</sup> Onwaniban Evelyn. 2019. "Military Rule and Nation Building" *Rima International Journal of Historical Studies (RIJHIS)* ISSN: 2672-4871, Vol. 3, no. 1, January, 2019. p. 345

<sup>27</sup> National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) Handbook 1973. Decree and Amendment NO. 28, Vol. 60, May 23, Part A.

<sup>28</sup> NYSC Hand Book Revised in 1999.

expose them to the ways of life of different cultural groups in other to foster understanding, remove prejudice, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups.”<sup>29</sup> Hence, the policy has as its major goal peaceful-coexistence and harmony among Nigerian. Its aim is to eliminate every form of ethnic animosity and grievances that have pervaded the country since amalgamation as epitomised in the eventualities that led to the breakdown of peace in the early post independent era.

By the policy that initiated this scheme, youths were not only to work but to engage in community services and programmes that would help them interact with the host communities in order to have deep insights into the local traditions and customs of the people as these would help achieve the goals of reducing prejudices and fostering cultural understanding and tolerance.<sup>30</sup> Hence, corps members are given orientation on these goals to better prepare them for the task of national integration and development.

The NYSC is arguably the biggest youth mobilisation agency in the world that is aimed at promoting relationships and reducing conflicts. It hopes to democratise the society and enhance national development.<sup>31</sup> Its mobilisation is done in such a way that persons of particular ethnic group are deployed to regions other than their ethnic regions for a period of one year where they work and live in those communities, and are provided monthly stipends by the Federal Government for their sustenance. In some cases, corps members also get allowances from their Places of Primary Assignment (PPA).

In the youth mobilisation, there had been modification overtime to incorporate graduates across all tertiary institutions,

<sup>29</sup> National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) Handbook 1973. Section 4 of the Decree No 24, May 1973.

<sup>30</sup> NYSC 1983. “A Compendium of National Youth Service Corps: Ten Years of Service to the Nation. NYSC Directorate; Lagos

<sup>31</sup> NYSC News OCNODE512019. “Buhari: NYSC must Continue ...” and “NYSC-Catalyst for National Development-Gen. Yakubu Gowon” *A Journal of NYSC Directorate Headquarters* 2019. see also, Ben Agande. “Don’t Scrap NYSC-Jega. Vanguard, Thursday June 2, 2011. P. 11

universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. Nigerian graduates from overseas are also allowed to participate as the policy also makes provision for them to serve their fatherland.<sup>32</sup> Their deployment to different regions to bridge the cultural and religious gaps in the various regions have helped to foster understanding and tolerance to a large extent. Apart from their places of work where corps members interact with colleagues, their involvement in Community Development Service (CDS) has enabled them (the corps members) interact directly with the people in their host communities.

It is important to note that the NYSC has become an effective tool in mobilising all educated youths for national development.<sup>33</sup> Thus, government should consider a similar scheme for youths who are unable to attain the educational qualification required for participation in the scheme, or government should modify the NYSC to embrace all categories of youths in the country to engender humongous impact in the towards national integration. In this regard, a post-secondary school mobilisation as adopted in Tanzania, where the youth are trained in various skills including military and police training, vocational skills and modern farming techniques, could be adopted for the category of youths that have not attained the prerequisite educational qualification at the age of 30.<sup>34</sup> This will better equip them to be self-sufficient and less dependent on the country for survival, and also aid national development which is central to the philosophy the NYSC.

At this juncture, it is important to note that successive governments, non-governmental organisations and private initiatives have launched series of vocational programmes in times past, including the Youth Entrepreneurship Development Programme (YEDP) launched in March 2016<sup>35</sup> and October 7,

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<sup>32</sup> NYSC Library. "12 Years Of NYSC"

<sup>33</sup> National Service for the 80s: Report on the Proceedings of the Workshop on the NYSC Scheme, Kano, kano State, 26-28 May, 1980. P.2.

<sup>34</sup> Folorunso Kila, "Youth Mobilization for National Development: The Tanzanian Experience" p.36-37

<sup>35</sup> Central Bank of Nigeria. "Youth Entrepreneurship Development Programme <https://www.cbn.gov.ng/Devfin/yedp.asp> accessed 12 October, 2020

2020, #75 billion Nigerian Youth Investment Fund to sustain the youths.<sup>36</sup> Great as these initiates are, their impacts would be encompassing if the youths are mobilised compulsorily for these programmes, such as is the case in the NYSC.

Apart from promoting national harmony in the country, the selfless services rendered by corps members in national service have promoted transformation and the socio-economic development of the country over time.<sup>37</sup> Corps members have, over time, identified and implemented several developmental projects in their communities of service including water projects, educational programmes, equipping of libraries and computer laboratories, renovation of schools, sanitation services and, even, resolution of disputes, among other community services.<sup>38</sup> It must however be stated that while the developmental projects embraced by youth corps members are welcomed, it reveals the failure or inability of various local governments and their states to deliver effectively and develop their places of jurisdiction. Hence, corps members have become saddled with the responsibilities of delivering certain projects lacking in the communities.<sup>39</sup> Often times, the funds generated for these projects are from their personal purses. This in itself is unhealthy for the youths, considering the meager allowances paid to them and the uncertainty they may face after their service year, due to the high unemployment rate in the country. The dearth of infrastructures especially in rural communities hampers the goals of national integration, as most corps members are forced to redeploy to urban centres and those who manage to stay,

<sup>36</sup> Abiola Odutola. "N75 Billion Nigerian Youth Investment Fund to be rolled out before the end of October-Minister" <https://www.cbn.gov.ng/Devfin/yedp.asp> accessed 12 October, 2020

<sup>37</sup> Adeola J. Afolayan et al. "Address by the Director General of NYSC Brig. Gen. Ibrahim

D.D. PHD MTRCN at the Opening Ceremony of the NYSC Freedom of Information Desk Officers Workshop held on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2019 at Rockview Hotel (Royale) Wuse II, Abuja. P.36

<sup>38</sup> *Vanguard*, Thursday Nov 24, 2011. P.18, see also, *Vanguard*, Wednesday October 8, 2014. P.32

<sup>39</sup> Adeola J. Afolayan et al. "Address by the Director General of the NYSC Brig. Gen. Ibrahim D.D. PHD MTRCN at the Opening Ceremony of the NYSC Freedom of Information Desk Officers Workshop held on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2019 at Rockview Hotel (Royale) Wuse II, Abuja. P.36

relocate to urban centres after their service year. Government at various levels should be held accountable for the revenues allocated to them and not leave their core responsibilities to youths who are supposed to be assisted to become independent nationals of the country. In other words, if various governments play their roles effectively, youths who are deployed to the communities would utilise their meagre resources for other personal investments that may make them not only to be self-employed but also employers of labour in the various communities, rather than channel their savings to providing basic amenities in the communities where they serve.

A major area in which the NYSC has fostered national integration in the country is through inter-ethnic marriages. Other areas include improved physical health and spots development among the youth, and community developmental projects.<sup>40</sup> Through extra-curricular activities such as volleyball and football where teams play against each other, as well as inter-state corps members sport activities, the scheme is able to unify and foster friendly relations between and among corps members. As subtle as it may seem, through inter-state sport competition among corps members, primordial ties are being removed, consequently paving way for greater acceptance of other cultures, and national affiliation. This is especially so, given that corps members participate as representatives of the states where they are being posted to rather than their states of origin.<sup>41</sup>

No doubt, the NYSC has served as avenue for young people to meet and interact, as well as a platform that merges the destinies of many through friendships and marriages initiated during the service year. The NYSC policy encourages inter-ethnic marriages among corps members and provides support for them. This is especially so for corps members that get

<sup>40</sup> A.O. Sanda. 1976. "Problem and Prospects of the National Youth Service in Nigeria" Report Submitted to the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, university of Ibadns, April 1976, see also, Femi A. Adetunji . "National Youth Service Corps "NYSCAT 15"

<sup>41</sup> Gregory Enegewa and Gabriel Umoden, 1993. *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service*. NYSC Directorate Headquarters; Abuja

married during their service year.<sup>42</sup> The NYSC has recorded several marriages among its serving corps members. Terfe Kende, a Tiv, who served in Osun state met and got married to Abiola (a corps member of Yoruba origin) during their service year in 2010.<sup>43</sup> In similar vein, Sunday Samuel and Ugochi Nwanguna from Edo and Imo states respectively courted during their service year in Ogun State in 2007 and consummated their marriage after their service year.<sup>44</sup>

Apart from marriages between serving corps members, some persons posted to different communities meet their heartthrobs who are resident there and conjugate their relations. This has also aided resettlement of some corps members subsequently. It has enabled participants of the scheme to understand the cultural dynamics of the varied peoples and cultures of the country.<sup>45</sup> According to Barrister Tope Ayedogbon, "The NYSC has improved inter-tribal marriages between corps member. Apart from marriages between corps members during their service year, some corps members who court during this period conjugate their relationships afterwards. Many others meet their spouses who are non 'coppers' during the service year. I know certain persons (who are my friends) who met their spouses during their service year. Some of them even got married to husbands from different tribes and religions. A particular captain (name withheld) in the military who is my friend married his wife, a fellow corps member too, during their service year. The NYSC has also enabled youths to develop new ideas and establish businesses in their places of their national service."<sup>46</sup> For Patience Onwuaniban, "most of the people that have connected me to businesses and clients are friends I met during my service year in Lagos."<sup>47</sup> Paul Ikechukwu also holds this view as he credits most

<sup>42</sup> National Youth Service Corps By Law 1993.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Terfa Kende, age 37 in Abuja on 12 October, 2020

<sup>44</sup> Interview held with Sunday Samuel, age 44, in Lagos on 22 December, 2020

<sup>45</sup> Simon Kolawole and Eniola Bello. "NYSC: Still Worth its Ideals?" *This Day*, Vol. 16, No. 5853, Tuesday May 3, 2011. P.19

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Barrister (Mrs.) Tope Ayedogbon, age 37, at Abuja on 12<sup>th</sup> October, 2020

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Patience Onwuaniban, age 34, in Lagos, 22 December, 2020

of his achievements to friends made during his service year.<sup>48</sup> Through friendships and inter-ethnic marriages, the NYSC has helped to reduce prejudices, increased the bonds of understanding and promote harmony among Nigerian youths, their families and associates.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter interrogated the historical trajectory of the challenge of national integration in Nigeria from the colonial period. It argued that the foundation of ethnic chauvinism in the post-independence Nigeria was laid during the colonial period. However, since independence, several structural mechanisms have been put in place to promote national integration in the country. One of these mechanisms was the introduction of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). Through inter-marriages, CDS, sports development and a wide range of interactions among the youths and communities of the country, the NYSC has succeeded in fostering cross-cultural values, understanding, appreciation and respect for the varied cultural values and created a lot of opportunities for enhancing youth geographical knowledge of the country. Undoubtedly, the NYSC remains one of the major enduring structural mechanisms for promoting national integration among Nigerian youths in particular and the entire country in general.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Paul Ikechukwu, age 57, in Abuja, 13 October 2020

## Chapter Sixteen

# NYSC AND NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

*Albert Onobhayedo*

*Department of History & International Studies  
University of Benin  
Benin, Nigeria.*

### Introduction

The policy of deploying members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) as ad hoc electoral staff in Nigeria is inextricably tied to the desire to solve the manpower problems that beset the electoral process in the country. Over the years, despite the aberrant intrusion of the military into politics and governance, Nigeria has made overt efforts at anchoring its political structure on democratic principle. Invariably, policies, institutions, and modalities, of which elections constitute a critical component, were contrived to drive the process. The resultant elections and democratic experiments, nevertheless, have been fraught with anomalies and a perturbing credibility crisis. Institutional failure has reinforced this experience, given the inability of the national electoral body, in several instances, to ensure transparency, probity, fairness, equity and to recruit capable hands, including ad hoc staff, while discharging its statutory role of conducting elections in Nigeria. The failure of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), in this regard, is underscored by the fact that several of the election results it proclaimed have been overturned by the judiciary at an alarming frequency. Gubernatorial results have been nullified and overturned in states such as Oyo (2007 election), Ekiti (2007), Edo (2007), Zamfara (2019) and Imo (2019)<sup>1</sup>. Also, between

<sup>1</sup> Governorship Elections: Cases of Nullified Elections, *Vanguard Newspaper*, November 26, 2010 and Information obtained from INEC office, Benin City.

November 2019 and January 2020, INEC conducted twenty-eight re-run elections arising from thirty court orders.<sup>2</sup> Inadequate performance by INEC personnel, including ad hoc staff, who were, hitherto, drawn from teachers and members of the public, is implicated in this experience. In order to stem the tide of this untoward development, INEC has sought solution from several fronts, especially in the area of electoral reforms. The policy of utilizing members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) as ad hoc electoral staff resonates in the attempts made to improve on the electoral process. The background of the corps members, in "learning and character", as polytechnic and university graduates, supposedly, predisposes them as trainable and potentially competent ad hoc personnel that could make a difference; hence the recourse to the extant collaboration between INEC and NYSC on the matter. The issues analysed in this chapter include the emergence of INEC and NYSC, the MoU between both organisations, the deployment of corps members as ad hoc INEC staff before and after the MoU, as well as the training, remuneration, accommodation, safety concerns and benefit associated with the partnership.

### **Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)**

The electoral body in Nigeria has adopted various appellations and acronyms over the years. From its inception and tag during the colonial period – Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) – it metamorphosed and assumed new names through constitutional reviews, which reflect the evolution of its statutory role and modalities of operation. At Independence, it quickly morphed into the Federal Electoral Commission (FEC). Even at this stage, the challenge of getting enough competent hands to man polling units had started to rear its head, constraining FEC to rely substantially on ad hoc staff during the 1964 and 1965 elections. The quest for improvement under the Olusegun Obasanjo military regime resulted in the replacement

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<sup>2</sup> INEC Set to Conduct 28 r-run in 11 states, *Newsletter- Situationroom*, Nigerian Civil Society, January 21, 2020,

of FEC with the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO), which conducted the 1979 and 1983 elections, both of which were won by Alhaji Shehu Shagari. By 1987, the tag FEDECO gave way to the National Electoral Commission (NEC) under the Ibrahim Babangida regime, which, among others, superintended the June 12, 1993 elections, relying, markedly, on ad hoc staff.<sup>3</sup> Under General Sani Abacha, who became Nigerian Head of State in 1994, a new electoral body was constituted and christened National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) but did not survive the death of Sani Abacha in 1997. Further revision under Abdulsalami Abubarkar in 1998, resulted in the extant form and tag – Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). So far, INEC has conducted the 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019 general elections as well as the gubernatorial elections in Edo and Ondo states in September and October 2020 respectively.<sup>4</sup> INEC exercises a constitutional mandate that the Electoral Act of 2010 has reaffirmed.<sup>5</sup> The statute charged INEC with the responsibility of organizing federal and state elections, registering and regulating the activities of political parties, providing voter education, conducting voter registration and employing the required staff. In addition to its full-time staff, and in order to discharge these functions effectively, provision was made for the recruitment, training and deployment of ad hoc staff. And since 2007, National Youth Service Corps members have featured consistently as ad hoc Presiding Officers (POs) and Assistant Presiding Officers (APOs) during national elections in Nigeria. Prior to this time, “ad hoc staff were drawn from government institutions and private individuals, who had no definite records of verifiable addresses, the use of ad hoc staff was

<sup>3</sup> Shehu Bello Harris, “Assessing the participation of Youth Corps Members in the 2015 Electoral Process in Nigeria”, <https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Conference-Paper-by-Shehu-Bello-Idris.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Shehu Bello Harris, “Assessing the participation of Youth Corps Members in the 2015 Electoral Process in Nigeria”

<sup>5</sup> Sam Itodo, “Elections and Youths: The Case of Nigeria”, ACE Project, [http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/em/elections-and-youth/the-case-of-nigeria/mobile\\_browsing/onePag](http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/em/elections-and-youth/the-case-of-nigeria/mobile_browsing/onePag)

characterized by various electoral malfeasance, which undermined the integrity of elections".<sup>6</sup>

### **The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)**

The NYSC is a statutory agency of the federal government, a brain child of the General Yakubu Gowon regime. It was established on the heel of the Nigerian civil war, in tandem with the motive of postwar reconstruction and quest for national unity. The events leading to the civil war and the three years of battle had skewed the orientation of Nigerian youths towards ethnic chauvinism and nepotistic tendencies. The mass migration of the Easterners from Northern and Western Nigeria had created distrust and scars in the demographic configuration of Nigeria. Mutual trust had gone with the wind, and the prospect of a political structure based on the democratic principle was bleak. The realities, challenges and aftermath of the civil war necessitated the invention of new ways of strengthening and stretching the frontier of nation building. In the light of this, the Yakubu Gowon regime established the NYSC with the NYSC Decree of 1973, reaffirmed in the Youth Service Corps Decree of 1993 and National Youth Service Corps Act Cap N84 Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.<sup>7</sup>

Arising from this, NYSC authorities were charged to ensure the "equitable distribution of members of the service corps and the effective utilization of their skills in areas of national needs" which does not preclude elections. Although, officiating in elections was not overtly spelt out in the stated objectives, article 14, section 9 of the statute legitimized the deployment of youth corps members to "undertaking and projects the President, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces may by order determine".<sup>8</sup> Despite argument to the contrary, this clause indicates that corps members are "amenable to mobilization in the national interests", thus, providing the latitude for the

<sup>6</sup> Sam Itodo, "Elections and Youths: The Case of Nigeria".

<sup>7</sup> NYSC Decree, available in NYSC Secretariat Abuja and Benin City. Also available for download at [www.nysc.gov.ng](http://www.nysc.gov.ng)>download>nsc-decree.

<sup>8</sup> NYSC Decree, available in NYSC Secretariat Abuja and Benin City. Also available for download at [www.nysc.gov.ng](http://www.nysc.gov.ng)>download>nsc-decree.

government to initiate the understanding between NYSC and INEC.

The road to the partnership was checkered. At no point was it taken for granted by parents, the corps members, and even NYSC authorities that the NYSC project was automatically aligned to the manpower need of INEC. Hence, the emerging relationship between INEC and NYSC has been attended by debates regarding its legality. Despite the clauses seemingly approving of a partnership between both agencies in the stated objectives of NYSC, the terms of reference of both organisations did not directly intersect. The NYSC programme provided for a two-tier assignment, namely, primarily assignment and community service. Some critics have argued that ad hoc electoral assignment was not envisaged in this structure. For instance, a human right lawyer, Kayode Ajulo, has vehemently queried the legality of involving corps members in ad hoc electoral jobs.<sup>9</sup> He averred that the policy was inconsistent with the statutory duties of a corps member. This implies that the idea negates the notion of primary assignment and community service as enshrined in the NYSC Act. To strengthen his arguments, he drew attention to the exposure of corps members to violence and corruption, which have characterized elections in Nigeria. He also foregrounds his position on the argument that corps members are barred by law from taking up any other paid jobs while in service. According to him, "once you are in national service, you are not supposed to take up any remuneration apart from allowances, so, INEC is violating the law".<sup>10</sup> In a similar tone, but for a different reason, a local government Chairman, Emmanuel Bamgboye posited that youth corpers should not be employed in future elections.<sup>11</sup> Unlike Ajulo who based his objections on the legality of the idea,

<sup>9</sup> Lawyer Threatens to Sue INEC for Using CORPERS as ad hoc Election Workers, *Punch*, March 1, 2019

<sup>10</sup> Lawyer Threatens to Sue INEC for Using CORPERS as ad hoc Election Workers, *Punch*, March 1, 2019

<sup>11</sup> "Don't Hire Corpers for Future Elections Council Chairman warn", *Punch*, March 9, 2019.

Bamgbose emphasized inexperience, youthful exuberance and incompetence in handling statistical figures. He stated that:

In subsequent elections, I will advise INEC not to use corps members because most of them are inexperience, some of them cannot write figures very well, while most of them are not capable and are not exposed to this type of election duties previously.<sup>12</sup>

However, this argument runs counter to the accolades and encomiums, which several personalities and observers, as we shall see, have showered on corps members over superior conduct during elections. Bamgbose's vituperation could have been influenced by some corps members' legitimate protest over the non-payment of their allowances in the course of the 2019 elections in Mushin Local Government area, which rattled INEC and resulted in delay in the electoral process.<sup>13</sup>

In order to decipher the *raison d'être* for the integration of corps members into electoral assignments, attention must be paid to the manpower problem that have characterized the conduct of elections in Nigeria. Giving its population of about 200 million people, Nigeria constitutes a vast electoral field, perhaps only surpassed, in terms of numerical statistics by the United States, China, India, Pakistan and Brazil. At independence, Nigeria already had a population of 45 million people to grapple with.<sup>14</sup> At the time of the 2011 election, it had risen to 160 million and 200 million in 2020.<sup>15</sup> At no point in Nigeria's electoral history have the staff of the electoral commission sufficed in dealing with the task of conducting elections in the country. With over 120,000 polling units to contend with, INEC require, at least 700,000 personnel,

<sup>12</sup> "Don't Hire Corpers for Future Elections Council Chairman warn", *Punch*, March 9, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> "Don't Hire Corpers for Future Elections Council Chairman warn", *Punch*, March 9, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Nigerian Population, WORLD Population Review.com

<sup>15</sup> Nigerian Population, WORLD Population Review.com. Nigerian population census figures and estimates are also available in Nigerian Population Commission

including 675,000 ad hoc staff to conduct elections<sup>16</sup>. Typically, every polling unit required a minimum of a Presiding Officer (PO), Assistant Presiding Officer 1 (APO 1), Assistant Presiding Officer 2 (APO 2) and Assistant Presiding Officer 3 (APO 3). In addition to these positions, returning and collating officers are required at the local government, state and federal levels. This has necessitated the recourse to ad hoc staff, over the years.

Corps members were introduced to augment and shore up the quality of ad hoc staff. Going by the enabling law, only graduates of tertiary institutions are deemed qualified to be absorbed into the NYSC programme. This has, definitely, facilitated capacity building towards the successful conduct of elections in Nigeria, leveraging on the notion of certificate earned in learning and character, reinforced by three weeks of national orientation and civic education in NYSC camps. Another consideration was the exogenous character of a corps member, vis-a-vis, his state of origin and place of service. By law, corps members are expected to serve outside their state of origin and, therefore, expected to be apolitical as none stakeholders in local politics in communities where they carry out their primary and INEC assignments. *Ipsso facto*, they are less likely to pervert electoral procedures. Also, their recruitment as ad hoc staff aligns with the global trend where the youths have become instruments of social change through the social media and non-governmental organizations. The wave of violence that followed the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections called for a re-evaluation of the place of the youths in Nigerian elections. Their susceptibility to manipulation by politicians who galvanize them towards violence during elections became an issue of concern. Therefore, the National Youth Policy of 2009 called for a new orientation and better opportunities for the youths in national affairs.<sup>17</sup> The INEC-NYSC partnership dovetailed into this desire.

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<sup>16</sup> This is the estimated at the time of the 2015 election.

<sup>17</sup> Sam Itodo, "Elections and Youths: The Case of Nigeria"

## Deployment of Youth Corps Members as Ad Hoc Staff in Nigerian Elections

Information and documentary evidence on the earliest attempt to deploy corps members as ad hoc staff during elections in Nigeria are scanty. While most of the existing studies on the subject matter and even the MoU of 2013 point to the 2007 election, an informant, Dr John Abhuere, credited Ibrahim Babangida's regime with the first attempt.<sup>18</sup> In line with the reputation acquired by the regime for novel political formations such as open ballot, the INEC Chairman, Humphrey Nwosu, considering NYSC as a reservoir of high quality manpower, approved the utilization of corps members as ad hoc electoral officers in the 1993 general elections. This pioneering attempt proceeded without recourse to a comprehensive MoU, leveraging on the administrative fiat associated with military regimes. The corps members who participated at this stage, were mostly recruited from their places of primary assignment, without a proper delineation of the terms and condition attached. Although their involvement under Ibrahim Babangida did not blossom as a large-scale project, as only a handful were involved, it remained a landmark and a prolegomenon to subsequent developments. INEC authorities had hoped that, afterwards, the idea will be promptly developed and concretized as a collaborative policy between them and NYSC.

However, the idea suffered a setback with the annulment of June 12, 1993, general election. By the annulment, the hand that rocked the cradle also truncated the electoral process and the innovations that came with it. Consequently, the utilization of corps members as electoral officers was jettisoned in the 1999 and 2003 elections. It was not revisited until the 2007 general elections.<sup>19</sup> The impetus for the renewed interest derived from President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua critique of the elections that brought him to power. The 2007 general elections, and indeed,

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Dr John Abhuere, a former Director at NYSC headquarters, Abuja. He was the first coordinator of INEC-NYSC partnership. He is currently the founder and chairman of the Centre for Childcare and Youth Development, Abuja.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Dr John Abhuere. See also, 2013 MoU between INEC and NYSC.

those of 1999 and 2003, were riddled with inordinate party rivalry, vituperations, violence, maleficence and credibility crisis.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the quality of service rendered by several ad hoc staff was tainted by party affiliation. The propensity for such affiliation was, logically, expected to be lower within the ranks of the corps members who were fresh graduates from tertiary institutions and engaged outside their states of origin.

Pressing for electoral reforms and respect for due process, the Umaru Musa Yar'Adua regime identified competence and education as sine qua non to sound electoral practices. Recognizing the potentials of the NYSC scheme as a reservoir of highly skilled and educated personnel, Yar Adua endorsed a recourse to corps members as ad hoc staff in consonance with the fifth item of his policy of education and human capital development embedded in his Seven Point Agenda.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the decision to engage corps members as polling officers was consistent with this desire for electoral reforms. Yar Adua disposition ignited a new wave of interest in a synergy between NYSC and INEC, regarding the conduct of elections, paving the way for the INEC Chairman, Maurice Iwu, to initiate the process.

A requested made to NYSC by INEC, approved by the NYSC directorate, culminated in the engagement of corps members in the 2007 elections. Their performance in the elections approximated the standard envisaged by the INEC authorities. The splendor of their accomplishment resonated as fillip for further engagement of corps members as electoral workers in various by- and re-run elections. The by-elections of 2008 and 2009 and 2010 provided an avenue for the consolidation of the INEC-NYSC understanding. The NYSC contributed 5,851 corps members as ad hoc staff in the Kogi governorship re-run elections.<sup>22</sup> In the process, the corps members, to a large extent, exhibited competence and a high level of discipline. On the same

<sup>20</sup> Sam Itodo, "Elections and Youths: The Case of Nigeria",

<sup>21</sup> Overview of President Yar'adua's Seven Point Agenda: Issues and Policy Challenges, [www.nigeriahc.org.uk](http://www.nigeriahc.org.uk) › pdf › seven\_point\_agenda

<sup>22</sup> Sam Itodo, "Elections and Youths: The Case of Nigeria".

date, some of them performed a similar feat in the governorship re-run elections in Adamawa state. They were involved in other elections in Zamfara, Sokoto, Bayelsa and Nasarawa states in 2008 as indicated in the table below:

**Table 13:** Deployment of Corps Members in Various Elections in 2008.<sup>23</sup>

DATE	DESIGNATION	STATE	NO OF CORPS MEMBERS DEPLOYED
29/3/2008	Governorship (Re-run)	Kogi	5,851
29/4/2008	Governorship (Re-run)	Adamawa	5,727
19/4/2008	Maru North (By-Election)	Zamfara	177
24/4/2008	Governorship (By-Election)	Sokoto	3,035
24/5/2008	Governorship (By-Election)	Bayelsa	1,805
07/06/2008	Lafia/Obi Federal Constituency (By-Election)	Nassarawa	447
23/08/2008	Governorship (By-Election)	Cross River State	2265

**Source:** Adapted from Shehu Bello Harris, "Assessing the participation of Youth Corps Members in the 2015 Electoral Process in Nigeria", <https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Conference-Paper-by-Shehu-Bello-Idris.pdf>.

The table indicates that a total of 11,578 and 7,729 where involved in re-run elections and by-elections respectively in 2008. By 2009, it had become the norm to engage corps members as electoral officers. They were increasingly seen as factors in the realization of the long sort credibility in Nigerian elections. Not only were they of numerical value, they had sufficiently demonstrated an apolitical disposition as to become a source of relief to INEC authorities in their quest for competent non-partisan ad hoc staff. Thus, the momentum attained in 2008, fired the progress recorded in 2009. In that year, corps members were involved in at least ten elections as follows:

**Table 14:** Deployment of Corps Members in Various Elections in 2009.

DATE	DESIGNATION	STATE	NO OF CORPS MEMBERS DEPLOYED
5/2/10	Governorship Election.	Anambra state	4,658
10/4/10	FCT Area Council Election	Abuja	2,400
April 2011	General Elections		185,000

Source: Adapted from Shehu Bello Harris, "Assessing the participation of Youth Corps Members in the 2015 Electoral Process in Nigeria", <https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Conference-Paper-by-Shehu-Bello-Idris.pdf>.

The various re-run and by-elections up to 2010 had served as a learning ground, having exposed some challenges in the NYSC-INEC partnership. As the nation prepared for the 2011 general elections, the deployment of corps members as ad hoc INEC staff had become a *fait accompli*. What could be likened to the experimental years were over, and it was time to consolidate. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was deemed fit to be an indispensable part of the consolidation process. Thus, an MoU was signed in 2010, streamlining the mode of engagement between NYSC and INEC, and paving the way for the engagement of 185,000 corps members as ad hoc staff in the 2011 general elections. Thereafter, the MoU was reaffirmed in 2013 to strengthen the synergy between INEC and NYSC. The 2013 documents spelt out in details, the terms and conditions that were to guide both organizations while superintending national elections. The MoU created a framework for action and reaction, charted a path for the partnership, encoded the responsibility of both parties, and spelt out the terms of understanding as follows:<sup>24</sup>

1. The Commission may engage, on ad-hoc basis, the services of Corps members for its electoral duties;
2. The Commission shall train the corps members so engaged for its electoral duties before deployment.

<sup>24</sup> Memorandum of Understanding between INEC and NYSC, September 24, 2013.

3. The Commission may, as it deems expedient, request for camp facilities from the NYSC for the purpose of training corps members and other related electoral duties;
4. Corps members deployed by the Commission for electoral duties will be paid allowances as determined by the Commission;
5. Where corps members are moved from their states of deployment to another state, the Commission shall provide for their feeding, transportation and accommodation for the period so engaged;
6. INEC and security agencies through the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCESS) shall put in place adequate security arrangements to safeguard the lives of Corps members who participate in electoral duties, prior to, during and after elections;
7. NYSC State Coordinators shall be members of the State Inter-Agency Consultative Committee (ICCES) for election duties;
8. NYSC shall provide, in so far as it is capable, the number of Corps members required by the Commission for electoral duties in each of the 36 states of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory;
9. The Commission shall use NYSC staff in supervisory roles during electoral duties in which Corps members are involved;
10. The Commission shall after due confirmation by both parties pay all approved entitlements through the NYSC State Secretariat at the rate approved by the Commission to Corps members, and staff of NYSC deployed for electoral duties;
11. The NYSC Local Government Inspector in each of the 774 Local Government Areas nationwide shall serve as the NYSC-INEC liaison officer in their respective Local Government Areas and shall ensure welfare of Corps members in that Local Government Area for the purpose of electoral duties;

12. Corps members engaged in any electoral duty shall operate under the directives of the Commission. They shall be under the supervision of NYSC staff, Electoral Officers and Supervisory Presiding Officers during the period of electoral duties;
13. NYSC upon receipt of a complaint of misconduct from the Commission shall investigate and sanction any Corps member or staff found culpable;
14. NYSC shall avail the Commission the opportunity to train Corps members and staff on electoral processes during the orientation course;
15. The Commission shall take insurance cover for Corps members who suffer injury, permanent disability or loss of life or property in the course of carrying out the Commission's assigned duties. In case of NYSC staff, the appropriate provisions of the Public Service Rule shall apply;
16. The parties to this Memorandum of Understanding shall be at liberty to draw attention to any matter relating to it while it subsists; and
17. The Parties hereto may meet from time to time to review this Memorandum of Understanding as the need arises.

In addition to the above, the MoU laid out the procedures for managing infractions against the partnership and resolving disputes amicably. To this end, a committee of three members, drawn from both organizations, was set up. The MoU was "to remain in force for Four years and renewable thereafter by mutual agreement".<sup>25</sup> However, either of the parties could terminate it, provided it gave the other party four months' notice to that effect. While the MoU subsists, the Corps Welfare and Inspectorate Department of the NYSC and its subunit – INEC and Other Matters – were charged with the responsibility of operationalizing the agreement, in tandem with the objective of

the MoU, and to ensure goal realization.<sup>26</sup> Invariably, they handled issues related to recruitment, training, remuneration and welfare.

**Fig. 32:** Corps Members on Election Duties in Different Parts of the Country



### Deployment of Youth Corps Members as Ad hoc Staff since the MoU of 2010

The 2011 General Elections amply demonstrated the resolve to consolidate the engagement of Nigerian corps members in electoral services in Nigeria. With 120,000 polling units to contend with, INEC upheld the practice. 185,000 corps members out of approximately 240,000 ad hoc staff were deployed to serve

<sup>26</sup> Memorandum of Understanding between INEC and NYSC, September 24, 2013.

across the country.<sup>27</sup> They were adjudged to have performed creditably and commended by local and international observers. Their impact was felt to the extent that a report by the International Republican Institute (IRI) declared that "NYSC members increased public confidence through their role as poll workers and voter's registration officials as they were seen as more neutral than past officials"<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the institute recommended that INEC should build "institutional expertise by incorporating... experienced NYSC workers as future trainers".<sup>29</sup> In a National Public Opinion Survey, carried out on the 2011 election, only 5% of the respondents were dissatisfied and held the view that some of corps members "did a poor job".<sup>30</sup> Okolo and Onunkwo blamed the lapses in the performance of some corps members on inadequate training, arguing that some of them "had different approaches to the same issue, thereby lacking uniformity of approach".<sup>31</sup>

The accolades that greeted the performance of corps members in the 2011 general elections became even louder after the 2015 and 2019 general elections and the gubernatorial elections in Edo and Ondo states of September and October, 2020 respectively. At the point of the 2015 election, the recruitment of corps members as ad hoc staff had become a *fait accompli*. The introduction and use of digital permanent voters' cards by INEC chairman, Attahiru Jega, made the engagement of corps members more relevant, given their backgrounds as graduates of tertiary institutions. 186,000 corps members applied, while 134,000 were selected and trained to work in the March 28<sup>th</sup> and

<sup>27</sup> "134,000 corps members to be used for general elections", *The New Times*. See also, National Election, International Republican Institute, Washington, DC, U. S. A. Report on 2011 Election in Nigeria,  
[https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/flip\\_docs/Nigeria%202011%20EO%20-%20Final/files/assets/basic-html/page40.html](https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/flip_docs/Nigeria%202011%20EO%20-%20Final/files/assets/basic-html/page40.html)

<sup>28</sup> Nigerian National Election, International Republican Institute, Washington, DC, U. S. A., Report, on 2011 Election in Nigeria.

<sup>29</sup> Nigerian National Election, International Republican Institute.

<sup>30</sup> Nigerian National Election, International Republican Institute.

<sup>31</sup> Ben Simon Okolo and R Okey Onunkwo, "The 2011 Nigerian Elections: An Empirical Review", *Journal of African Elections*, Vol 10, No. 2, Pdf.

April 11<sup>th</sup> 2015 general elections, and they were to become the fulcrum of the ad hoc staff considered competent to handle card readers and digital data processing, in addition to the conventional assignments of POs APOs, in the “more than 150,000 polling units and voting points across the country”.<sup>32</sup> A web site was created to ease the process of application, although physical selection was entertained in some local government areas to address the short-fall in the number of online applicants. The dedication of the NYSC members during the election, according to a report from the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and International Republican Institute (IRI), was remarkable as they were not deterred by the “loss of life suffered by the NYSC during the post-election violence in 2011”.<sup>33</sup> Impressed by their performance, the INEC Chairman, Mahmood Yakubu, opined that “there can't be elections in Nigeria without the NYSC, it is simply impossible. The corps members are the most dedicated, educated, patriotic, willing, committed, election duty staff in Nigeria”.<sup>34</sup> Beyond the 2015 election, their utilization had become a routine practice. During the 2019 general elections, over 290,000 corps members were engaged as ad hoc staff.<sup>35</sup> In Ogun State alone, for instance, 17,000 corps members were mobilized just as approximately 20,000 were engaged in Lagos State alone.<sup>36</sup> Youth corps members also made invaluable contribution to Edo State gubernatorial election of 19<sup>th</sup> September 2020, which has been described, on account of its relatively free and fair character, as the “dawn of a new era, where votes actually determine the outcome of elections”.<sup>37</sup> In the Edo election, a team of 20,000 ad

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<sup>32</sup> Sam Itodo, “Elections and Youths: The Case of Nigeria”.

<sup>33</sup> Nigerian National Election, Report by National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute, Washington, DC, U. S. A. Report, 2015 Election in Nigeria, p. 12

<sup>34</sup> “Reward for Dedicated Corps Members”, *Thisday, Newspaper*, June 20 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Wale Odunsi, NYSC: INEC Announces Automatic Employment for Corps Members, *Dailypost*, June 17, 2019. See [dailypost.ng](http://dailypost.ng)

<sup>36</sup> “Reward for Dedicated Corps Members”, *Thisday, Newspaper*, June 20 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Chuks Okocha, “INEC Engages 20,000 Ad hoc Staff for Edo Gov Election”, *Thisday, Newspaper*, August 14, 2020.

hoc staff was deployed, of which corps members constituted a majority in line with the declaration of Professor Bolade Eyinla, Technical Adviser to INEC Chairman that “the youth corps members will constitute the larger percentage because they will be deployed mostly as Presiding Officers”. The use of an online registration platform, earlier introduced, was sustained in the recruitment of ad hoc staff for the Edo state election. Nevertheless, information obtained from some youth corps members indicate that a sizable number, having not met the deadline for online registration, presented themselves physically for selection in training venues. A similar approach was adopted in the Ondo state gubernatorial election of October 10, 2020. An online portal, which closed on August 21, was opened for registration as ad hoc staff. Out of necessity, and in acknowledgement of the value of corps members as polling officers, the deadline was extended through a special link to the registration portal to enable INEC fill-up the 15,000 ad hoc positions reserved for them out of a total of 17,000.<sup>38</sup> Recruitment was usually followed by training which equipped the corps members with the knowledge and ethics associated with polling processes.

### **Training of Corps Members for Ad Hoc Electoral Assignments**

Training of is a statutory requirement for preparing corps members to serve effectively as ad hoc INEC staff. Thus, the MoU made it mandatory for INEC, in collaboration of NYSC authorities, to provide the requisite training in the designated assignments. Such training has heralded the engagement of corps members as ad hoc staff since the 2007 general elections. The training programme often began with sensitization-tours by designated INEC officials and campaigns through the mass media. By such means, the qualification for participation as ad hoc staff was spelt out. This facilitated a filtration process whereby pregnant women, nursing mothers, and those with

<sup>38</sup> Dayo Johnson Akure, Ondo 2020, INEC Engage 15,000 Corpers as Polling Officer, *Vanguard Newspaper*, September 9, 2020.

health challenges where discouraged from applying. A manual “for the sensitization of corps members” was produced to strengthen the sensitization process in 2015.<sup>39</sup> It highlighted the expected role and code of conduct of the corps members during elections. Sensitization also took the form of aggressive campaign such as that which heralded the call for application for ad hoc staff in Ogun State by the NYSC State Coordinator, Josephine Bakare, before the recruitment of 17,000 corps members to serve in the 2019 election.<sup>40</sup> She accomplished this task through an enlightenment tour on the four zonal NYSC offices, in Ijebu Ode, Abeokuta, Ota and Shagamu. A formal training followed from January 29 to 31. Such training and sensitization were augmented by conferences and seminars, to which prospective ad hoc staff, including corps members were invited. In an NYSC management conference held in Benin City, preparatory to the March 28 and April 14, 2015, general elections, the authorities admonished corps members to show integrity and resist “desperate politicians who do not want the votes to count”. They were also counseled to eschew “any form of misconduct or bias... during the polls”.<sup>41</sup>

Sensitization was followed by formal training on the electoral process. The mode of training varied depending on the type of election and the approach approved by INEC and NYSC authorities. Yet, there were certain basic characteristics. The training ground, over the years, was restricted to four arenas, namely, the NYSC orientation camp, INEC secretariat, local government secretariat and school premises. A typical training session lasted for a few hours and had some basic components, including lessons on good conducts, electoral statistics, computation process, identification and use of various forms

<sup>39</sup> *Manual for Sensitization Corps Members on Election Duties*, National Youth Service Corps Directorate, Abuja, 2015.

<sup>40</sup> *NYSC Draft 17,000 Corps Members in Ogun*”, January 24, 2019,

<https://www.sunnewsonline.com/nysc-drafts-17000-corps-members-for-elections-in-ogun/>

<sup>41</sup> Nelson Usofia, “134,000 Corps Members to be Used for general Election”, *The New Times*, March 12, 2015, <https://thenewtimespress.com/archives/1393>

and fundamental electoral laws. Prior to the 2007 elections, there was little emphasis on risk management and personal safety. But the by-elections that followed the 2007 elections witnessed a new emphasis on lessons regarding safety and security because of incidents of politically motivated violence that affected some corps members. As we shall see, incidents of violence were even more rampant during and after the 2011 general election, necessitating a greater emphasis on security tips in the training programmes that proceeded 2015, 2019, and 2020 elections.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, corps members were warned against confronting armed thugs in the bid to protect election materials. They were taught to leave such matters to the security agencies and to utilize designated incidence forms to make their report. By 2015, the authorities stretched the scope of training to include digital data capturing and the use of card readers, as these were introduced as new elements in the electoral process. However, some individuals have criticized the nascent digital content in the training process, averring that there were not enough digital data capturing machines released for training.<sup>43</sup> They also reported that the machines used for training were sometimes different from those deployed during elections.<sup>44</sup> The training of corps members has also been criticized on the ground that training sessions were often crowded. Figures as high as 400 persons per session, for instance, were recorded in Kastina in 2015. A similar situation played out in Benue and Adamawa States where as many as 300 participants were accommodated in some of their training sessions. There are indications that this was a general problem across the country.<sup>45</sup> Another drawback of the training programme was that lessons were not given

<sup>42</sup> Nigerian National Election, International Republican Institute, Washington, DC, U. S. A., Report, on 2011 Election in Nigeria.

<sup>43</sup> Nigerian National Election, International Republican Institute, Washington, DC, U. S. A., Report, on 2011 Election in Nigeria.

<sup>44</sup> Nigerian National Election, International Republican Institute, Washington, DC, U. S. A., Report, on 2011 Election in Nigeria.

<sup>45</sup> Nigerian National Election, International Republican Institute, Washington, DC, U. S. A., Report, on 2011 Election in Nigeria.

about INEC operational words in local languages to enhance the capacity of the corps members to relate with the locales during elections.<sup>46</sup> Itodo has also argued that:

the failure of the electoral commission to commence early training of election officials, especially the youth corps members, compromises their ability to effectively manage Election Day operations. The number of days apportioned for training of ad hoc officials is grossly inadequate to sufficiently equip the corps members with capacity to fulfil their duties.<sup>47</sup>

Although the NYSC manual for the sensitization of corps members was helpful, it was not well circulated, its availability online notwithstanding. Most corps members were either unable or unwilling to bear the cost of downloading it.

Also, individuals like Bamgbose blamed shoddy training for the ease with which some corps members resorted to demonstrations and suspension of service while in the electoral field, as witnessed in Mushin in 2015.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Abasi Aniedi Ikoiwak, the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC), in Delta state, explained corps members' agitation over what they perceived as wanton delay in the payment of their allowance in Delta state in 2015, in terms of their ignorance about the payment process. He had to address this gap in knowledge, and the tension it orchestrated, through the print media, declaring that INEC "is not directly responsible for the payment of NYSC corps members who participate...[in elections] as ad hoc staff."<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, he stated that INEC "pays their stipends or allowances directly to the coffers of the Directorate of NYSC who

<sup>46</sup> Interview (Benin City, October 4, 2020) with Jerry Bight Azebokhe, Youth Corper, 2018-2019, Anambra State.

<sup>47</sup> Sam Itodo, "*Elections and Youths: The Case of Nigeria*".

<sup>48</sup> "NYSC Draft 17,000 Corps Members in Ogun", January 24, 2019,  
<https://www.sunnewsonline.com/nysc-drafts-17000-corps-members-for-elections-in-ogun/>

<sup>49</sup> Lucky Oyibo, INEC Not Responsible for Payment of NYSC Members, *The pointer*, October 18, 2020, <http://thepointernewsonline.com/?p=37643>

in turn pays the corps members directly”<sup>50</sup>

Beyond the issues pertaining to competence, training, recruitment and deployment of corps members as ad hoc staff, welfare and security concerns have also emerged as problematic elements in the NYSC-INEC cooperation. Both have constituted formidable challenges, which at some point, have threatened to rock the boat.

## Remuneration

Ad hoc electoral assignments did not fit squarely into the mode of primary assignment and community service envisaged in the NYSC statute for which corps members received fixed allowances. Although corps members are barred from taking up additional paid jobs, beyond their statutory primary assignments, ad hoc INEC electoral assignment could not be characterized along the same line (of barred additional jobs) because of its national outlook. However, NYSC authorities ensured that the NYSC-INEC partnership was embarked upon at no extra cost to the directorate.

The amount approved and paid out to corps members who serve as ad hoc staff during elections have varied over the years. They are not permitted to negotiate. The amount paid to them was calibrated along the line of job description and not qualification. Although the corps members had higher expectations, as graduate of tertiary institutions, a flat rate was paid to them as ad hoc POs, and APOs. Up to the 2015 general election, corps members received 16,000 per election, including, presidential, gubernatorial, re-run and by-elections.<sup>51</sup> However, there were concerns for a review of this amount as many corps members considered it grossly inadequate, in the face of the challenges they faced, especially in difficult terrains. Such complaints were fueled by the accommodation and

<sup>50</sup> Lucky Oyibo, INEC Not Responsible for Payment of NYSC Members, *The pointer*, October 18, 2020, <http://thepointernewsonline.com/?p=37643>

<sup>51</sup> Interview (October 2, 2020) with Abdulahib Mukhta, Youth Corper and Ad hoc INEC staff in Lagos, 2009 and Interview (October 2, 2020) with Aminu Omale Audu,, Youth Corper and Ad hoc INEC staff in Kogi, 2009.

transportation challenges they faced. They sometimes pay out of their pockets to attend to such needs while in the electoral field. A review of their stipend resulted in an increment to 17,500 Naira per day or 35,000 Naira for any electoral assignment that spans two days. Thus, 35,000 Naira was the amount paid in during the 2019 election, less bank charges, to cover the presidential and gubernatorial elections. At the same rate, corps members who served during the Edo and Ondo states gubernatorial elections of September and October 2020 received 17,500 Naira.

### **Accommodation and Logistics**

Apart from allowances, accommodation during elections has been major source of stress and tension for corps members. Given the character of the NYSC scheme, corps members are deployed as INEC staff outside their home communities. The MoU between INEC and NYSC entrusts to INEC the responsibility of providing decent and safe accommodation for the corps members so employed. Over the years, INEC has handled this responsibility with levity, as the media are awashed with complaints and pictures of the poor response of INEC to this critical need. Also, most of the corps members interviewed, who had to stay overnight in the course of elections, stated that they either slept over in the open field in Registration Area Centres (RACs), where election materials are distributed, or other public places like INEC and local government secretariat. Some slept in buses and classrooms in schools, where they even shared mattresses. This was done with little regard to sanitation, safety and security of the corps members. Also, the corps members, largely, transport themselves and election materials to polling stations at their own expense, whereas INEC ought to bear the cost, in consonance with the MoU. Despite these challenges, corps members have been amenable to control and directives from their NYSC supervisor and INEC authorities and have shown appreciable respect for the rules of the game. They explore the channel of

communication open to them, although poor communication and information-sharing sometimes constitute problems as opined by Itodo:

The centralization of information poses a challenge to corps members seeking real time information whilst on election duty. Corps members have had to navigate the bureaucracies and inconsistencies associated with information-sharing.<sup>52</sup>

Shehu Bello Harris has also identified lack of synergy between INEC and NYSC as a logistic challenge. He argued that during the 2015 elections, some of the staff of both organizations “worked at cross-purposes against the spirit of the MOU”,<sup>53</sup> pointing to the lack of synergy between the NYSC State Coordinators and members of the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCESS), as some Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) “blatantly refused to allow them function in that capacity until after the intervention of INEC Headquarters”.<sup>54</sup> NYSC was not going to brook exclusion from the management of the security challenges that corps members face during elections. It ensured that its marginalization in ICCESS in previous years was corrected in the 2019 and 2020 elections.<sup>55</sup>

## Security and Safety Issues

The safety of corps members has also been a critical challenge in the discharge of their allotted assignments. They have suffered violence during and after elections, with at least twelve deaths recorded. These killings were carried out by politically

<sup>52</sup> Sam Itodo, “Elections and Youths: The Case of Nigeria”,

<sup>53</sup> Shehu Bello Harris, “Assessing the participation of Youth Corps Members in the 2015 Electoral Process in Nigeria”, p

<sup>54</sup> Shehu Bello Harris, “Assessing the participation of Youth Corps Members in the 2015 Electoral Process in Nigeria”, pp. 21-22

<sup>55</sup> Shehu Bello Harris, “Assessing the participation of Youth Corps Members in the 2015 Electoral Process in Nigeria”, pp. 12

motivated thugs and rioters whose grudges against the corps members are believed to be their uncompromising stance against electoral fraud, and resistance to financial inducement to rig elections and falsify results. As far back as 2008, two corps members were killed in Jos in the course of local government elections.<sup>56</sup> Also, in the wave of violence that followed the 2011 general elections, eleven of them were killed in Glada, Ita/Gadau, Katagum and Alkaleri local government areas of Bauchi State.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, a corps member, Samuel Okota, was killed in the Rivers State re-run election in Ahoada West Local Government Area.<sup>58</sup> There was also a case of an accident, which resulted in the death of Okanlewon Olaleka Ibrahim, in the course of his electoral assignment in the March 9, 2019 election.<sup>59</sup> Concerns about the safety of corps members have been particularly strong in the constituencies of Northeastern Nigeria because of the spate of violence and insecurity associated with Boko Haram extremists. The situation in this geo-political zone was so critical that NYSC asked for bullet-proof vests as a condition for deploying corps members to Adamawa state during the gubernatorial elections of 2015.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, violence against corps members has elicited some responses regarding measures to be taken to guarantee their safety during electoral assignments. As stated earlier, critics like Ajulo, proposed that the practice of employing corps members

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<sup>56</sup> "Post-Election Violence and Youth Corpers", *The Nigerian Voice*,  
<https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/51574/post-election-violence-and-youth-corpers.html>,

<sup>57</sup> "Post-Election Violence and Youth Corpers", *The Nigerian Voice*,  
<https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/51574/post-election-violence-and-youth-corpers.html>

<sup>58</sup> "Rivers Re-run: NYSC confirms killing of corps member", *Vanguard Newspaper*, March 21, 2016.  
<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/03/rivers-re-run-nysc-confirms-killing-corps-member>.

<sup>59</sup> "RIP Ibrahim... NYSC, Nigerians mourn corps member who died while on election duty", International Centre for Investigating Reporting, <https://www.icirnigeria.org>

<sup>60</sup> Staff Writer, "Adamawa Elections: NYSC Wants INEC To Provide Bullet-Proof Vests and Armed Escorts For Corps Members", *NewsWire Nigeria*, September 16, 2014,  
<https://newswirengr.com/2014/09/10/adamawa-elections-nysc-wants-inec-to-provide-bullet-proof-vests-and-armed-escorts-for-corp-members/>

as ad hoc INEC staff should be outlawed and jettisoned altogether, arguing that the acts of violence are likely to persist because they are perceived by their host communities as unwanted hands in elections that they regard as community affairs.<sup>61</sup> However, the idea of excluding corps members from electoral assignment has remained unpopular. The authorities are more inclined towards alternative safety measures. Although not persuaded by the argument that corps members should be excluded from ad hoc electoral assignments, Attahiru Jega, expressed some concerns about security challenges faced by them during general elections, stating that they will only be invited to serve “on the guarantee that they are secured,”<sup>62</sup> stating further that “there is no responsible organization that will deliver innocent people to the lion's den”.<sup>63</sup>

### **Impact of the Involvement of Corp Members in Ad hoc Electoral Assignments and the Electoral Process**

Despite the challenges that have attended the process, the engagement of corps members as polling staff definitely represents a landmark in the evolution of electoral process in Nigeria. The dominant perception of their impact could be gleaned from the views expressed by participating corps members, international and local observers as well as INEC and NYSC officials. A corps member of the 2009 service year, Omale Aminu Audu, opined that INEC ad hoc assignments give corps members a sense of belonging as citizens and an opportunity to cultivate the spirit of patriotism and fairness.<sup>64</sup> This implies that they gain first-hand experience about some of the fault lines in the electoral process in Nigeria and the opportunity to be a

<sup>61</sup> “Lawyer Threatens to Sue INEC for Using CORPERS as ad hoc Election Workers”, *Punch*, March 1, 2019.

<sup>62</sup> Adamawa 2014: NYSC Gives INEC Conditions on Corps Members Participation, *Vanguard*, September 10, 2014. See [allafrica.com/stories201409100270.html](http://allafrica.com/stories201409100270.html)

<sup>63</sup> Okey Ndribe and Caleb Ayansina, Adamawa 2014: NYSC Gives INEC Conditions on Corps Members Participation, *Vanguard*, September 10, 2014. See [allafrica.com/stories201409100270.html](http://allafrica.com/stories201409100270.html)

<sup>64</sup> Interview (October 2, 2020) with Aminu Omale Audu, “Youth Corper and Ad hoc INEC staff in Kogi, 2009.”

part of the solution. Similarly, Abdulahi Mukhta averred that most corps members perceived INEC job as a sensitive national assignment, which come to them as a privilege; a training ground of some sort for learning how to reconcile privileges with obligation as a citizen. According to him, it exposes corps members to the challenges that beset the electoral process, and that the participants go home better informed about the anomalies in Nigerian political development and, thus, become better equipped to partake in voters' education in their communities.<sup>65</sup> Speaking along the same line, Jerry Bright Azebekhe stated that as a result of his experience as ad hoc staff, he gained a better understanding of Nigeria's political actors, arguing that vote buying could be contained easily if security agents are truly disposed to doing so. He advocated enhanced allowances for corps members who serve as POs and APOs during elections and suggested that they should be trained as covert agents to detect vote buying and report same to the security officers. However, he pointed out that some POs are implicated in the discrepancies (over voting) that sometimes occur between accredited and actual number of voters. According to him, such POs deliberately and carefully tore and handed out two ballot papers to one accredited voter to shore up the votes of his favourite candidate.<sup>66</sup> This implies that some NYSC members are susceptible to manipulation by politicians and party candidates during elections.

Itodo reechoed these accolades when he declared that "the professional conduct and patriotism exhibited by corps members in the management of elections at polling units has improved the integrity of elections in Nigeria".<sup>67</sup> He underscored this assertion by drawing attention to the decline in election litigation between 2007 and 2015. In the 2007 election

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<sup>65</sup> Interview (October 2) with Abdulahi Mukhta, Youth Corper and Ad hoc INEC staff in Lagos, 2009 and

<sup>66</sup> Interview (October 4) with Jerry Bright azebeke, Youth Corper and Ad hoc INEC staff in Amambra, 2018-2019.

<sup>67</sup> Sam Itodo, "Elections and Youths: The Case of Nigeria".

there were 1,290 petitions, 732 in 2011, and 611 in 2015.<sup>68</sup> It has also been argued that the INEC-NYSC partnership “promotes youth participation, restores confidence in Nigerian youths, instils the value of volunteerism, patriotism and citizenship, reduces the rigging of elections as well as builds a culture of leadership among participating corps members.”<sup>69</sup> In a similar tone, NDI reported that “NYSC members increased public confidence through their roles as poll workers and voter's registration officials as they were seen as more neutral than past officials”.<sup>70</sup> Also, the European Union (EU) International observers' reports and gestures, have lent credence to the engagement of corps members in Nigerian elections. Beyond words, they demonstrated their support for the development in practical terms. After the 2019 general elections, they rewarded 75 youth corps members, for the due diligence they displayed during elections with the equipment – laptops and mobile phones – which they used during the election. During the presentation ceremony, which was attended by the Director General of NYSC, Brigadier General Shuaibu Ibrahim and the head of EU delegation to Nigeria, Ambassador Ketil Karlsen, the chairman of INEC, Mamood Yakubu, extolled the immense contribution of corps members to the conduct of elections in Nigeria, despite the risk of working in difficult terrains and riverine areas like Oporoma in South Ijaw and Ilaje in Ondo State.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, expressing his delight in their conduct, he complemented the EU gesture with a promise that outstanding performance by corps members in the electoral field will, henceforth, (after the 2009 election) be rewarded with full-time employment as INEC staff.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Sam Itodo, “Elections and Youths: The Case of Nigeria”.

<sup>69</sup> Sam Itodo, “Elections and Youths: The Case of Nigeria”.

<sup>70</sup> Nigerian National Election, International Republican Institute, Washington, DC, U.S.A. and the National Democratic Institute Report on 2011 Election in Nigeria.

<sup>71</sup> “Reward for Dedicated Corps Members”, Thisday, Newspaper, June 20 2019.

<sup>72</sup> “Reward for Dedicated Corps Members”, Thisday, Newspaper, June 20 2019.

## CONCLUSION

The deployment of NYSC members as ad hoc electoral staff opened a new chapter in the electoral process in Nigeria. It has helped INEC to address a major manpower problem that beset its endeavours as electoral umpire. NYSC feeds INEC with quality hands – graduates of tertiary institutions, who are not more than 30 years of age. Since 2007, corps members have constituted the hub of ad hoc staff. The relevance of the NYSC-INEC partnership has become even more glaring as INEC now requires over a million ad hoc staff to conduct elections. Against a few voices of dissent, stakeholders in Nigerian politics and international observers have showered encomiums and even gifts on corps members for the improvement they have engendered in the conduct of elections in the country. They have displayed a superior level of neutrality and probity in comparison to the older regime of ad hoc staff. Statements and projections from both INEC and NYSC authorities indicate that the partnership will endure for a long time to come.

## Chapter Seventeen

# NYSC AND MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA, 1973-2019

*Olisa Muojama*

*Department of History*

*University of Ibadan*

*Ibadan, Nigeria.*

### Introduction

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was established in 1973 as a post-civil war strategy in Nigeria, aimed at the development of common ties among the youth of Nigeria and for the promotion of national unity.<sup>1</sup> The programme was also meant to provide the Nigerian youth with appropriate training in various skills in a real working condition, an organisation to inculcate in the Nigerian youth a healthy attitude towards manual labour.<sup>2</sup> Apart from addressing some of the fundamental issues of the civil war by actively promoting the ethos of unity and cultural integration, the NYSC also contributes to national development through skill and 'manpower development' of the Nigerian youth.

As far back as 1971, even before the establishment of the NYSC, government had recognised the importance of training by promulgating the Industrial Training Fund Decree. This was an attempt by the Federal government to ensure adequate provision of trained manpower to run the affairs of the various commercial and industrial establishments. Under this, a huge

<sup>1</sup> Dereck Osadere Arubayi. "Youth Development: Understanding the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to Nigeria's National Development." A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester on Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Development Policy and Management in the Faculty of Humanities, 2015

<sup>2</sup> Azalahu Francis Akwara. "The Role of the National Youth Service Corps in National Development in Nigeria: A Case Study of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States of Nigeria." MSC degree project submitted to the Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1991, p.1

amount was provided by the government from time to time, and other employers of labour were expected to contribute to this fund training programmes.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the 1988 Civil Service reforms emphasised the need for training and development of workers as it has become imperative that workers have day to day information on the job they are doing.<sup>4</sup>

This paper examines the role of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in the manpower development in Nigeria. The argument and observation that underpin the study is two-fold. First, earlier studies on the manpower development in Nigeria have omitted the contributions of the NYSC. Similarly, an avalanche of works has been done on various aspects of the NYSC.<sup>5</sup> However, these works have downplayed the role of the NYSC in manpower development. Second, the paper maintains that the NYSC has made tremendous contributions in the training and retraining of young Nigerians in various skills which have enabled them to scale the hurdle of unemployment.

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<sup>3</sup>C. S. Ologunowa, B. A. Akintuinde, and B. O. Adu. "Manpower Training and Development: Pathway to Efficient Organizational Performance." *American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* Vol.9, No.1, 2014, p.48

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.44

<sup>5</sup> Azalahu Francis Akwara. "The Role of the National Youth Service Corps in National Development in Nigeria: A Case Study of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States of Nigeria." MSC degree project submitted to the Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1991; Dereck Osadere Arubayi. "Youth Development: Understanding the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to Nigeria's National Development." A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester on Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Development Policy and Management in the Faculty of Humanities, 2015; Bika and Ehiorobo. "Assessing the Impact of National Youth Service Corps Scheme on Socio- Economic Development in Nigeria."; G. Eneagwea and G. Umoden. *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service*. Lagos: Gabumo Press, 1993; Ebenezer Obadare. "Statism, Youth and the Civic Imagination: A Critical Study of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Programme in Nigeria." *Centre for Social Development Report* 05-18, 2005; Chukwuemeka Okafor and Johnmary Ani. "The National Youth Service Corps Programme and Growing Security Threat in Nigeria." *Africa's Public Service Delivery Performance Review*; T. A. Amao. "National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Contribution to Development in Nigeria." *Commonwealth Youth and Development*. Vol. 10, No.2, 2012, 90-97; L. Raimi and O. Alao. "Evaluation of the Economics (Cost and Benefits) of National Youth Service Corps for Sustainable Development in Nigeria." *Humanomics* Vol. 27, No.4, 2011, 270-281; Anthony Onyeishi and Christian Ezeibe. "National Youth Service Corps Scheme and National Development in Nigeria." *Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities* Vol. 4, No 4, 2014, 455-465

The study relied on both primary and secondary sources for its analysis. Primary sources included interviews of purposively selected stakeholders such as the former corps members who have benefitted from manpower development programme under the auspices of the NYSC. The study is important because it will not only fill a gap in the body of knowledge in the area of manpower development in Nigeria, but will put the activities and contributions of the NYSC in proper perspective.

The subsequent narrative is divided into five sections. The first section deals with the conceptual overview of manpower development. The Second section deals with the contribution of NYSC to manpower development. This section is subdivided into two, namely the 20th and 21th centuries. The third section deals with the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Programme of the NYSC, while the fourth section deals with the challenges of manpower development as it relates to the NYSC. This is followed by a conclusion.

## **Manpower Development in Nigeria: A Thematic Overview**

This section deals with the thematic overview of the nuances of manpower development. The themes include conceptualisation and nature of manpower development, theories of human capital and human capacity, relevance and importance of manpower development, effects of manpower development and institutional contributions to manpower development in Nigeria.

### ***Conceptualisation and Nature of Manpower Development***

Manpower is the critical element in the development of any nation. It refers to human power supplied by physical and/or mental work of people rather than machines. It also refers to power in terms of number of people needed or available in a particular country for social and economic development.<sup>6</sup> It connotes the total supply of humans (personnel—men and

<sup>6</sup>Moshood Ayinde Hassan. "Manpower Development for Workers in Tertiary Institutions: Distance Learning Approach." *International Education Studies* Vol.4 No.2, 2011, p.89

women) available or engaged for a specific job or task. The available personnel may be skilled or unskilled. They may not be fully developed as workers and, therefore, over the course of time, there is need for an organisation to train or retrain them to perform specific tasks. This training required of the personnel can be referred to as manpower development or staff renewal.<sup>7</sup>

Manpower development is now commonly referred to as human resource or human capital development. It seeks to optimise an organisation's usage of its human resources. It requires an incorporate approach and addresses multidimensional aspect of employees, ranging from enhancing technical and interpersonal skills to creative thinking and leadership.<sup>8</sup>

Manpower development has to do with training and retraining of workers. Training, as used in this context, refers to acquisition of skills and information directly required for the performance of specific role. It includes on-the-job training, workshops, seminars and conference.<sup>9</sup> Manpower training is one of the most significant investments in manpower development.<sup>10</sup>

Manpower development is synonymous with capacity building. Capacity building entails investment in human capital, institutions and practices necessary to enhance human skills, overhaul institutions and improve procedure and systems.<sup>11</sup> Sanusi further sees capacity building as the internationalisation of the knowledge, skills and processes that enable the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of set goals in an efficient manner.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Victor F. Peretomode and Peter Ikoya. "Mentorship: A Strategic Technique for Achieving Excellence, Manpower Development and Nation Building." *Mediterranean Journal of Social Science* Vol. 10, No. 2, 2019, p.21

<sup>8</sup> Ugochukwu Chinonso Okolie and Charles Ogbakirigwe. "Entrepreneurship Development through Vocational Education and Manpower Development in a Developing Economy." *Journal of Education Policy and Entrepreneurial Research* Vol. 1, No.2, 2014, p.152

<sup>9</sup> Okereke and Igboke. "Training Manpower Development", p.399

<sup>10</sup> Obi-Anike, Ofobrku and Okafor. "Manpower Development and Employees' Performance", p.3

<sup>11</sup> Malaolu, and Ogbuabor. "Training and Manpower Development", p. 163

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

Manpower development emphasises the issue of improvement in two key elements, namely, individual employees and business organisations.<sup>13</sup> Some methods of manpower development in organisations include the following: coaching, job rotation and job enlargement, in-house training, in-science training, workshop/ committee meetings, vestibule training, apprenticeship method.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Theories of Human Capital, Human Capacity and Manpower Development***

The theory of manpower development is rooted in the field of macroeconomic development. In the viewpoints of conventional economic theory, organisational manpower is considered as commodities that can be merchandised in terms of buying and selling.<sup>15</sup> Human behavior is not as predictable as matter in the physical sciences. In effect, theoretical postulations about the capacity of training and manpower development to increase efficiency in employees' performance cannot always be guaranteed.<sup>16</sup>

Human capacity theory provides evidence which indicates that training and education raise the productivity of workers by imparting useful knowledge and skills, hence raising workers' future income by increasing their lifetime earnings and also providing an exploration that links investment in training with workers' wages. In particular, the theory draws a crucial distinction between general education and firm-specific training, and recognises training and human development as a basic skill provided for higher productivity of a worker. Training has the distinct role in the achievement of an organisational goal by incorporating the interest of the

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<sup>13</sup>Obi-Anike, Ofobruku and Okafor. "Manpower Development and Employees' Performance", p.3

<sup>14</sup>Peretomode and Ikoya. "Mentorship", p.21

<sup>15</sup>Obi-Anike, Ofobruku and Okafor. "Manpower Development and Employees' Performance", p.3

<sup>16</sup>Chukwunenyi Iheanacho Okereke and Beatrice Nnenna Igboke. 'Training Manpower Development and Job Performance: Perception and Relevance among civil Servants in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.' *Journal of Economics and International Finance* Vol. 3, No. 6, 2011, p.399

organisation and the workforce.<sup>17</sup>

The notion of human capital (HC) as one of the dominant factors of production was advanced to address the complications of economic growth studies in the 1960s. The theoretical foundation of HC in conventional development economics seeks to elucidate the basis of unequal growth paths between nations. Human capital theory is founded on Adam Smith's proposition, *Wealth of the Nations*, in which he remarked that the substantial investment in human capital development is a prerequisite to a nation's development. Accordingly, investment in human capital development in both formal and informal education and training programmes enhances economic productivity and the prospects of successful innovation and competitiveness.<sup>18</sup> The underlying argument is that the returns on education and life-long learning will enhance overall production of nation state, and improve individual earnings and social status. OECD contends that human capital describes the combined skills, knowledge, competences, aptitudes, and other attributes embodied in individuals that are relevant to economic development.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Relevance and Importance of Manpower Development***

Several scholars have accepted the perception that manpower development remains a good mechanism for the enhancement of organisational productivity. According to such scholars, manpower development is the process of teaching managers, professional and all employees the knowledge and skills needed for present and future task accomplishment.<sup>20</sup> Overtime, organisations have been embarking on training and capacity building for their employees so as to enhance productivity and overall performance of staff in such organisations. This is in

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<sup>17</sup> Malaolu, and Ogbuabor. "Training and Manpower Development", p.163

<sup>18</sup> Kareem Bika and Abraham Ehiorobo. "Assessing the Impact of National Youth Service Corps Scheme on Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria." *Ilorin Journal of Human Resource Management (IJHRM)* Vol. 3, No. 1, 2019, pp. 111

<sup>19</sup> Dareck Osadere Arubayi. 'Youth Development.' p.45

<sup>20</sup> Obi-Anike, Ofobrku and Okafor. "Manpower Development and Employees' Performance", p.1

recognition of the important role of training and manpower development on employees' productivity and organisational goals.<sup>21</sup> Employee training and manpower development is very vital to job productivity and an organisation's performance since the formal educational system does not adequately provide specific job skills for a position in some organisations. While few individuals may have the requisite skills, knowledge, abilities and competence needed to fit into a specific job function, some others may require necessary skills to be able to fit in a specific job function and also make significant contribution to the organisation's performance.<sup>22</sup>

Job performance is more than a narrow economic measure as it connotes how well a group performs its required tasks to satisfy its customers inside and outside the organisation, which suggests effectiveness and efficiency of the employees.<sup>23</sup> Robinson and Robbinson have argued that the most significant direct benefits of training and manpower development are clarity in job duties and responsibility as well as increase in employee's competence, among others.<sup>24</sup> Aina has argued that training enables an employee to produce efficiently, prepares him for higher position (advancement), enhances his self-respect and economic independence, among others.<sup>25</sup> Rose has noted that the individual employee gains from training and manpower development by being able to perform his task well and gain satisfaction for efficient work.<sup>26</sup>

Training and manpower development directly result in job satisfaction and increased performance. However, it has been noted that this mechanical assumption is misplaced, as it neglects the vital role played by 'motivation' as an intervening variable between the polemics of training and manpower

<sup>21</sup> Malaolu, and Ogbuabor. "Training and Manpower Development", p.163

<sup>22</sup> Malaolu, and Ogbuabor. "Training and Manpower Development", p.163

<sup>23</sup> Okereke and Igboke. "Training Manpower Development and Job Performance",

p.400

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

development and performance.<sup>27</sup> Training and manpower development build a team that is effective, efficient, and well-motivated, thereby enhancing the confidence and self-esteem of employees. The employees' knowledge and skills are thus developed to adapt to new technologies and other organisational changes. Training and manpower development also create chances for the promotion of employees to replace those who have left the organisation.<sup>28</sup> The importance of manpower development in national development has been extensively discussed in literature and a general conclusion has been reached by scholars all over the world. This informed the position that it is human resources, not capital, not income, nor material resources, that constitute the ultimate basis of the wealth of nation.<sup>29</sup>

### *Effects of Manpower Development*

Manpower development was perceived to influence job performance, but the influence of the type of training on job performance is inclusive.<sup>30</sup> The difference in organisational performance as well as differential in countries development can be situated within the context of the effect of manpower development. For instance, in trying to understand the differentials in the growth rates of GNP per capita during the postwar decades in the three regions of Asia (East, South-East, and South Asia), Harry Oshima singled out manpower development as one of the major forces responsible for the growth differentials.<sup>31</sup>

East Asian countries, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore grew at a rate of about 6% GNP per capita between 1950 and 1975, in contrast to South Asian countries which grew at a rate of only 1 to 2 % and South East Asia countries at a rate of 2 ½ to 3%. In this classification, Singapore is placed in East Asia, Burma with South Asia, and China,

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Malaolu, and Ogbuabor. "Training and Manpower Development", p.163

<sup>29</sup>Malaolu, and Ogbuabor. "Training and Manpower Development", p.166

<sup>30</sup>Okereke and Igboke. "Training Manpower Development and Job Performance", p.399

<sup>31</sup>Harry T. Oshima. *The Role of Manpower Development in Postwar Asian Differential Growth*. University of the Phillipines, School of Economics Discussion paper 7902 February 1979., p.2

Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos are excluded, since GNP statistics were not available shortly after the Second World War.<sup>32</sup>

In terms of national resources (including arable land) per capita, East Asia is the poorest of the three regions. Capital in the form of factories and machines was largely bombed out by the U. S. air force in most of Japan and Taiwan, and during the Korean War in the case of S. Korea., Thus, these countries had to build up their technology and much of capital anew by importations from abroad. And technological needs can be met by importing foreign technology.<sup>33</sup>

If we go further afield into the Middle East, we have the oil countries which, despite their richness, do not seem to be able to grow in a sustained fashion. The most recent example is Iran which, despite the vast importation of modern technology from abroad, is now in great disturbance with little prospects of resuming growth for years to come. There are several countries in Africa and Latin America where abundance of national resources and capital have not produced economic development in any sustained fashion.<sup>34</sup>

Raw materials can also be imported cheaply with the revolution in maritime transport, as the experience of East Asia demonstrates. We are thus left with manpower as the main factor in the growth of developing countries since the importation of large amounts of required manpower raises difficult problems as in the case of Iran and other Middle Eastern countries. It is, of course, not the quantitative aspects of manpower that is important, inasmuch as Southeast and South Asia are amply supplied with labour. Good manpower is of particular importance for Asia with its great population densities and scarce natural resources and wealth. Manpower must substitute for the scarce resources.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.2

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.2

<sup>34</sup> Harry T. Oshima. *The Role of Manpower Development in Postwar Asian Differential Growth*, p.2

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.3

## *Institutional Contributions to Manpower Development in Nigeria*

Emeka Christian Okafor has discussed the role of vocational education and technical education in manpower development and job creation in Nigeria, maintaining that technical education facilitates the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge.<sup>36</sup> He noted that technical education is a planned program of courses and learning experiences that begins with exploration of career options, supports basic academic and life skills, and enables achievement of high academic standards, leadership, preparation for industry-defined work, and advanced and continuing education.<sup>37</sup> He argues that presently, Nigeria is offering education in general subjects, but to achieve development, it must offer a variety of courses for disciplines such as technical, vocational, professional, agricultural, and so on, because the country needs a balanced distribution of manpower for all professions, so that the vast population of Nigeria can contribute to economic growth by participating in different professions.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, Musa Sheriff Urama and Okerieocha Ndidi have examined the role of technical and vocational education in providing the much-needed skilled manpower in various spheres of endeavour. According to them, the technical growth of any country should be structurally consistent with its manpower in the right number, the right quality, and at the right time. Skills could be acquired through training, formal and informal education (apprenticeship). Skills acquired through formal education can be obtained through technical education. Vocational technical education is indeed any form of education whose purpose is to prepare persons for employment in an occupation or a group of occupation. Vocational technical education is aimed at developing practical skills such as desirable work attitude and habits that make the recipient a very

<sup>36</sup> Emeka Christian Okafor. "The Role of Vocational and Technical Education in Manpower Development and Job Creation in Nigeria." *Journal of Research and Development* Vol. 2 No.1, 2011, p.152

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 155

creative and resourceful individual.<sup>39</sup> There has been a study on the relationship that exists between manpower development planning and ICT. The study critically examines the readiness of the polytechnic's students in harnessing the potential of internet and its overall impact on manpower development.<sup>40</sup> Its aim is to identify how the deployment of ICT affects manpower planning and development in Nigeria.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, Camilus Bassey Ben and Michael Ushie Ashang have also dealt with the role of ICT in skilled manpower development through vocational education among higher institutions, using Cross River State of Nigeria as a case. They note that manpower development is partly determined by the ability to establish a synergic interaction between technological innovation and human values. The rapid rate at which ICTs have evolved since the mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as the convergence and pervasiveness of ICTs give them a strong role in manpower development and globalisation.<sup>42</sup> In all these conversations on manpower development, the role of the NYSC has been a missing theme.

### **National Youth Service Corps and Manpower Development: Implications for Economic Development and Nation Building in Nigeria since 1973**

This section deals with the contributions of the NYSC scheme to manpower development as well as its implication for economic development and nation building in Nigeria since its inception in 1973. To achieve this purpose, the understanding of the

<sup>39</sup> Musa Sheriff Urama and Okorieocha Ndidi. "Manpower Development in Technical and Vocational Education (TVE): A Prerequisite for the Technical Development of Nigeria." *Knowledge Review* Vol. 26, No. 4, 2012, 130-131

<sup>40</sup> Dimitri J. Amassoma, Dauda O. Ayanda and Kamiludeen Tijani. "Internet Usage among Nigerian Polytechnic Students and its Impact on Manpower Development: A Case Study Approach." *Journal of Information Technology Impact* Vol. 10, No.3, 2010, p. 161

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p.165

<sup>42</sup> Camilus Bassey Ben and Michael Ushie Ashang. "The Role of ICT in Skilled Manpower Development through Vocational Technical Education among Higher Institutions in Cross River State, Nigeria. " *International Journal of Vocational and Technical Education* Vol.5 No.5, 2013, p.92

dynamics of the scheme is essential. This is because the scheme has not been static but dynamic in accordance with the changing pattern of the Nigerian socio-economic configuration. Put differently, the national socio-economic changes have affected the nature and trajectories of the NYSC's contributions to manpower development as well as its implication for economic development and nation building Nigeria.

Although from inception, part of the mandates of the NYSC was to allow Nigerian youths to acquire the spirit of independence by inspiring them to acquire skills for self-employment as well as contribute towards the growth and development of the country's economy<sup>43</sup>. In the early years of the NYSC (1970s) up to its first two decades (1990s), the scheme's focus and attention was more on national integration and nation-building. This was because of the effects of the civil war of 1967-70, which continued to linger decades after the incident. Thus, in order to foster the process of de-Biafranization and to reintegrate the secessionist region into the mainstream of the Nigerian society, there was the need to focus more attention on the youth in order to breed a new generation of detribalised Nigerians, which had to take between thirty and forty years. This accounted for major emphasis on nation building processes by the NYSC in the first twenty to thirty years of its establishment. As a result, manpower and economic development were tangential and secondary. This does not imply that manpower development did not occur. Its occurrence was implied, but not emphasised. The corps members, in their various places of primary assignment, learn some practical skills which help to develop their manpower. The argument, however, is that it was not a major emphasis of the Corps by that time. Part of the reasons for this secondary place of manpower development in the scheme of the NYSC in the early years of its

<sup>43</sup> MtormaBari Tambari Deebom and Ilomabo Taylor Daerego. 'The Influence of National Youth Service Corps Entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition Programmes on Youth Empowerment in River State.' *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, Vol. 7, Iss. 6 (June 2020) 147

establishment was that apart from the effect of the civil war and the desire to foster national integration, the education system in Nigeria was still very strong, comprehensive and viable three decades after Nigeria's independence in 1960. Consequently, manpower development was not an issue in the Nigerian political and economic spheres because virtually all the graduates of the Nigerian tertiary institutions by that time were properly trained in both theory and practice, coupled with the fact that there was scarcity of manpower in relation to the available employment opportunities in the country. It was such that even before graduation, companies and industries went to tertiary institutions in search of workers who would fill the teeming vacancies in their establishments. All these contributed to making manpower development a non-issue in the first two to three decades after the inception of the NYSC.

However, by the late 1900s and early 2000s, the socio-economic environment of Nigeria had changed. There were demographic changes such that the population of the country increased geometrically, coupled with the increase in the number of graduates as well as the concomitant shrinking in the economic opportunities due to the effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme of the mid-1980s and early 1990s. This situation was compounded by the ascendancy of the government as the major employer of labour in the country, as well as nepotism. Since certificate became a ticket for employment in the government sector, emphasis was more on paper qualification, rather than on knowledge acquisition. This gave rise to the emergence of graduates who could no longer function efficiently in the practical world, what has been described as 'unemployable graduates'. Thus, in order to remedy this deficiency, NYSC began to pay more attention to manpower development, a means to providing some practical skills to the corps members in order to make them functional in the labour market and to give them the opportunity to be self-reliant considering that opportunities for employment are constantly shrinking. This, as we shall see eventually resulted in the

introduction of Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Programme (SAED) in 2012.

The subsequent narratives are specific cases aimed at buttressing the foregoing propositions of the changing pattern of the emphasis of the NYSC from major preoccupation with national integration and nation-building to the accentuated attention to manpower development. In line with the foregoing historical model, the narrative has been divided into two sections, namely, 1973-2000, which represents the era of exclusive emphasis on national integration, and 2000-2020, representing the era of shifting emphasis on manpower development. The testimonies of corps members who served in various states at different time frame are explored to demonstrate these trends.

### *The First Three Decades of NYSC and Manpower Development in Nigeria, 1973-2000*

The NYSC operations are two-dimensional: (a) orientation, which takes place between two and three weeks and (b) primary assignment, which takes place outside the camp. Throughout its existence till date the drill activities, handled by the military, have featured prominently in the orientation camps. This gives the scheme its paramilitary characteristics and outlook. Besides, there are non-drill activities which are also undertaken in the camp such as cultural activities, sports, seminars and workshops, religious activities, economic activities, entertainment, among others. These non-drill activities have changed overtime due to the dynamics of the socio-economic development of Nigeria. Emphasis of this section will be more on the non-drill activities which are the vehicle of manpower development, considering that the corps members are not being prepared for military activities, but for being good and detribalised citizens of Nigeria wherever and in whatever trade they eventually find themselves after the scheme.

For instance, in the 1970s, the non-drill activities were initially provided by instructors from the military and

citizenship and leadership Training Centre. The orientation programme included a series of lectures on the history, politics and administration, economics and ideology of Nigeria. These lectures were to emphasise national unity and nation-building, common heritage, the emerging ideology of Nigeria, and the special position of Nigeria in the Black world.<sup>44</sup>

Chris Ikporukpo who was one of the pioneer corps members corroborated this evidence. He served between 1973 and 1974 in north-western state, which was one of the 12 states in Nigeria as at that time. The north-western state comprised the current Zamfara, Sokoto, Niger, and part of Kwara. The orientation camp was located in Sokoto, while he did his primary assignment in Shinkafi Government Secondary School located in Zamfara, where he taught Geography and Economics.<sup>45</sup> He noted that the military drills were then the major activity in the orientation camp. Part of the training included the art of solo survival, a situation in which the corps members were taught how to survive when left on their own in the forest or in unconventional situation. It also involved climbing of the Kotokoshi hill near Sokoto. He confirmed that there were also non-drill activities which were mainly lectures on military discipline, history and cultures of the Nigerian peoples.<sup>46</sup> There was no special attempt at providing new practical skills for them at the camp except what they learned at their place of primary assignment.

Two years after Ikporukpo completed his national service, Gabriel Ifo Atiri undertook his national youth service programme between 1976 and 1977, and also in Sokoto, in the then north-western state. He corroborated Ikporukpo's testimonies that the orientation camp was in Argungu in Sokoto and that there was no deliberate effort to provide them with other additional practical skills, apart from military drills, which was meant to make them nationalists. However, his primary assignment at the Ministry of Agriculture gave him an

<sup>44</sup> Obadare, "Statism", p.18

<sup>45</sup> Chris Ikporukpo. 70 years. Interview conducted on 26 September 2020

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

opportunity to learn many things which he did not acquire from the university. For instance, he read crop protection, but served in the Fishery Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, which made him to learn the fishery aspect of agriculture. This made him to become an all-round agricultural expert.<sup>47</sup> Abiodun Sanni who served in Kano between 1980 and 1981 had a similar experience. According to him, apart from drill activities, there were some non-drill activities which included talks and addresses by the NYSC officials. This involved language teaching, among others.<sup>48</sup> He also noted that there were sports activities for recreation and integration.

Similarly, Mojeed Kolawole Akinsola served between 1980 and 1981 in old Imo State, comprising the present Imo and Abia States. He did his primary assignment at the Girls' Secondary School, Okigwe, where he taught Physics. He confessed that he acquired new skills during the service year, noting that although he was a science student, his areas of specialty were Mathematics and Chemistry. However, his teaching of Physics at the Girls' Secondary School, Okigwe, during his service year made him to become an all-round science student, which gave him the opportunity to become a principal of a science school, much later after NYSC before he joined the University of Ibadan as a lecturer.<sup>49</sup>

As argued earlier, considering that the NYSC was mainly conceived and established for the purpose of national integration and unity, its emphasis and focus in its early years were primarily on producing patriotic and detribalised Nigerians. However, this does not imply that manpower development did not occur. The argument here is that by this time manpower development was not one of the primary foci of the Corps, but only resulted from the activities of the corps members in their places of primary assignment, as they happened to learn some practical skills and further developed

<sup>47</sup> Gabriel Ifo Atiri. 67 years. Interview conducted on 27 September 2020

<sup>48</sup> Abiodun Sanni. 65 years. Interview conducted on 25 September 2020

<sup>49</sup> Mojeed Kolawole Akinsola. 66 years. Interview conducted on 27 September 2020

their manpower, most especially in public service areas such as schools, local and state government secretariats, government agencies and parastatals, among others. This is due to the dominance of the government in the economy of the country in the post-civil war period. This explains the posting of Chris Ikporukpo to Shinkafi Government Secondary School in 1973/74; Gabriel Atiri to the Ministry of Agriculture in 1976; Abiodun Sanni to Bayero University Kano in 1980 and Mojeed Akinsola to Girls' Secondary School, Okigwe in 1980. According to Ikporukpo, he was one of the few graduates in the school in addition to the principal and two Indian couples. This shows that by this time, the corps members were in fact an important addition to the manpower of the Nigerian socio-economy. Abiodun Sanni's experience in 1980 was similar to that of Ikporukpo's in 1973. Sanni also did his primary assignment in a school, Bayero University Kano, where he became a Graduate Assistant in Micro Biology Department. Akinsola's experience was the same. Although he read Mathematics and Chemistry, he became the only Physics teacher in the Girls' Secondary School, Okigwe, in 1980/81, because the school had no Physics teacher.

The implication of this for manpower development was that the majority of the corps members who served in the first two decades of its establishment acquired practical skills in teaching, administrative jobs, public service, and the likes, not because of any special and conscious policy of the NYSC as was later the case in the 2000s, but unconsciously through their places of primary assignment. This enabled corps members to be employed in the sectors with public orientation. For, instance Chris Ikporukpo eventually ended up as a Professor of Geography at the University of Ibadan and metamorphosed into a Vice-Chancellor at the Niger Delta University. Like Ikporukpo, Abiodun Sanni also ended up as a lecturer at the University of Ibadan, where he climbed to the rank of Professor, while Gabriel Atiri became a Professor of Agriculture at the University of Ibadan.

However, in the 1990s into 2000s, the private sectors began to gain momentum. This included the rise of the banking and insurance sectors, among others. This also affected the NYSC scheme in that the human resources department of these sectors began to go to the NYSC orientation camps to give talks and sensitisation to the corps members, as well as invite them to their establishments for primary assignment, thus influencing them and impacting on their capacity. As a result, some of the corps members gained knowledge in areas different from their fields of academic qualification. Some of them, by so doing, gained practical experience and ended up working in those sectors. For instance, Sulaiman Kunle Teslim who served in Kwara in 1990 noted that banks, engineering firms and agricultural firms visited their orientation camp for talks and advertisement of their establishments.<sup>50</sup> As a result, he did his primary assignment at Colas Consultants, where he learned to practice design with computer as well as application of innovative lotus 1,2,3 different from practical calculation. He admitted that the practical skills he acquired from his place of primary assignment are useful in his current practice as a civil engineer.

However, this gradual shift in the non-drill activities in the orientation camps in the 1990s, characterised by the intervention of private sectors, was not the case in all states of the federation. For instance, Aina Olubukola Adeogun, who served in Banue and Kogi States in 1990 had a different experience. She noted that there were neither companies nor private establishments that visited their orientation camp for talks, and therefore, apart from the drills and the orientation by the NYSC officials, there was no new practical skills learnt at the orientation camp.<sup>51</sup> She was of the opinion that during their time, the graduates possessed sufficient manpower and that their education was robust enough to make a difference. She added that their expertise and manpower were exploited to bring about economic development of the country, coupled with the fact that they were

<sup>50</sup> Sulaiman Kunle Teslim. 55 years. Interview conducted on 24 September 2020

<sup>51</sup> Aina Olubukola Adeogun. 52 years. Interview conducted on 24 September 2020

used to inject fresh ideas into the educational system. According to her, 'It was like cheap labour to be able to train the educationally disadvantaged areas.'<sup>52</sup>

Bamidele Dahunsi's experience was similar and contemporaneous with Adeogun's. Dahunsi served in Plateau State in 1990. By that time, Plateau State included the present Nasarawa State. Thus, the orientation camp was in Akwanga which is in present Nasarawa State. He acknowledged that there were some corporate bodies who came to give talks at their camp and that those talks were aimed at providing field experience to corps members. His primary assignment was at workshop of the Nigeria Army Engineers, Jos, where he participated in vehicle repairs, including armoured personnel carriers. This, according to him, helped to improve the skills he already had as a student of Agricultural Engineering. It also enabled him to become professionally active today, although he is now a lecturer. He admitted that the skill of field involvement was mainly what he gained from NYSC, apart from which he would have been an armchair engineer.<sup>53</sup>

Similarly, Kehinde Olujimi Eyiomo did his NYSC programme in Taraba State between 1991 and 1992. He is a sports enthusiast and sportsman by profession. He noted that there were no non-drill activities which took place in their time. His primary assignment was at Taraba State Sports Council, where he coached and trained the athletes. He confessed that the skills which he acquired from his work schedule during his NYSC prepared him for the coaching profession which he is doing today. It was the experience he derived from the NYSC that enabled him to go to the National Institute for Sports (NIS) for his professional qualification, which enabled him to become a qualified and certified coach.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Bamidele Dahunsin. 53 years. Interview conducted on 27 September 2020

<sup>54</sup> Kehinde Olujimi Eyiomo. 64 years. Interview conducted on Monday 14 September 2020

Lanre Oladoyimbo served in Anambra State in 1996. He noted that apart from drill activities, there were non-drill activities that took place in the orientation camp. He recalled that the Society for Family Health paid them a visit and gave them talks on the activities of the Society, which became useful to those of them in the medical profession.<sup>55</sup> He did his primary assignment at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital where he became Head of Hospital Statistics. This accorded some him practical skills and experience such as the use of computer in data analysis.<sup>56</sup>

Chris Omoregie who served in Sokoto State between 1999 and 2000 confirmed that in their time, there were non-drill activities at the NYSC Orientation Camps. According to him, beyond the para-military drills and parades, there were seminars and skills acquisition programmes, anchored mostly by the agencies of the NYSC. Omoregie, who did his primary assignment in a secondary school, noted that as a graduate of education to whom teaching practice was one of the components of his teachers' training and preparation, there was nothing new to him about teaching in a secondary school in Sokoto during his service year. However, he acquired practical experience of teaching students outside his socio-cultural environment. In addition, the experience further prepared him for the teaching profession which he is currently undertaking at the University of Ibadan.<sup>57</sup>

Beyond manpower development, the NYSC programme fostered national integration and nation-building, to which the corps members whose experiences have been reviewed testified. These corps members were all united in the opinion that their views about the other sections of the country changed as a result of their participation in the NYSC programme, which enabled them to live among those people. They gave testimonies of love and affection which they enjoyed from the members of the community where they served.

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<sup>55</sup> Lanre Oladoyimbo. 52 years. Interview conducted on 24 September 2020

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Chris Omoregie. 53 years. Interviewed conducted on Wednesday, 16 September 2020

For instance, Ikporukpo talked about the cordial relationship that existed between the corps members and the host community where he and other corps members served. According to him, there was nothing to fear. They were free to move around at will. Everyone showed them love and affection. Some of the friends he made during his NYSC programme in 1973/74 are still his friends till date, most of them from the northern part of the country where he served. He cited example of Bafarawa who was his student at Shinkafi Government Secondary School and who later became the Executive Governor of Zamfara State, and with whom he has maintained contact up till date.<sup>58</sup>

Gabriel Atiri noted that it was during his service year that he went to Sokoto and the north in general for the first time in his life. He argued that his participation in the NYSC in Sokoto made him to change his views about the northern part of the country as he was able to have a firsthand knowledge of their culture and traditions.<sup>59</sup>

Abiodun Sanni who served in Kano in 1980/81 recounted how they usually visited Abubakar Rimi's house for feeding and other forms of hospitality whenever they wanted, maintaining that the corps members were treated with love and protection and were regarded as the children of the government, until the mid-1990s when things began to change due to the crisis that attended the annulment of the Presidential election of June 12, 1993.<sup>60</sup> Akinsola also revealed that he was still in contact with the traders whom he met in Imo State up till date.<sup>61</sup> Bamidele Dahunsi remarked that NYSC created the avenue for him to meet people from diverse backgrounds, some of whom he is still in contact with till date.<sup>62</sup>

According to Kehinde Eyiomo who served in Taraba State in 1991/92, he was able to have a change of perception about the

<sup>58</sup> Chris Ikporukpo. 70 years. Interview conducted on 26 September 2020

<sup>59</sup> Gabriel Ifo Atiri. 67 Years. Interview conducted on 27 September 2020

<sup>60</sup> Abiodun Sanni. 65 years. Interview conducted on 25 September 2020

<sup>61</sup> M. K. Akinsola. 66 Years. Interview conducted on 27 September 2020

<sup>62</sup> Bamidele Dahunsi. 53 years. Interview Conducted on 27 September 2020

northerners in Nigeria, and this enabled him to integrate properly into the environment. According to him, he did not entertain any form of discrimination and that the Taraba State Sports Council wanted to retain him after his NYSC programme, but he did not stay back because he proceeded to the National Institute for Sports for further training.<sup>63</sup>

From the foregoing discussions, it is clear that the NYSC delivered in its mandate to bring about national integration and nation-building from its inception in 1973 up till 2000. In addition, it also provided platforms for manpower development, even though it was not part of its original mandate.

### ***Youth Unemployment and NYSC's Attention to Manpower Development, 2000-2020***

As has been noted in the previous section, Nigerian graduates did not entertain the problem of unemployment in the first three or four decades after independence. Even before graduation, some business concerns went to universities to head-hunt potential graduates for employment. Part of the reasons for this is due to nature of education system as well as demographic factors in relation to the available opportunities for employment. By then, the quality of education was much stronger than what came afterwards, coupled with the fact that increased in population led to increase in educated population outnumbering the openings for employment.

However, from the late 1900s into the 2000s there occurred some changes both in the standard of education and in demography, in relation to openings for employment. This culminated in an era in which the NYSC began to show conscious interest in developing the manpower of the corps members so as to make them either competitively employable or self-reliant. By so doing, the NYSC tried to provide avenues for the acquisition of practical skills and experience by the corps members. This was against the backdrop of the fact that the

corps members of those years showed less evidence of practical experience unlike their predecessors, whose training were indeed comprehensive and rounded. In this way, the NYSC officials in different states collaborated with corporate bodies and various establishments in orienting the corps members while in the camp and in providing them with opportunities for primary assignment, which eventually culminated in the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Programme (SAED) in 2012.

For instance, Donatus Esimekhuia who served in Kano between 2002 and 2003 corroborated this evidence, noting that HIV clubs as well as Road Safety club were formed by corps members as a result of the interventions of these agencies at the orientation camp.<sup>64</sup> Some of these corps members ended up being recruited into these agencies during their primary assignment and after their national service. Some of these corps member so recruited did not study courses related to these agencies, but acquired the requisite skills during their service year.

Oluwatosin Adeniyi who served in Kebbi State between 2003 and 2004 recounted a similar experience. According to him, he participated actively in non-drill activities such as poetry recitals and cultural dances, and also provided support for the Orientation Broadcasting Service (OBS). He noted that there were quite a number of companies and organisations that came to give talks at the orientation camp. These included the Zenith Bank Plc, which came to give interesting talks on financial institutions and financial management as well as the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), which gave talks on road safety protocols. These activities at the orientation camp provided him and other corps members with some practical skills, which they did not get from their tertiary education training. For instance, it was the talks given by Zenith Bank Plc that made him to develop interest in the banking sector, to which he ventured after his NYSC, before going back to the University for his Postgraduate

Programme. Again, his participation in the quarter guard at the orientation camp instilled in him a different understanding of discipline, and his occasional engagements with Orientation Broadcasting Service further sharpened his communication skills, which is instrumental in his current lecturing profession in Economics Department of the University of Ibadan.<sup>65</sup> Adeniyi who did his primary assignment at Haliru Abdu Secondary School, Jega, Kebbi State taught Mathematics and Economics and also acted as the football team assistant coach. In addition to the new practical skills which he acquired at the orientation camp, there were other skills he also acquired at his place and of primary assignment. According to him, the most profound was the capacity to listen and the patience to allow learners grow at their own pace. This was against the backdrop of the fact that most of the students could not communicate in English Language. He also noted that the communication and teaching skills he acquired were undeniably part of the bedrock of his present professional dossier as a University lecturer.<sup>66</sup> In terms of integration into the community, he said he enjoyed warm friendship from both the old and young members of the community. At some point, according to him, he was even drafted into the community football team as a midfield player. The team was a closely-knit family and he did not feel uncomfortable being a non- indigene for once. His one year in Kebbi State opened him up to the truism in the notion of a “shared humanity”. The northerners he encountered at work and across social spaces showed him love both verbally and with tangible actions.<sup>67</sup>

Abayomi Ige who served in Abia State between 2003 and 2004 also had a similar experience. He said there were corporate bodies that came to organise seminars in their orientation camp. His place of primary assignment was at the School of Nursing, Federal Medical Centre Umuahia, where he learnt teaching skills, definition of marking scheme, talking to people, class

<sup>65</sup> Oluwatosin Adeniyi. 41 years. Interview conducted on Monday, 14 September 2020

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Oluwatosin Adeniyi. 41 years. Interview conducted on Monday, 14 September 2020

management skills, students-teachers interaction, among other things.<sup>68</sup> He remarked that he went to Abia State for the first time in his life by virtue of NYSC and that it was an interesting experience, which changed his perception about other peoples of Nigeria. As a result, he has learnt to base his judgement not on hearsay, but on personal experience.

Similarly, Aliyu Umar Tambwal who served in Oyo State between 2004 and 2005 had the same cheering testimony as Oluwatosin Adeniyi and Abayomi Ige concerning the role of the NYSC in manpower development and nation-building. Aliyu noted that the process of manpower development and nation-building by the NYSC always begins from the orientation camp and dovetails into the place of primary assignment. According to him, while in the orientation camp at Iseyin, Oyo State, there were so many memorable experiences ranging from the paramilitary drill activities to the non-drill activities such as lectures and talks by various organisations and business enterprises aimed to acquaint the corps members with all manners of practical experience and skills. He maintained that the appearance of such companies as Calipso liquor, United Bank for Africa, Zenith Bank, Union Bank, Gulder Ultimate and their talks as well as the programmes they organised resulted in some corps members becoming part of the workforce of these organisations.<sup>69</sup> At his primary assignment at Fiditi Grammar School in Afijio Local Government, Aliyu taught Geography. The practical experience he acquired during this period endeared the teaching profession to him. Similarly, the welcoming and warm relationship he enjoyed in the southwestern part of Nigeria coalesced to shape his personality. As a result of these factors he decided not only to pitch tent with the teaching profession, but to stay behind in the southwestern Nigeria for a while, leading to his movement into the University of Ibadan for a postgraduate programme, which enabled him to

<sup>68</sup> Abayomi Ige. 42 years. Interview conducted on 27 September 2020

<sup>69</sup> Aliyu Umar Tambwal. 46 years. Interview conducted through telephone on Tuesday 22 September 2020.

become a lecturer in the Department of Geography, Uthman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto.

Adebayo Philip Adenuga noted that in Taraba State where he served between 2005 and 2006, they were visited by banks at the orientation camp, although not for any form of career talks but for advertisement of the banks' activities in order to get more customers. According to him, as part of non-drill activities, cultural dance, football competition, as well as parties were organised, and all these activities fostered integration among corps members who came from diverse backgrounds.<sup>70</sup> He did his primary assignment at the Federal Technical College Jalingo where he taught Technical Drawing and Automobile Technology. As a result, he was able to acquire new skills in the use of scanning machine to detect fault in vehicles, a technology which by then was very new. He also noted that the experience he acquired from the NYSC helped him in his current career in automobile practice.<sup>71</sup>

In Nasarawa State, the story is the same. Akin Tella who served between 2006 and 2007 talked about football competition and dramatic performances as part of the non-drill activities that occurred at their orientation camp.<sup>72</sup> He noted that the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), NAPTIP, and Bank of Industry (BOI) all came to their orientation camp for career talks. He remarked about how as a result of his participation in the NYSC, he gained new practical skills such as better internet surfing, preparation of lesson note, research based-teaching, all of which he learned from Solid Rock International College, where he did his primary assignment. This skill is helping him today in the preparation of lecture notes as well as delivery of lectures which he practicalised using the secondary school students during his service year. His use of computer during his service year is instrumental in his online research activities in his

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<sup>70</sup> Adebayo Philip Adenuga. 48 years. Interview conducted on 24 September 2020

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Akin Tella. 35 years. Interview conducted on 25 September 2020

current career trajectories.<sup>73</sup>

Dapo Olakunlehin who served in Cross River State between 2007 and 2008 had almost the same experience as Tella who served in Nasarawa. Olakunlehin noted that they played host to the NDLEA, NAPTIP and BOI at their orientation camp. His primary assignment at Calabar Municipal Council and later at Kanu Agabi & Associates gave him the skills in the area of preparation of deed, case management, confidence in appearance in court, being a lawyer by profession.<sup>74</sup>

Ayotunde Ebenezer Adeloye who served in Anambra State in 2011/2012 noted that he participated in both drills and non-drill activities that went on at the orientation camp. From the drill of the parades, he was able to learn some safety skills as well as exercise regimes. Similarly, he also learnt some new practical skills from the non-drill activities. For instance, there were mandatory talks given by different facilitators and organisations such as NIM, ISMN, FRSC, FCMB, CDS group, just to mention a few. All these organisations provided practical skills which became instrumental in shaping the personalities of the corps members outside their university of education. Apart from manpower development which went on at the orientation camp at Umunya, there were activities aimed at fostering national integration. Adeloye noted that the State Ministry for Culture and Orientation had facilitators present at the camp to educate them on the culture and traditions of the host communities. As a result, he was able to learn cultural fluency and cultural intelligence, Igbo language skills, among others. Adeloye who did his primary assignment at Okija Grammar Schooll, Okija, in Ihiala Local Government Area, served as a French teacher for junior secondary students and also doubled as a class teacher. From this assignment he was able to develop and acquire healthy dose of practical educational psychology, all of which became handy while teaching the Basic French class between

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Dapo Olakunlehin. 36 years. Interview conducted on 25 September 2020

2012 and 2013, as well as GES 108 students at the University of Ibadan since 2018.<sup>75</sup>

Ester Obimdi who served in Ogun State in 2015/2016; Somtochukwu Onumba who served in Abuja in 2016/17; Racheal Ogbonna and Ebunoluwa Fawole who also served in Abuja in 2018/19, and Uloma Eke who served in Edo State in 2019/2020 all corroborated the forgoing testimonies of manpower development resulting from their participation in the NYSC scheme, coupled with the national integration and nation-building possibilities inherent in the programme.

The NYSC accentuated its attention on manpower development beginning from the late 1990s and it climaxed in 2012 with the introduction of the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Programme (SAED). This SAED project deserves some special analytical attention.

## **NYSC's Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Programme**

As has been noted earlier, the first three decades of the existence of NYSC was the period of major focus on national integration and unity, with minimal attention on manpower development. This is due to the fact that by then there was no problem of manpower arising from strong and viable education system, demographic factor and availability of employment opportunities for the extant graduates. However, this was not the case starting from the late 1990s. Not only was there a dwindling standard of education, there was also increase in population which also translated to increase in the number of graduates visa-a-vis the available opportunities for employment. This made the NYSC to accentuate its attention of manpower development among the corps member.

However, the problem of youth and graduate unemployment aggravated such that in 2012, the Federal

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<sup>75</sup> Ayotunde Ebenezer Adeloye. 34 years. Interview conducted on Thursday 17 September 2020.

Government of Nigeria introduced into the NYSC a training programme known as the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) project. The purpose of the project was to enable graduates to acquire skills which will enable them to be self-reliant in order to tackle the problem of unemployment and underemployment among them. Thus, SAED project has the mandate to provide youth corps members open access to acquire vital and essential skills and resources necessary to be successful in entrepreneurship. SAED, as a department in NYSC, is headed by a Director and is made up of two divisions, namely: Skills Acquisition Division and Entrepreneurship and Empowerment Division. These two departments have the responsibilities to, among other things:

1. give orientation to and train over 200, 000 corps members for skill acquisition yearly;
2. assist in training and tutoring of 100, 000 young graduates in skills acquisition and entrepreneurship development for self-reliance annually;
3. develop an entrepreneurship partnership between the private sector and the public sector.
4. provide new ways and methods on how best Nigerian youth employment and empowerment can be achieved;
5. support evidence-driven funding programmes and formulate policies that enhance youth employment and empowerment;
6. organise orientation and training sessions on the importance of corps members to enroll into the skills acquisition and entrepreneurship development programs;
7. develop a standard curriculum for the in-camp skills acquisition exercise;
8. identify organisations at state level to provide training and mentoring in specific skills sets;
9. attach corps members to the various organisations for skills acquisition and entrepreneurship development
10. monitor and supervise trainee corps members; and

## 11. facilitate access to available funding opportunities<sup>76</sup>

At the end of 2012 Batch 'B' orientation course, 45,000 corps members had been trained in various skills, and this as follows: 5, 404 in agro-allied skills; 5, 509 in food processing; 8, 035 in culture and tourism; and 5, 062 in cosmetology. Similarly, there were a total of 8, 119 corps members trained in ICT; 2, 885 in power and energy; 2, 672 in environment; 2, 837 in beautification; 2, 057 in construction and 2, 425 in education. Between 2012 and 2019, the NYSC-SAED project had trained a total of 971,272 corps members in skill acquisition programmes while 7000 had established their preferred businesses.<sup>77</sup>

### *Challenges of NYSC and Manpower Development*

Arubayi argues that dominant social constructions based on age and transition patterns undermine the impact/effective functioning of one's capabilities for addressing national development challenges, concluding that limited support structure during the youth educational paths and lack of opportunity structures while youths are in the NYSC pathways continue to limit the functioning of their capabilities in sectors of national development needs.<sup>78</sup> NYSC's development of youth capabilities for national development is underpinned by the four sector (education, health, infrastructure, and agriculture) deployment policy, which ironically excludes fourteen other sectors of the economy that contribute to Nigeria's GDP. This creates deployment traps that limit the effective functioning of youth capabilities.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, he noted that findings from

<sup>76</sup> MtormaBari Tambari Deebom and Ilomabo Taylor Daerego. 'The Influence of National Youth Service Corps Entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition Programmes on Youth Empowerment in River State.' *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, Vol. 7, Iss. 6 (June 2020), 148

<sup>77</sup> Thisday, 6 February 2019; Alson see MtormaBari Tambari Deebom and Ilomabo Taylor Daerego. 'The Influence of National Youth Service Corps Entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition Programmes on Youth Empowerment in River State.' 149

<sup>78</sup> Arubayi. "Youth Development", p.11

<sup>79</sup> Arubayi. "Youth Development", p.188

the study suggest that although 60% of youth capabilities fit the pre-given four deployment sectors, only 69% of youth respondents are deployed to areas where they can effectively function based on their specialisations or capabilities, suggesting therefore that the effective contributions of youth capabilities to national development through the NYSC pathway could be more robust if deployment is not constrained by the four (4) sector deployment policy.<sup>80</sup> Raimi and Alao have critically evaluated the cost and benefits of the NYSC scheme against the backdrop of remarks that the scheme has lost its relevance and has not really helped to accelerate socio-economic development of the country as stipulated in the Handbook of the NYSC. They argue that despite the huge financial and human resources given to the NYSC, there has been no return-on-investment on the part of a youth corps member or the nation within the last ten years except for the enrichment of the pockets of those hired to manage the NYSC scheme.<sup>81</sup>

In his article in the Nigerian Tribune, Sunday, July 8, 2012, Banji noted that nearly forty years after its establishment, NYSC scheme has been threatened by protests occasioned by security challenges. These include protests by corps members posted to such states that their lives would appear to be in danger due to the Boko Haram insurgency. This has resulted in fears that the NYSC scheme might have outlived its relevance. Similarly, the relevance of the NYSC programme was called to question with the pronouncement by the House of Representatives on Tuesday, July 3, 2012, barring the NYSC Secretariat from posting corps members to volatile states in the northern parts of the country.<sup>82</sup>

According to Okafor and Ani, the early phase of the program recorded the problems of corruption, language barriers as well

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> L. Raimi and O. Alao. "Evaluation of the Economics (Cost and Benefits) of National Youth Service Corps for Sustainable Development in Nigeria." *Humanomics* Vol. 27, No.4, 2011, p.227

<sup>82</sup>Fatai Ayinde Aremu. "National Youth Service Corps Programme and the Quest for Policy Consideration." *Journal of Management and Social Sciences* Vol. 7 No.1, 2018, p.280

as hostile culture, just as the contemporary Nigerian society has been overtaken by the destructive wind of insecurity, which has affected the NYSC scheme.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, Anthony Onyishi and Christian Ezeibe noted that the NYSC was established to pursue goals roughly similar to those of Americorps. However, the current situation suggests that there has been a fundamental departure from the original aims of the scheme in favour of essentially mere post-graduation ritual—a prerequisite for employment. They posited that the NYSC has thus far failed to sustain a verifiable connect between the policy goals and institutional/structural mechanisms upon which it should have been embedded.<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was formed in 1973 as a post-war mechanism for the development of common ties among the youth of Nigeria and for the promotion of national unity among the various sections of the country. Notwithstanding its original mandate to bring about national integration, it also contributed to national development through skill and 'manpower development' of the Nigerian youth. By so doing, it has helped in building and sharpening the human capital and in developing the skills, knowledge, attitudes and competence of the corps members in order to meet the current and future organisational requirements and goals of the country. This was affected through various means, such as experiences acquired at the orientation camp and at the place of primary assignment.

There are some dynamics in this process of manpower development under the auspices of the NYSC as have been seen in the body of the essay. For instance, from the inception of the

<sup>83</sup> Chukwuemeka Okafor and Johnmary Ani. "The National Youth Service Corps Programme and Growing Security Threat in Nigeria." *Africa's Public Service Delivery Performance Review*, p.149

<sup>84</sup> Anthony Onyeishi and Christian Ezeibe. "National Youth Service Corps Scheme and National Development in Nigeria." *Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities* Vol. 4, No 4, 2014, p.455

scheme in 1973 until about the 2000s, manpower development was not the main focus but national unity and national integration. This was due to the exigency of the time occasioned by the civil war that occurred between 1967 and 1970. Notwithstanding, manpower development was unconsciously and tangentially achieved through the assignments which the corps members carried out during their service years. However, from the late 1990s into the 2000s, there followed a paradigm shift in the *modus operandi* and consciousness of the NYSC, characterised by its interest in manpower development of the participants. As a result, conscious efforts were made by the scheme to help in the human capital development of the corps members. Part of the reason for this new trend was the dwindling fortune of education in Nigeria, coupled with the shrinking of employment opportunities for the teeming Nigerian graduates. Therefore, there was the need to inculcate the skills in the corps members that would enable them to be more employable and self-reliant after the NYSC programme. This culminated in the introduction of the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Programme in 2012.

This contribution of the NYSC to manpower development of the Nigerian youth has implications for the economic development of the country, as the corps members constituted manpower and human resources for the various government agencies and private organisations in the country. As has been seen, the corps members in the early years of the establishment of the NYSC constituted the critical mass of the manpower for various facets of the public sector in the country, both during and after their service years. Beyond manpower development, the NYSC has also delivered on its original mandate of fostering national unity among the Nigerian youth, as the corps members are able to meet and interact with their colleagues from diverse backgrounds as well as the people of the host communities who have different cultural backgrounds from the corps members. This has implications for ~~NYSC PUBLICATION~~ and national integration.

Unfortunately, the social cohesion in Nigeria began to crumble in the mid-1990s due to the political developments in the country. The annulment of the presidential election of June 12, 1993 and the crisis that ensued afterwards contributed to the gradual erosion of the post-war national unity which the NYSC has contributed to building over the years. The subsequent crisis in the country occasioned by the introduction of Sharia in some northern states in 1999, coupled with election crisis in the north in 2007 and 2011, in which corps members were targeted and killed inaugurated the call from some quarters for the total abolition of the scheme. This has been aggravated by the rise of the Boko Haram insurgency in 2009 and its ferocious attacks on some parts of the country, which has made it even more dangerous for corps members to be posted in those areas.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the NYSC has made tremendous contributions to national integration, nation building and manpower development in Nigeria. All these efforts have also had some positive impacts on socio-political and economic development of Nigeria.

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ADELOYE, Ayotunde Ebenezer	M	34	2011/2012	Anambra	17/09/2020
ADENIYI, Oluwatosin	M	41	2003/2004	Kebbi	14/09/2020
ADENUGA, Adebayo Philip	M	48	2005/2006	Taraba	24/09/2020
ADEOGUN, Aina Olubukola	F	52	1990/91	Benue/Kogi	24/09/2020
AKINSOLA, M.K.	M	66	1980/81	Imo	27/09/2020
ATIRI, Gabriel Ifo	M	67	1976/77	Sokoto	27/09/2020
DAHUNSI, Bamidele	M	53	1990/91	Plateau	27/09/2020
EKEH, Uloma	F	23	2019/2020	Edo	22/09/2020
ESIMEKHUIA, Donatus	M	45	2002/2003	Kano	24/09/2020
EYIOMO, Olujimi Kehinde	M	64	1991/92	Taraba	14/09/2020
EZEKWOLUME, Benchuks	M	43	2006/2007	Oyo	23/09/2020
FAWOLE, Ebunoluwa	F	24	2018/2019	Abuja	26/09/2020
IGE, Abayomi	M	42	2003/2004	Abia	27/09/2020
IKPORUKPO, Chris	M	70	1973/74	Shinkafi (North-Western State)	25/09/2020
OBIMDI, Easter	F	28	2015/2016	Ogun	26/09/2020
OGBONNA, Rechel	F	25	2018/2019	Abuja	26/09/2020
OLADOYIMBO, Lanre	M	52	1996/97	Anambra	24/09/2020
OLAKULEHIN, Dapo	M	36	2007/2008	Cross River	25/09/2020
OMOREGIE, Chris	M	53	1999/2000	Sokoto	16/09/2020
ONUMBA, Somtochukwu	F	25	2017/2018	Abuja	26/09/2020
SANNI, Abiodun	M	65	1980/81	Kano	24/09/2020
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## Chapter Eighteen

# THE NYSC AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

*Maryam Hamza*

*Department of History & War Studies*

*Nigerian Defence Academy*

*Kaduna, Nigeria.*

### Introduction

Since time immemorial, various communities and countries, all over the world, have developed different arrangements for the capacity development of their youths, as the latter are always considered the forthcoming generation that would carry on with the ideals and aspirations of the society. This makes necessary the development and enhancement of youth capacity to take over from older generation. The United Nations echoed to the world the vital role youths play in the society by declaring 1985 as "The International Youth Year for Development and Peace". Real emphasis was given to the demographic significance, essentiality and dynamism of youths to the society, with a reiteration of the fact that youths make tremendous contributions to the society at all levels as actors, players, partners and strategic catalysts for development.<sup>1</sup> Nigeria's former President Olusegun Obasanjo expounded on the importance of the nation's youth population and their strategic importance to development by stating that:

Youths are the foundation of a society. Their energy, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and the security of a nation.

<sup>1</sup>United Nations, "Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs*, New York: UN Press, 2018. pWhitlock, J (2004), "Understanding Youth Development: Principles and practice" *Act for Youths Center of Upstarts and Excellence*, Cornel University, University of Rochester and New York Center for School Safety, p. 1.

Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation gains strides in economic development and socio-political attainments. In their dreams and hopes a nation finds her motivation, on their energies, she builds her vitality and purpose. And because of their dreams and aspirations, the future of a nation is assured.<sup>2</sup>

This is to emphasise the significance of youths in development, and Nigeria is not an exception of this global trend. This means that any nation of the world that neglects the relevance of youth engagement in the socio-economic advancement of her strategic populace does so at its own detriment.

From pre-colonial to colonial and into the post-colonial periods, youth development programmes in Nigeria have been going on in local and informal contexts in terms of apprenticeship, military training, informal education, and mentorship, among others. During colonialism, Western education under the British system targeted the youths who later, as patriots and nationalists, used their newly acquired knowledge to wrestle power from the British. After independence however, the first National Development Planning lacked any serious arrangement for the development of the youths. Between 1967 and 1970, Nigeria experienced a civil war after which there was a second National Development Plan which was deliberately dominated by the agenda of post-war healing and rebuilding. It had the famous 3Rs policy of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation in its mandates, and later the National Youth Service Corps Scheme (NYSC) in 1993.<sup>3</sup> The NYSC was the first and is still the most dominant and largest organised government arrangement targeting the Nigerian youths that constitute about 60% of the country's population. It has had and still has tremendous political,

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<sup>2</sup>Hamilton S.F (et. al) (2004), "Principles for Youth Development" in Hamilton and M.A Hamilton (ed) "The Youth Development Hand Book: Coming of Age in American Communities", Thousand Oaks: Sage PublicationPlc p.6

<sup>3</sup>As quoted in, Itai Kabonga, "Youth and Development in Ward three of Chegutu District, Zimbabwe", *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, Vol.6, Issue 2, 2016, p.234

economic, and socio-cultural developmental impact on Nigerian youths across religion, ethnicity, tribe and region since its inception in 1973, despite the numerous challenges that have bedeviled the system.

It is against this backdrop that this chapter examines the programmes of the NYSC and how they target the development of the Nigerian youth. The chapter also examines past efforts at youth development as well as NYSC's effort at the upliftment and development of the youths over time. Another area the present research deals with is the contributions of the NYSC to youth development over the years and the challenges encountered in the discharge of its duties. The chapter therefore flows in five sections. The first section gives a conceptual clarification of the key concepts of youth, development, and youth development. The second section focuses briefly on the philosophy behind the creation of the NYSC and attempts to ascertain the connectivity of the scheme with youth development. The third section analyses the impact of the NYSC on youth development. The fourth section examines the challenges associated with youth development and the way forward. The fifth section is the conclusion.

## Conceptual Clarifications

### Youth

The definition of youth varies with the laws of different countries and international bodies. Youth could be described in terms of age, physical appearance or psychological attributes, psychological instincts, moral and social value, sentiments, aspirations and temperament, among others. They generally fall into the category of juvenile, adolescent, and adult. In the United States of America, youth are defined as individuals within the age bracket of 17 and 24 years for purposes of participation in certain programmes.<sup>4</sup> The United Nations Organisation defines

<sup>4</sup> Arubayi, D.O "Youth Development: Understanding the Contribution of the National Youth Service Corps to Nigerian National Development" PhD Thesis, School of Environmental, Education and Developmental Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Manchester, 2015, p78-83

youth as someone from 15- 24 years of age.<sup>5</sup> The Nigerian National Population Commission defines youth as someone from between 15 and 35 years of age. Based on its act, the National Youth Service Corps recognises a youth as someone that is below 30 years of age.<sup>6</sup> The age bracket of those serving is mostly from twenty to thirty years, since the scheme exempts those above thirty years. The Nigerian educational system mostly graduates secondary school students at the age of eighteen and the minimum years to spend in Nigerian university is four years. This makes it possible for a twenty-two years old graduate to be a corps member, although corps members below age twenty-two are sometimes called up due to some factors. These factors include as spending fewer years studying abroad, skipping classes in secondary and primary schools, or getting into the university before 18 years. On the other hand, graduates sometimes fraudulently back date their ages to fall below thirty for one reason or another in order to serve.<sup>7</sup>

Gowon posits that youth is an impressionable stage, a time of emotional development, rapid change, idealism, adventure and even rebellion which, if not well managed, may be channeled into the harmful, unproductive and destructive occupations and pastimes.<sup>8</sup> This shows that the youth in any society cannot be underestimated and neglected as doing so will leave this forceful group of young persons at a great disadvantage to themselves and the society at large.

The NYSC scheme has been used as an initiative to engage, mold, and transform the youth population that have ultimately contributed significantly to societal development. From the 2,364 corps members that served in 1973, the number has risen

<sup>5</sup> Raimi L & Alao O. 2011, "Evaluation of the Economies (Cost and Benefits) of National Youth Service Corps for Sustainable Development in Nigeria" *Humanomics* Vol. 27 No.4, p. 272

<sup>6</sup> Secretary-General's Report to the General Assembly, A/36/215, 1981

<sup>7</sup> Obadare E. 2016, "Statism, Youth and Civic imagination: A Critical Study of the NYSC Program in Nigeria" Center for Social Development, Global Service Institute, Washington University, St. Louis. p. 21

<sup>8</sup> Obadare E. 2016, "Statism, Youth and Civic.... p.22

over the decades. By 2005, some 85,000 corps members were mobilised to serve, and as at 2019 about 300,000.<sup>9</sup> youths were mobilised to serve in the NYSC Scheme, all of them graduates from the various tertiary institutions from Nigeria and abroad. The number of youths the scheme has mobilised, integrated and partly empowered over the years is an indication that to an extent the scheme has achieved some of its core objectives.

## Development

Development is a broad concept that encompasses social, economic, political, and human variables. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sees development as “to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community”.<sup>10</sup> Achieving development is viewed as freeing people from the obstacles that affect their ability to develop their own lives and communities. Development is empowerment; it is about people taking control of their lives, expressing their demands and seeking and taking charge of their own solutions to their problems. According to S. Burkey, economic and political development must translate into social development. As a broad concept, development has been extensively explored with a view to realising economic growth and socio-economic advancement as the determining factors in societal transformation. Economic growth may bring material gain to the people but development is much more about enrichment of the lives of all the people in the society.<sup>11</sup>

S. Todaro defined development as not purely an economic phenomenon but rather a multi-dimensional process involving the re-organisation and re-orientation of the entire economic and social system. In addition to improvement in incomes and

<sup>9</sup> Gowon Y. 1994, “A Keynote Address” paper presented at the Second Global Conference on National Youth Service Scheme, Abuja.

<sup>10</sup> Nwouso, M. 2019, “Youth Entrepreneurship among University Graduates in Anambra State” Phd Dissertation, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Walden University, p. 98

<sup>11</sup> UNDP Nigeria 1998: Nigeria Human Development Report. Lagos.

output, development typically involves radical changes in institutional, social, and administrative structures, as well as in popular attitudes and in many cases, even customs and beliefs."<sup>12</sup> His definition of development revolves around improving the quality of all human lives with three equally important aspects. These aspects are, first, raising a people's living levels, i.e. incomes and consumption, levels of food, medical services, education through relevant growth processes. Secondly, creating conditions conducive to the growth of people's self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions which promote human dignity and respect. Thirdly, increasing peoples' freedom to choose by enlarging the range of their choice variables, e.g. varieties of goods and services. It could be argued that all these, to an extent, have been covered by the NYSC scheme which will be shown in subsequent sections of this study.

To Walter Rodney, development is a process of change that is many-sided involving individualism, social stratification/castes and the society at large. He maintains that individual development, though sometimes moral, is tied to the overall development of the state. Individualistic development has exhibited strength to single-handedly improve people's ability to live better lives.<sup>13</sup> As it were, personal development is a lifelong process. It paves the way for people to assess their skills and qualities, consider their aims in life and set goals in order to realise and maximise their potential.

## Youth Development

Youth development is defined as:

a strategic approach with a focus on practices for engaging entire communities in helping all youths

<sup>12</sup>Burkey S. 1993, *People First: A Guide to Self-Reliant, Participatory Rural Development*, London: Zed Books, p.38

<sup>13</sup>Todaro M. & Smith S.C. (2015), *Economic Development in the 3<sup>rd</sup> World*, 12<sup>th</sup> Edition, New York: Pearson, p.16.

thrive. It builds on traditional youth service approaches by emphasising long term, systemic strategies for cultivating qualities and traits desirable in young people through the creation of environments that support their developmental needs and capacities.<sup>14</sup>

There are basically three aspects of youth development identified. They are (a) natural (which is more of physical growth, traditional self-awareness of the environment and the use of other parts of the body for most basic human activities; (b) Principle (which emphasises the agency of institutions, organisations and individuals for capacity building and growth of the youths especially in the community level); and (c) Practice (the practical application of the principles acquired to foster and enhance the growth and the effectiveness of the natural growth).<sup>15</sup> The NYSC programme mostly falls within the practice and principle categories. This can be deduced from its objectives as enshrined in the National Youth Service Act of 2004 which clearly targets not only national unity, cohesion and integration, but also overall youth development in social, cultural, economic and political aspects.

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<sup>14</sup> Rodney W. (1983), *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, London: Bogle-L'Uverture Publications. p.1

<sup>15</sup> Whitlock, J (2004), "Understanding Youth Development: Principles and practice" *Act for Youths Center of Upstarts and Excellence*, Cornel University, University of Rochester and New York Center for School Safety, p.1

## The Philosophy of the NYSC



Fig. 33: The International Youth Day Celebrations Organised by the NYSC Kubwa Camp, 2017

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was created by Decree no. 25 of 22 May 1973 during the reign of General Yakubu Gowon. It was later revised and replaced by Decree no. 54 of 16 June 1993 and enacted to the ACT of parliament as NYSC ACT Cap. 84 in 2004, and put under the jurisdiction of the Federal Ministry of Youths and Sports.<sup>16</sup> This legal instrument is a compulsory programme designed for all graduates of tertiary institutions such as universities and polytechnics primarily “to inculcate in Nigerian youth the spirit of selfless service to the community and to emphasise the spirit of oneness and brotherhood of all Nigerians irrespective of cultural or social background”. The scheme was meant to encourage the

<sup>16</sup> Hamilton S.F (et. al)(2004), “Principles for Youth Development” in Hamilton and M.A Hamilton (ed) “*The Youth Development Hand Book: Coming of Age in American Communities*”, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication Inc, p,3

development of common ties among the Nigerian youth by promoting national unity, development of the Nigerian youth and Nigeria into a great and dynamic economy.<sup>17</sup> The scheme consists of four cardinal programmes within each service national year which every corps member must go through. These programmes are: (a) the twenty one days' orientation program in a military boot camp which is highly regimented; (b) Primary Assignment (PPA) which see the posting of corps members to public and private sectors of the Nigerian State that runs concurrently with (c) the Community Development Service (CDS), a weekly engagement of grouped corps members to identify and solve at least one problem of their host communities; and lastly (d) the passing out parade and issuing of the certificate of national service to corps members.<sup>18</sup>

The philosophy behind the creation of the NYSC is national unity, integration, development and creation of sense of national consciousness among the Nigerian youths. In places where there is no single ethnic, mythological origin, the only way to develop national unity and consciousness is through such arrangement as the NYSC. Added to this was the unfortunate events that led to the Nigerian Civil War that further deepened the animosity between different Nigerian regions and ethnicities, hence, there was a need for a template that could integrate the future Nigerian generation. The scheme aims at inculcating discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work, and of patriotic and loyal service to Nigeria in any situation they may find themselves. The scheme also aims at raising the moral tone of the Nigerian youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement; while focusing on developing in the Nigerian youths the right attitudes and mind set, acquired through shared experience and suitable

<sup>17</sup> Arubayi, D.O. (2015), "Youth Development: Understanding the Contribution of the National Youth Service Corps to Nigerian National Development," *Ph.D Thesis* Department of Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester, p. 84

<sup>18</sup> NYSC Handbook for Members, National Youth Service Corps, Nigeria. 1999.

training, which will make them more amenable to mobilisation in the national interest.<sup>19</sup>

The NYSC ACT further aims at empowering Nigerian youths to acquire the spirit of self-reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self-employment, to contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy. It is also geared at developing common ties among the Nigerian youths and promote national unity and integration. Moreover, the ACT sets out to remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm, first hand, the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups.<sup>20</sup> The scheme has given room for convergence of diverse persons and ideas of different ethnic and religious backgrounds while exposing to all a true sense of communalism and universality, rather than the particularity of humanity aimed at breaking barriers and mutual distrust between all. The scheme exposes the similarities between us all as a people, which is one of its cardinal aims and objectives. Also, given the paucity of economic opportunities in Nigeria, rising spate of unemployment occasioned by the huge number of graduates being released every year into the labour market, if the scheme had been absent there would have been economic crunch and pressure on the nation. Yet, again, the NYSC is a “stop-gap” without which there would have been a crisis. Thus, the scheme offers opportunity for a first-time employment to young graduates. This has enabled many mobilised youths to know and take their bearing in life. It has also afforded them focus and helped to expose their hidden talents and potential which is beneficial to not only them, but the nation at large.

Also, the scheme has enabled many corps members to raise capital from their monthly stipends which, together with the training they receive during their service year, they have been able to eke out a living while transforming themselves, their immediate communities, and the nation at large. The acquisition

<sup>19</sup> Arubayi, D.O. (2015), “Youth Development: Understanding... p.84

<sup>20</sup> National Youth Service Corps Act, Chapter 84, Section One, Article one and two, 2004

of skills by many corps members is made possible because of the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship programmes (SAED) created by the NYSC. The SAED is a compulsory skill acquisition programme that introduces or exposes every corps member to skill acquisition by making it mandatory for every corps member to belong to a skill acquisition group.<sup>21</sup> Based on the existing demography of Nigerian, the youths (14-35) who are in the majority and constituting more than 60 % of the Nigerian population, stand to benefit from the NYSC<sup>22</sup>. They Nigerian youth also stands to benefit both directly and indirectly from the scheme in the course of their one-year mandatory national service.<sup>23</sup> These benefits include skills acquisition, empowerment, exposure of hidden talents and potential, national cohesion and so on. Not only the corps members, but even the non-graduate youths also benefit from the scheme in their various communities as a result of activities of corps members. Since the Nigerian youth constitutes the larger percentage of the Nigerian population, any policy that addresses their development is a welcome development, and translates to a brighter future for the Nigerian State.

### **Contributions of the NYSC to Youth Development in Nigeria**

Indisputably, the NYSC scheme over the years has had tremendous political, administrative, economic and social impact on Nigerian youths, which has enhanced their development and increased their capacity. Young persons have benefited materially and intellectually and have acquired proper life orientation in different aspects of their lives. Arguably, it is the most enduring programme that has impacted on the lives of hundreds of thousands if not millions of Nigerian youths across religious, ethnic and regional milieu.

<sup>21</sup>National Youth Service Corps Act, Chapter 84, Section One, Article one and two, 2004

<sup>22</sup> Isa Wana, 50, NYSC State Coordinator Kaduna State Secretariat interviewed at the Kaduna State NYSC Secretariat on 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2020

<sup>23</sup> National Bureau of Statistics, 2018.



**Fig. 34.1:** The NYSC Band Performing at a Function, 2019



**Fig. 34.2:** The NYSC Band Performing at a Function, 2019

In the first instance, the nation does not have any outfit where Nigerian youths express themselves and derive benefit from the resources of the country like the NYSC. From birth through the education process, including the secondary school and tertiary institution, there is not a single programme that gives the Nigerian youth any form of succor like the NYSC. The scheme is a “stop-gap” between ideals and realities. During school years, most young people learn about theories and philosophies of an ideal and hypothetical society. In reality, such societies are a mirage especially in the Nigerian state. Thus, the first step of the NYSC, right from the orientation camp, is to dissuade corps members from that idea of an ideal society, and make them understand society differently from what they have learnt in schools and away from the illusion of encountering a model functional society. The scheme exposes youths to the reality of how the society really is and the absolute need for them to make their contribution to the nation by developing their individual mental state and discover their unique membership of nationhood.<sup>24</sup> While schools are a collection point of young people, a place of convergence of youths from diverse families mostly from the same region, the NYSC has been able to bring youths from diverse backgrounds. For many, it is a convergence of youths from different ethnic and religious background for the first time ever.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout the course of the one-year mandatory national service, the youths are equipped with political, administrative, organisational, management and leadership skills and capabilities. At the first instance, after posting, they are required to report to their respective orientation camps all over the 36 states of the country and the federal capital territory on short notice. On setting their foot on the military boot camp, they would find themselves in a highly organised, regimented and disciplined environment.

<sup>24</sup> “People and Society: Population”, *World Fact Book*, the Central Intelligence Agency, 2017. (accessed on 1st October 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Mr HA Nasamu, 54, Director, Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Department. Interviewed at the Gowon House, NYSC Headquarters, Abuja, 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.

After the introductory climate setting lectures, corps members are acquainted with the first rules and regulations of proper conduct in the camp, and the disciplinary measures to be taken should these rules be broken. For many corps members, this first-time experience of being held responsible for any action or inaction may be their first contact at being held strictly accountable for their actions. They are compelled to be disciplined and have absolute respect for rules and regulations especially in a country where holding people accountable for their actions and getting adequate response (positive or negative) for it is alien.<sup>26</sup>

It is a daily routine at the orientation camp to receive series of lectures on politics, leadership, history, ideology, economy, and lofty values and ideals of the Nigerian State. Such orientation broadens their perspective and understanding of the Nigerian State. They are exposed to new knowledge and ideas that would help them to navigate the Nigerian socio-economic and political landscape after service.<sup>27</sup> This initial sensitisation is usually a first- time experience for many young people. Therefore, the scheme has succeeded in creating an avenue for understanding the complexity of the matrix of the nation by youths who are experiencing other parts of the nation and people for the first time ever, which has also succeeded in clearing their misconceptions about other people from other parts of the nation. There is a cross breeding and synergy of new ideas, experiences and knowledge across the nation. There is also the importation of ideas by students from within the nation and overseas which has been made possible by the scheme. This has been facilitated by the deployment of the policy, in the scheme, of structural uniformity across board that brings corps members from different and diverse ethnic and religious groups and backgrounds other than their states of origin across the 36 states

<sup>26</sup> Isa Wana, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Arubayi, D.O (2015) "Youth Development" p87

of the federation, including FCT, to meet, mix and interact with one another to promote cohesion and integration.<sup>28</sup>

The three weeks' orientation camp for corps members exposes them further to a number of things that impact tremendously on them. Foremost among these is the fact that during the orientation, corps members are usually organised into military-like platoons. The platoons, numbered one to ten, consists of more than one hundred corps members. Each platoon is headed by a corps member who is democratically elected. Thus, the leadership and responsibility of each platoon is in the hands of one person under the observation of NYSC platoon staff advisers and the military platoon instructors, who is incorporated into the camp's chain of command. This introduces most of the corps members to election processes, contention, conceding defeat, obligation, responsibility and duty. Decision making is done democratically through discussion, deliberation and, if need be, election. This incorporates in corps members the task of leadership, responsibility, fairness, and leader/follower relationship in a mini Nigeria-like setting as the platoons comprises virtually every tribe, religion and gender from all the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. It is more of a deliberate leadership mentoring program that helps to shape and enhance the leadership capacity of the Nigerian youths. It develops and enhances their citizenship and leadership/followership capacity.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, corps members are assigned different types of duties to incorporate them into the process of camp administration and decision making which further inculcates into them a sense of duty and leadership as they would one day be in a place to make hard decision.<sup>30</sup> They are hence incorporated within the chain of command of the scheme from the Director General to the State

<sup>28</sup> Obadare, E "Statism, Youth and Civic Imagination: A Critical Study of the NYSC Program in Nigeria" p18

<sup>29</sup> G. Enegwea & G.Umoden, *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service*, Lagos: Gabumo Publishing Company Limited, 2003, 42

<sup>30</sup> Arubayi, D.O "Youth Development: Understanding the Contribution of the National Youth Service Corps to Nigerian National Development" p.87

Coordinator, Zonal Inspector (ZI), Local Government Inspector (LGI), Corps Liaison Officer (CLO), and Community Development Service (CDS) President. Adding to this is the fact that whatever chain of command or administrative structure they may encounter in their various places of primary assignments also applies to them.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, the corps members live a regimented lifestyle in camp. This is because the camp is a military boot camp subjected to the camp chain of command from the camp director, the camp commandant down to their respective platoon staff advisers, military instructors and corps platoon leader. This indeed helps them to live a regimented, well-ordered, disciplined and organised life for 21 days, which regulates virtually whatever they do from eating, sleeping, to other activities.<sup>32</sup> This leadership mentoring programme not only inculcates in the corps members a sense of duty and responsibility on the part of the leader, it also impacts on the other corps members a sense of followership which entails cooperation in working with the platoon leader to accomplish a set mission. Therefore, youths are exposed through the scheme to have a high degree of responsibility, spirit of teamwork and cohesion, right from camp through service year and beyond. Indeed, this prepares them for the reality of what the society and future holds for them after service, when they find themselves in the various strata of the Nigerian or even foreign civil and public service or the private sectors. Their understanding of the concept of subordination to superior authority will help them to cope at such times.

The scheme is also the only avenue that brings youths close to the military in a formal setting. During the orientation exercise, there is constant interaction between the military leadership in charge of orientation camps and corps members. The military is perceived as an aggressive and brute profession

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<sup>31</sup> Umogha, M.A, (Mrs), 2018 Batch "B" stream "L" Camp Director, Iseyin, Oyo State Nigeria, 25, July, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Bashir S, a Bauchi indigene served at Kaduna 2019 Batch "D" interviewed 5<sup>th</sup>, Oct 2020.

that is dreaded and thus the personnel are usually seen by the civilian community to be inhuman. The scheme has thus helped to debunk this wrong and erroneous perception about the military. For some corps members, the interaction between them and the military inspired them to join the military profession. Many have joined the short service courses and other arms of the military profession, either as professionals in their respective fields or in combat roles.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, duties during the orientation period are sometimes assigned according to the professional training of corps members. For instance, the medical students undergo a kind of twenty-one-day internship in the camp clinic by attending to the sick under the supervision of qualified medical practitioners in the camp. This surely enhances their knowledge as they stand to learn from the vast experience of the official physicians in the camp. Therefore, the scheme offers youths first-time opportunities to come face to face with their areas of specialisation by practicing what they learnt in school. This is one aspect of the scheme that has benefited the larger society. It is common knowledge that most public health centres across the nation do not have resident doctors especially in the rural areas. It is thus very common to see corps members as the only resident doctors serving in such capacities.<sup>34</sup> Other corps members who studied media related courses for the first time find themselves in the Orientation Broadcasting Service where they are given the chance to practice what they studied at school. Most of the youths have never had the opportunity for practical sessions in their schools because of the dysfunctionality of the school system and the inadequacies of many Nigerian tertiary institutions in terms of laboratories for the practical aspects of their different courses. These youths are thus availed the opportunity to learn from veteran practitioners especially in the

<sup>33</sup> Obadare, E “Statism, Youth and Civic Imagination: A Critical Study of the NYSC Program in Nigeria” p18

<sup>34</sup> Abdulkadir Muhammad Ali, Head of Transport and Maintenance, NYSC Secretariat, Kaduna State. Interviewed at the State Secretariat, on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

field of program anchoring, broad casting, interview, public relations and so on. Also, students of catering also acquire further practical knowledge in the kitchen by working with camp cooks to prepare food for the whole camp. This exposes them to other new techniques in the preparation of especially the cultural food associated with the host community. For instance, a Yoruba or Igbo corps member serving in the north and assigned to the kitchen would learn the traditional northern food.<sup>35</sup> All the practical sessions experienced by corps members continues after camp, in their various places of primary assignments, where they are often posted based on their area of specialisation which further deepens their understanding and enhances their knowledge.

One of the cardinal objectives of the NYSC, apart from promoting national unity, is selfless service to fatherland and humanity. Using the Community Development Service therefore, the scheme has continued to touch the lives of both the corps members and the community in which they serve. The CDS is supposed to instill in corps members the virtue of dignity of labour and infuse them with a sense of pride at having to practically contribute to their local communities on developmental projects. The CDS is the most important aspect of the scheme as it has, over the years, recorded leaps in development of community projects. The CDS contributed to the development of basic rural infrastructure where corps members execute many works for their host communities. Through the CDS, the corps members harnessed their various skills, creativity and identify and solve at least one problem of their host communities.<sup>36</sup>

They also partake in literacy programmes aimed at encouraging adult literacy and improving general education, especially in rural communities. The healthcare delivery system is one that has been positively impacted upon through the CDS.

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<sup>35</sup> National Youth Service Corps. 2016 Annual Report of the NYSC Scheme. p.34  
<sup>36</sup> Arubayi, D.O (2015) "Youth Development" p88

Youths get actively involved in immunisation campaigns, campaigns against AIDS/HIV, drug abuse and so on. Through the CDS, the NYSC has also succeeded in creating avenue for corps members and in communities where they serve to be actively involved in promoting sports and cultural activities. Corp members have also helped in developing community theatre, drama and dance group, which has positive impact on local inhabitants. The NYSC through the CDS has been involved in farming programmes and have gone ahead to establish a number of agro-based industries across different locations of the nation. This has also helped in providing employment to youths in those localities where these industries are located. As part of their community development services, the corps members have been engaged in designing, inventing and fabrication of simple machinery using local material while also engaging members of their host communities. As a result of the CDS, many corps members went on to engage in personal CDS and made personal sacrifices by building symbols, public toilets, class rooms and providing chairs to students and even roads. This has clearly shown that the ideals of selfless sacrifice have been deeply inculcated in them.<sup>37</sup> For instance, those posted to sports CDS have to train in the various sports such as football, volley ball or attend gymnasium once in a week and constantly play matches with clubs in their host communities. This enhances their effectiveness and capability even after service; some became known to sport managers through such encounters that serve as their route for making it big in the sport industry.<sup>38</sup> The corps members in culture and tourism and other CDS groups often visit the historical sites of their host community such as the museums, and this helps in widening their perspectives and knowledge about the history of the Nigerian society.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Enegwea G & Umoden G (2003), *NYSC Twenty Years of National Service*, Lagos: Gabumo Publishing Company Limited, p. 42

<sup>38</sup> Enegwea G & .Umoden G (2003), *NYSC Twenty Years...* p.42

The NYSC has also engaged youths who have contributed in many national assignments such as census or elections, which demands the labour of many agile Nigerians. Many corps members have been trained and extensively incorporated into the system. They go into the nooks and crannies of Nigeria to conduct elections and census. The corps members usually work as ad-hoc INEC staff in P.O (Presiding Officer) capacity responsible for a polling unit or voting point as the case may be and other strategic capacities. These herculean tasks expose corps members to further understand the complexity of decision making, administration, public responsibility, honesty, leadership, and the aspiration of the Nigerian electorates on their leaders. Thus, the corps members have proven to be indispensable stakeholders in Nigerian election and democracy due to their effectiveness, endurance, skills, education, discipline and hard work, which they mostly acquire in the course of their service year, as it is difficult to finish the service year without going through such rigorous training and mentoring to carry out such tasks in an organised way.<sup>40</sup>

### **Economic Development of the Corps Members**

Economically, the NYSC has contributed tremendously to youth development. As noted earlier, without the NYSC, there would have been an unemployment crunch created by fresh graduates that are released yearly from the universities with less employment opportunities due to paucity of empowerment prospects and opportunities. It is for this reason, as part of the scheme's effort at alleviating this economic crisis evident in the nation, that the scheme introduced the Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship (SAED) programme into the activities of the NYSC. The NYSC's Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Department was created in March 2012. As earlier mentioned, the department introduced the skills acquisition

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<sup>39</sup> Anas Lawal, served 2018/19, Katsina State, Sports CDS Katsina, interviewed 25, Sept, 2020

<sup>40</sup> Arubayi, D.O (2015), "Youth Development... p. 92

programmes to proffer solutions to the menace of unemployment and underemployment in the country. Unemployment is one of the causes of depression among the mammoth Nigerian youth population due to the limited employment opportunities. According to the Director of the SAED programme, the cardinal purpose of creating and adding this programme to the contents of the three weeks' orientation is for the sensitisation and mobilisation of corps members for compulsory skills acquisition and development of their entrepreneurial capacity with the sole aim of promoting self-reliance and self-employment during their service year and beyond. The scheme thus offers many youths an opportunity of a first-time new knowledge on different skills that are capable of giving them a start-off to economic independence. The corps members are compulsorily made to learn and understand the notion of self-sustenance where the basic and elementary knowledge is given that can avail them the opportunity to carry on with their lives even without a white-collar job thus reducing the strain on the labour market. This way they learn diverse skills both in theory and in practice.<sup>41</sup>

The skills cut across various sectors of the economy, ranging from energy, construction, agro-business and environment. There are different aspects of skill training for the youths that focus on motor and automobile, cosmetology, education, cinematography, horticulture, construction, electrical and electronics, horticulture, poultry, snail farming, animal husbandry, fish farming, plantain and banana sucker plantation, catering, bead making, fashion designing, hairdressing and make-up, photography, graphics designing, and so on. The NYSC partners with different competent and experienced organisations to take corps members through the various skill acquisition programmes. The NYSC also partners with various professional bodies and organisation such as the Institute of

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<sup>41</sup>Abba Murtala Kutama, a Kano indigene serves of Batch C stream 1, 2018, Served as a PO, at Kankara Local Government of Katsina.

Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN), Nigerian Institute of Management (NIM) to enhance the creativity of youths and give them easy access to join these professional bodies, mostly at discounted amounts.<sup>42</sup>

During the one-year NYSC period, many corps members usually learn how to manage their meager allowances by saving up these stipends into capital through which they are able to take advantage of the many economic opportunities in their respective host communities and the country in general. This goes a long way in creating self-reliance and self-employment for thousands of them. The service year also helps them to know some of the intricacies of most Nigerian economic sectors as it is expected of their employers in their various places of primary assignment to treat them as the staff of such organisations. Many corps members thus leave the orientation camp and their community of assignment as totally transformed youths.

The scheme does not only acquaint youths with the skill acquisition, it goes further to engage them after the orientation period by providing them some sort of support. Thus, there is both post-camp and post-service year engagements where corps members are linked with artisans in different fields of interests. They are also connected with different agencies and organisations that give soft loans or interest free loans. The only collateral needed for such loans are a business plan and certificate of national service. Such agencies are Bank of Agriculture, Bank of Industry, Central Bank of Nigeria. The CBN under its Youth Entrepreneurship Development programme launched in 2016 which serves as a springboard for youth empowerment also targets corps members and other youths for self-employment.<sup>43</sup> The bank offers training to beneficiaries and

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<sup>42</sup> Mr HA Nasamu, 54, Director, Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Department. Interviewed at the Gowon House, NYSC Headquarters, Abuja, 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> For poverty, unemployment and underemployment among the Nigerian youths see Akutson, S and Ishaku, J, "The Need for entrepreneurship Education In Our Tertiary Institutions in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An economic and Religious Perspective" in *Kaduna Journal of Historical Society*, vol. 8, 2016, pp351-359.



**Fig. 35:** A Cross-Section of Corps Members at a Skills and Enterpreneuership Workshop, 2020

gives loans that should be paid back within a seven - year period, with two-year moratorium. The loan ranges from N150,000 to N250,000, and by the end of 2019 about N15,000,000 loans have been disbursed to corps members. The scheme's partnership with Bank of Industry under the BOI-NYSC Graduate Empowerment Fund has so far disbursed about N540,00,000 loans to corps members by the end of 2019.<sup>44</sup> These loans have helped not only corps members but other Nigerian youths to successfully establish business. This shows that these small businesses have reduced the strain on the labour market and

<sup>43</sup> For poverty, unemployment and underemployment among the Nigerian youths see Akutson, S and Ishaku, J, "The Need for entrepreneurship Education In Our Tertiary Institutions in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An economic and Religious Perspective" in *Kaduna Journal of Historical Society*, vol. 8, 2016, pp351-359.

<sup>44</sup> Economic Confidential, (2020), "Skill Acquisition: NYSC trains 700,000 Corps Members" Media Assessment: Shuaibu Ibrahim's Silent Revolution in NYSC. Vol.1 Abuja: Leadwatch Publications, p.72

have helped with employment of other youths in societies where they are located.<sup>45</sup>

From 2012 when the SAED programmed started, about 45,000 corps members have been trained; by February 2019 more than 971, 207 corps members have been trained and about 7000 thousand of them established one business or the other, while some 1600 have become full time entrepreneurs with at least ten employees under them.<sup>46</sup> By February 2020, the Director-General of the scheme, Brig. Gen. Shuaibu Ibrahim, stated that the number of youths that have been sensitised under the NYSC has risen to over 1,132,409 and over 700,000 have undergone various forms of skills training under the SAED programme.<sup>47</sup>

Interviews with some ex-corps members indicate how much the scheme has impacted on their economic development. For instance, Muhammad Bello, an ex corps member who served in Kaduna, contested and won 10, 000 naira during a camp SAED tailoring completion. He is now a professional tailor and does no longer bother to seek for a government job.<sup>48</sup> Another ex corps member who is now in glass and aluminum making business submits that:

I attended SAED program in aluminum fabrication where I acquired the skills to make aluminum and glass windows and doors. I think the SAED program is indeed very good as it enables youths to learn skill acquisition on which they can rely after their service. In order not to just rely on getting white collar job/government job, they can make use of what they

<sup>45</sup> Economic Confidential, (2020), "Unemployment: CBN Promises 7year Loans for Corpses'" Media Assessment: Shuaibu Ibrahim's Silent Revolution in NYSC. Vol.1 Abuja: Leadwatch Publications, p.73

<sup>46</sup> Nwoso, M (2019), "Youth Entrepreneurship Among University Graduates in Anambra State" Phd Dissertation, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Walden University, p.166

<sup>47</sup>This Day, 6<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Nigerian Press Release (2020), "Shuaibu Ibrahim's Twelve-Month Innovative Strides in NYSC", Vol.1 Abuja: Leadwatch Publications, p.104

acquire and still maintain and depend on it as means of their livelihood.<sup>49</sup>

Another ex-corps member also remarked that “NYSC as a scheme exposed me to new experiences which aroused my intense interest in entrepreneurship during my service year. Prior to my service, I have always dreamt of a civil service job but today NYSC has sold me brand new ideas which ultimately changed my mind - set through SAED. My destiny has changed for the better as I am now financially independent. I also have two other young persons working with me in my food business”<sup>50</sup>

Most of corps members have conceded that it was through the NYSC that they learnt how to develop a budget to start small scale enterprises. A study by Mike Nwosun on young graduate entrepreneurs in Anambra State shows that most of them save their meager NYSC monthly allowances to startup businesses while others were assisted with loans accessed.<sup>51</sup> In essence, there is huge labour mobility and movement of capital within the nation involving youths. This has helped to improve the economy in no more small measure.

Added to this is the fact that the scheme also organises exhibitions where inventions and innovations by corps members from diverse technical fields are promoted and assisted to be able to explore their course contents and display their talents. Companies and industrialists usually scout for such talents. It should be noted that the yam pounding machine was first idealised and innovated by a corps member but was hijacked by the Japanese due to the unseriousness of the Nigerian government.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Muhammad Bello Abdussalam, an ex-corp member, 2019 batch “B” stream I, interviewed 2, October, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> Hamza Muhammad, an indigene of Kaduna camped at Obubra camp, Cross Rivers, 218 Batch “B” Stream I, interviewed at Badarawa Kaduna on 6<sup>th</sup>, Oct 2020

<sup>51</sup> Jacob John, a Kaduna indigene served at Nasarawa State 2018 batch “B” Stream I.

<sup>52</sup> Nwoso, M. (2016), “Youth Entrepreneurship Among University Graduates in Anambra State” p116

The scheme has also helped many youths to identify their hidden talents and potential which they possibly were not aware they possessed until they were called up for the service. They are able to develop these talents through various competitions right from orientation camp and beyond, in parades, camp night activities, drama, beauty contest, dancing, music, cultural display, and sports (such as football, basketball, volleyball, race, etc). All these have helped corps members in identifying their talents and further engaging them in future assignments. Ozinna submitted that during his orientation in 2015, he joined the cultural dance group and discovered he could dance after joining the group. Consequently, he was posted to the Kogi State capital where he became part of the state dance troupe where they usually went on different dance tours across the state and outside. Some of his colleagues also made that discovery during their service year and can now eke out a living out of that accidental discovery.<sup>53</sup>

As a result of the NYSC, many have also unconsciously self-educated themselves and developed interest in one new skill or the other. For instance, many corps members accidentally stumbled upon their teaching potential from where they have steadily become professionals in the field. It is a policy of the NYSC to post corps members to teach in schools across the country, particularly in the rural areas. This has a highly positive impact on both the corps members and the young people who are being taught in such schools. It could therefore be argued that in most states of the federation, the public-school system would have been on shaky grounds or totally comatose without the presence of the corps members, particularly in the rural areas. Nigerians have a faulty attitude to government jobs, especially teachers in public schools. Many are on government payroll as teachers, but they have either abandoned their jobs or work in other private schools or organisations, and this is because there is lack of proper supervision in public schools. The

pupils and students of such schools are therefore often times neglected and left without teachers. The NYSC is the only body that has succeeded to an extent in keeping the public-school system alive.<sup>54</sup>

### Youths' Socio-Cultural Development Under the NYSC

The objectives of the NYSC reveal that it is a program that targets youths and promotes national unity through the removal of cultural and geographical bias. It does this by posting corps



Fig. 36: Corps Members in a Cultural Day Outing, 2020

members to different states other than their states of origin and offering them training in endurance to overcome the problems associated with serving in such new environments. The training also helps them to integrate with, and acculturate the ways of life of their host communities.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the scheme has helped to

<sup>54</sup> Ozinna Ntukogu, 27, ex corps member from Anambra State Served in Kogi State, 2015, interviewed at the Centre For Leadership and Complex Military Operation, NDA, Kaduna on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2020

<sup>55</sup> Isa Wana, October, 2020.

a large extent to eliminate prejudices and conservative attitude of some youths prior to their mobilisation for the NYSC. Most of the youths are exposed to different culture, traditions, norms, and perspective in life, and often transport these to different locations. This helps to broadens their minds, awareness and perspectives to become more cosmopolitan in national issues and national identity.

A graduate of Umaru Musa Yar' Adua University, Katsina, who served in Kaduna State pointed out that "the NYSC is very instrumental in sensitising me to know who I am as a Nigerian citizen, and to acknowledge the existence of other people totally different from me. My life was never the same after the orientation camp".<sup>56</sup> An ex-corps member admitted that before he embarked on the national scheme in Kogi State, he had no idea that there are persons among the Yoruba ethnic group that are Muslims. His service year also brought him close to Muslims for the first time in his life as he had never encountered any of them at close proximity, and so had no idea that it was possible for him to co-exist with Muslims in one space. From that service year, according to him, his whole perception about other parts of Nigeria and its people changed. This influenced his passion to learn more about the north, which brought about his eventual migration to Kaduna State.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, the NYSC helps to build bridges between the Nigerian youths upon whose shoulders the future of the nation rests, as the older generation would naturally soon pass out. Most of these young Nigerians were born, raised and educationally trained in their various localities within their respective states. Therefore, they may never have had the chance to visit other regions, a situation that would definitely impede national unity and development if such youths were to meet in the future as leaders to make decision say, for example, in the National Assembly or a national conference. With such a

<sup>56</sup> Deabon, M.T and Daerego, I.T (2020), "The Influence of the National Youth Service Corps Entrepreneurship and Skill Acquisition Program on Youths Empowerment in Rivers state" *International Journal of Humanities and social Sciences*, Vol. 7 Issue No. 6, pp146-148

<sup>57</sup> Abdullahi Aboki, served in 2019 batch "C" Kaduna; interviewed 1st, Oct, 2020

localised exposure, such youths would naturally have remained narrow minded, thinking that Nigeria begins and ends in their various states or regions. However, through the NYSC, they are helped to build bridges and appreciate the diversity of the Nigerian state, as virtually every ethnic group, religion and state is represented in the orientation camp. Not only on camp, even in their places of primary assignment and through their Community Development Service (CDS), corps members that served together with others from different family and socio-ethnic and religious backgrounds have a nationalistic perspective. During their one-year service they live like one big family with the *esprit de corps* disposition, and this helps them to create a sense of national identity which develops their capacity for future endeavors. This way, the NYSC's ideal of national unity, development and consciousness is realized. Another way this is achieved is through the idea of inter-marriages which the scheme encourages and has recorded between corps members from different ethnic backgrounds.<sup>58</sup>

In sum therefore, the NYSC, through all its programmes, have helped to educate Nigerian youths both formally and informally, as millions of them in Nigeria have benefitted from the program.

### **NYSC and Challenges of Youth Development**

Despite the great and noble youth development ideals of the NYSC scheme and its major achievements, the scheme is still bedeviled with many challenges that continuously impact negatively on its performance. One of these challenges is the paucity of funds particularly in the SAED programme. Most of the programmes are underfunded and thus corps members have not been able to benefit maximally from the programme. Corp members also deal with insufficient capital to start a business after service year, after they have learnt different skills from the

<sup>58</sup> Ozinna Ntukogu, 27, ex corps member from Anambra State Served in Kogi State, 2015, interviewed at the Centre For Leadership and Complex Military Operation, NDA, Kaduna on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2020

SAED programme. Many have great ideas that cannot be translated into reality and have had many entrepreneurial dreams shattered from prolonged non- implementation. Many accuse the government of only using the young graduates as sources of cheap labour and have not adequately intervened in giving them access to soft loans.<sup>59</sup> The NYSC, on the other hand, has repeatedly defended itself by making references to the availability of loans through the Bank of Industry or the CBN to corps members with clear business plans.<sup>60</sup>

Many corps members are unable to continue with the skills they had started to learn during orientation. This is because of lack of follow up initiatives and adequate training facility after camp, especially with regards to the SAED programme. Most programmes end after the orientation camp, since corps members are not under any obligation to continue with the mandatory program when out of the camp. Apart from paucity of funds, some corps members are posted to deep rural areas where they do not have access to training facilities even if they wish to continue.<sup>61</sup>

The NYSC is a product of our society, thus, there is this nonchalance in the attitudes of corps members under the skills acquisition and towards the noble drill. There is deep misconception about the scheme by corps members who see it as an avenue to secure white-collar jobs only. Many others erroneously think that there will be ready jobs waiting for them after the service year; therefore, they end up disappointed and see the scheme as a waste of time. There is strict refusal by many to committedly engage in the skills acquisition programme, as many corps members see the skills acquisition as a waste of valuable time. Consequently, it is debatable to state that the scheme has not fully achieved its aim of unification of Nigerian youths across board which could have solved the problems of

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<sup>59</sup> See for example the National Youth Service's "Security Awareness Hand Book For Corps Members and Staff" 8<sup>th</sup> edition 2018, by Watch on Security consultancy Service.

<sup>60</sup> Nwouso, M "Youth Entrepreneurship Among University Graduates in Anambra State"

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<sup>61</sup> Hamza H, 2020.

ethnic and religion crisis. However, even if the scheme has not united the nation as expected, it has, at least, provided an avenue for integration and cohesion among the youths in that they do at least mingle with one another and understand that each and every person from whatever background is uniquely different.

There is the nonchalance of the participation of other key components that make up the NYSC. The NYSC is not a federal service corp. It is rather supposed to be a partnership platform which requires the participation of the federal government, the state government, the local government, and the employers of labour with each having a role to play. In reality however, there is lack of commitment of these bodies because they erroneously believe that the NYSC is only a federal government organisation. Consequently, they do not give the scheme the needed and necessary support to succeed, so the scheme suffers greatly which is detrimental to development. Thus, the state and local governments contribute nothing while the scheme exists on 99% funding by the federal government.<sup>62</sup> There is need for greater advocacy especially for all the partnering components to give adequate support to see to the success of the scheme. All components need to understand their respective role to keep the scheme afloat.

The NYSC is also a citizen of Nigeria, and just like every Nigerian citizen, it suffers from same problems every citizen suffers from. The scheme is bedeviled by national security challenges ranging from militancy to kidnapping, banditry, arm robbery, Boko haram, cultism, and ethno-religious violence. All these ills have hampered the youth development ideals of the scheme as many corps members would not be able to go to their areas of primary assignment if such areas, as Borno or Zamfara for example, are unsecured. Plying some Nigerian roads now is seen as dangerous mission as such roads have become kidnappers' den. Also, many corps members have lost their lives as a result of communal clashes and electoral violence.<sup>63</sup> This

<sup>62</sup> Jacob John 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Enegwea G & .Umoden G, (2003), *NYSC: Twenty Years*, p. 42

resulted in mass out-cry by some Nigerians for the scrapping off of the scheme. There is also the issue of corruption on the part of the corps members which is disturbing, as there are corps members that go to their Places of Primary Assignment (PPA) only during the monthly biometric clearance; they usually connive with the NYSC officials especially at the local government level or the various heads of their PPAs to do this. This is a contradiction of the ideals of the scheme.

Many corps members are rejected from their initial PPA posting. This usually traumatises them as they are mostly strangers in these places. Most of the places of their initial postings are in their areas of specialization; so, when rejected they would have to scramble for any other place, which usually leads to their having to serve outside the area of their profession. This cripples their performance and reduces their zeal and morale. Many times, they have to contend with many inadequacies with regards to accommodation, transportation, lack of cooperation in their host communities, unavailability of portable drinking water, disregard by some employers, and so on. There is also the issue of corruption and lack of ethics by some elites in the society who want to do a quick fix for their wards to get the juiciest PPA in public and private institutions such as banks, insurance companies, and other "juicy" institutions. Although the NYSC always shows disgust for this practice, some unscrupulous staff of the scheme are still guilty of these unethical practices<sup>64</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The chapter has examined the concept of youth development in local and international contexts, the philosophy behind the creation of the NYSC scheme, the Nigerian youths as the major beneficiaries of the scheme and the political, social and economic contribution of the noble scheme in the capacity building and the development of the Nigerian youths which prepares them for

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<sup>64</sup> Chukwemeka, O and John Man, A.K (2014) "NYSC program and growing Security threats" African Development Watch, Vol 2, No. 2, p.45

the future tasks of nation building and sustenance. The chapter also highlights some of the challenges bedeviling the scheme, especially with regards to the supposed beneficiaries, the Nigerian youths. The scheme is a product of its own society; as such, it suffers just like other Nigerians in such areas as insecurity, lack of adequate funding, poor electricity and water, insecurity, nonchalance of corps members towards the skill acquisition, abscondment from the place of primary assignment, and so on. The scheme may not have achieved all its cardinal objectives particularly in the aspect of national unity; however, it has promoted cohesion and integration to some extent. The paper therefore recommends that there should be greater advocacy so that all the components that make up the scheme will clearly understand their respective roles to keep the scheme afloat. These components include the state and local governments, and private individuals. The government should increase funding in many areas of inadequacies bedeviling the scheme, particularly the SAED programme. There should be backward and forward relationship. Backward relationship in the sense that the university system should rejig their curriculum to include the SAED (skills acquisition programme) so that the NYSC will continue from where the tertiary institutions stop. Forward relationship will mean that the government should increase the funding of corps members' proposals for businesses to allow for greater self-sustenance. There should also be engagement of private individuals and corporations in the development of youths in order to move the economy forward.

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## Chapter Nineteen

# NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS AND THE LABOUR MARKET

*Emma-Lawson Hassan*

*Department of History & Diplomatic Studies  
Federal University, Wukari*

### Introduction

Our focus in this paper is to look at the relationship that has existed between the NYSC scheme and the labour market with regards to the nature of specialised skills that the scheme has been able to pool over the years. These specialised skills cover the various aspects of input of manpower, and how this has impacted on nation building throughout the period of the scheme's existence. To be able to do this, the paper begins with an inquiry into the circumstances that informed the establishment of the NYSC programme by looking briefly at the colonial and immediate post- independence eras. The paper goes on to look at the objectives that the scheme was set up to achieve, its operation and the social environment within which it has been operating. The paper also looks at the relationship between the NYSC and the labour market in terms of the various skills that the participants in the national service have acquired and how these skills have been deployed as human capital to the various aspects of the Nigerian economy. Finally, the paper undertakes an analysis of the impact of the National Youth Service Corps on nation building by looking at its achievements, challenges and prospects.

### Background to the Establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme

A critical look at the NYSC programme is likely to begin with the question: why the NYSC? Several answers have been given from

both government circle and the general public as to why the scheme was established in the first place. Findings reveal that most of the answers given agree on the fact that having fought a civil war between 1969 and 1970 which resulted in the dislocation of social relationships and the loss of millions of lives and property running into several millions of naira, the Nigerian nation found the need to deliberately put certain mechanisms in place in order to mitigate the negative effects of this unfortunate war on the country. The NYSC scheme is said to have been one of such mechanisms put in place as part of the “3R” programme- reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation- put together by the then Federal Military Government under General Yakubu Gowon at the end of the civil war. The aim was to build bridges across the ethnic and religious divisions which became widened as a result of the war, and to foster the spirit of Nigerian nationalism.<sup>1</sup> But as students of history, we know full well that the Nigerian civil war was itself a product of history and that history goes back to the colonial period or even beyond. However, in order not to drag us into a plethora of historical details, it will suffice to resort to the brief but fairly holistic and thus comprehensive historical background that the NYSC handbook seems to provide us with. It is not only a primary source as far as the NYSC programme is concerned, it also goes beyond the unfortunate civil war in looking at the genesis of the scheme when it states that,

Nigeria is a country whose colonial history and experience in the immediate post-independence era were characterized by ethnic loyalties, mutual group suspicion and distrust, that culminated in the traumatic events of a bloody civil war. As a developing country, Nigeria is further plagued by the problems attendant upon a condition of underdevelopment, namely; poverty, mass

<sup>1</sup>See the objectives of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme which are clearly spelt out in Decree No. 51 of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1993 as stated in the NYSC Act Cap N84 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004 and the NYSC Handbook revised in 1999, pp.6-10.

illiteracy, acute shortage of high skilled manpower (coupled with most uneven distribution of the skilled people that are available), woefully inadequate socio-economic infrastructural facilities, i.e. housing, water and sewage facilities, road, health-care services, and effective communication system.<sup>2</sup>

The picture of Nigeria that we get from the above quotation is not only apt but it is also so clear that it does not need further elaboration here. But it is important to note something generally about the early phase of the relationship between Africa and Europe which culminated into colonialism and later the British version of this obnoxious foreign system. Chinua Achebe seems to have provided us with a brief but a broad view of that relationship when he wrote that,

An Igbo proverb tells us that a man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body. The rain that beat Africa began four or five hundred years ago, from the "discovery" of Africa by Europe, through the transatlantic slave trade, to the Berlin Conference of 1885. That controversial gathering of the world's leading European powers precipitated what we now call the scramble for Africa, which created new boundaries that did violence to Africa's ancient societies and resulted in tension-prone modern states. It took place without African consultation or representation, to say the least.<sup>3</sup>

As one of the "tension-prone modern states", Nigeria is bound to exhibit all the characteristics that have been named in the above quotation from the NYSC Hand Book, and even more for obvious reasons. Looking at the British conquest of what later became Nigeria, it is clear to see that the country was a

<sup>2</sup>National Youth Service Corps: NYSC Hand Book, Revised in 1999, p.6

<sup>3</sup>Achebe, C. (2012) *THERE WAS A COUNTRY: A Personal History of Biafra*, Penguin Books Ltd., London

conglomerate of different groups of people who lived in independent and semi-independent kingdoms and states with different historical and socio-economic backgrounds, but who were later put together by the British colonial authorities through the process of amalgamation for the purpose of economic exploitation. It is also clear that the process of amalgamation which lasted up to 1914 was neither done in consultation with the various polities that were being woven together nor was time and efforts expended to allow for necessary adjustments on the part of the people in order to blend with each other. Rather, the process appears to have been imposed ruthlessly as in most cases it involved open warfare between the people and the colonizers. And throughout the period of colonial rule, nothing was done to deliberately forge unity among the various groups and sections of the country; instead, the British colonial policies which were based on the principle of divide-and-rule only succeeded in polarizing the people and the various sections the more. This is the kind of colonial history that Nigeria experienced and reference is hereby being made to it in order to highlight the background to the establishment of the NYSC programme.

Talking about the experience of the country 'in the immediate post-independence era', available evidence speaks for themselves. At independence, what was handed over by the British was an entity that was regionalised along ethnic loyalties with 'mutual group suspicion and distrust' as stated in the above quotation from the NYSC handbook. And the socio-economic condition that prevailed during and after colonialism was that of dependency and underdevelopment which was characterised by all the negative and disadvantageous variables that have been named in that quotation. This unfortunate situation was worsened by the almost three years of unfortunate civil war that was fought, which left us with monumental consequences in terms of the loss of lives and property as well as the accompanying socio-economic dislocations.

This was the prevailing circumstance under which the National Youth Service Corps programme was established in 1973 with Ahmadu Ali serving as the first Director-General of the NYSC until 1975. He was succeeded by several senior military officers with the incumbent Director-General being Brigadier-General Shuaibu Ibrahim. Having looked briefly at the background of the NYSC programme, we shall now proceed to look at some of the objectives of the scheme.

**Objectives of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme** Based on the above brief background information on the NYSC programme, it is fairly clear to begin to visualise some of the objectives that the scheme was established to accomplish. These objectives and the mode of operation of the NYSC scheme towards the achievements of its mandate are clearly spelt out in Decree No. 51 of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1993 as follows:

- To inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work, and of patriotic and loyal service to Nigeria in any situation they may find themselves
- To raise the moral tone of Nigerian youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement
- To develop in Nigerian youths the attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilisation in the national interest
- To enable Nigerian youths acquire the spirit of self-reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self-employment
- To contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy
- To develop common ties among the Nigerian youths and promote national unity and integration
- To remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all

**ethnic groups**

- To develop a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of Nigeria
- The equitable distribution of members of the service corps and the effective utilisation of their skills in areas of national needs
- That as far as possible youths are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin
- That such group of youths assigned to work together is as representative of Nigeria as far as possible
- That the Nigerian youths are exposed to the modes of living of the people in different parts of Nigeria
- That the youths are encouraged to eschew religious intolerance by accommodating religious differences
- That members of the service corps are encouraged to seek at the end of their one-year national service, career employment all over Nigeria, thus promoting the free movement of labour
- That employers are induced partly through their experience with members of the service corps to employ more readily and on a permanent basis, qualified Nigerians, irrespective of their states of origin. Unfortunately, most employers discard these young graduates, waiting for the next orientation programme to get fresh set of graduates.<sup>4</sup>

Although the Scheme was established by Decree 24 of 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1973, twenty years later, it was repealed by Decree 51 of 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1993, which is now quoted as NYSC Act CAP N84 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria.<sup>5</sup> Three cardinal points that are clearly stated in this Act regarding the establishment and objectives of the National Youth Service Corps are worthy of note here. Section 1 sub-section 2 of the Act states that:

The service corps shall see to:

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<sup>4</sup>See NYSC ACT Cap N84 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004 pp.1-3 and NYSC HAND BOOK, revised in 1999, pp.8-9

- (a) the proper encouragement and development of common ties among the Nigeria youth,
- (b) the promotion of national unity; and
- (c) development of Nigerian youths and Nigeria into a great and dynamic economy.<sup>6</sup>

A recent editorial in the NYSC NEWS also seems to provide us with a good background objective of the NYSC Scheme when it states that,

Prior to the establishment of the Scheme, the Nation was bedevilled by ethnic mistrusts which resulted in a thirty- month civil war that left in its wake millions of casualties... It was at the end of hostilities that the then leadership of the country came to the realisation that it will take more than the force of the arms to weld the entire country into one indivisible whole. Accordingly, searchlight was beamed on Nigerian youths to begin the process of building a country rising from the ashes of the war into an egalitarian and cohesive one, devoid of hate and stereotypes that divide us.<sup>7</sup>

The editorial goes further to assert that, "...the establishment of the Service Corps was indeed a major post-colonial conscious effort to fashion out a nation out of several ethnic nationalities that formed Nigeria in 1914."<sup>8</sup> It is on this premise that one can say that the primary purpose of the NYSC is to inculcate in the Nigerian youths the spirit of selfless service to the community, and to emphasise the spirit of oneness and brotherhood of all Nigerians, irrespective of cultural or social backgrounds. In other words, the scheme was initiated to foster unity among

<sup>5</sup> See the Editorial of NYSC NEWS, A Journal of NYSC Directorate Headquarters, APMAJU522020, see also NYSC Handbook, *op.cit.*, p.7

<sup>6</sup> NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS ACT: CAP N84 LAWS OF THE FEDERATION OF NIGERIA 2004, NYSC ACT<sup>1</sup>

<sup>7</sup> NYSC NEWS,*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Nigerians and to promote service to the nation. It is against this backdrop that one can conclude that the conception and founding of the NYSC scheme was purely for the purpose of achieving unity for a nation that was divided along ethnic and geo-political lines, and also one that was further fractured by an unfortunate civil war and the strong desire to rebuild it.<sup>9</sup> A list of eight-point objectives of the NYSC scheme are clearly stated on pages 8-9 of the NYSC handbook which we have already made reference to in this paper. An abridged version of those objectives has been stated thus:

To achieve the purpose of building a united nation, encouragement and development of common ties among Nigerian youths; promotion of national unity; and development of Nigerian youths and Nigeria into a great and dynamic economy became the mandate of the Service Corps which today is the biggest youth-mobilisation agency in Africa.<sup>10</sup>

Be that as it may, the establishment of the NYSC scheme and its long period of existence does not seem to have been an *Uhuru* yet as far as the problems and issues that brought it into being are concerned. Rather, to borrow from the late playwright and patriot, Chinua Achebe, the effort towards achieving unity in Nigeria and indeed nation building seems to be 'morning yet on our creation day' for some obvious reasons which we shall later interrogate in this paper. We shall now proceed to look at the mode of operation of the NYSC scheme since it is from here that we will be able to know whether or not the scheme was properly positioned to achieve those objectives for which it was established.

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<sup>9</sup>NYSC was created on 22 May, 1973 based on decree No. 24 which has now been repealed and replaced by Decree 51 of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1993 and later revised in 1999, which stated that the scheme was created "with a view to ensure the proper encouragement and development of common ties among the youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity", as already stated above.

<sup>10</sup>NYSC NEWS, *op.cit.*

## Brief operational guideline of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme

How the Federal Government intended to achieve unity and nation building in Nigeria through the instrumentality of the NYSC programme is embedded in the operational guideline of the scheme. However, for the purpose of this study, we shall only give a summary of the guideline here. Corps members (i.e. participants in the National Youth Service Scheme) are normally posted to states other than their states of origin where they are expected to mix with people from different ethnic groups, social and family backgrounds, and learn the culture of the indigenes in the locations they are posted to. This action is aimed at exposing the youths to the socio-cultural diversity of the nation and, thus, bring about unity in the country by helping the youths to appreciate other ethnic and religious groups. There is an "orientation" period of approximately three weeks which is spent in a military controlled camp as soon as corps members are called up for the national service away from family and friends. The camps are situated across the 36 states of the federation including Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. In these camps, corps members are taught some entrepreneurial skills. There is also a "passing out ceremony" at the end of the three weeks' orientation camp after which corps members are posted to their Place of Primary Assignment (PPA). They are expected to work as full-time staff at their PPA with exception of one working day devoted for community development service.

After eleven months at their PPA, corps members are allowed one month of vacation before their final passing out ceremony where they would be issued certificates of completion.<sup>11</sup> Thereafter, the Corps members are released into the labour market thus, becoming a source of labour supply as employees to the national and indeed international labour markets. Initially, especially in the 1970s and early 1980s, a good

number of corps members got absorbed in their places of primary assignment as staff on full employment, but with time and as we speak today, only a negligible few get such an opportunity in the country, hence the rapid rise in the number of unemployed graduates and the phenomenon of human capital flight or what is commonly referred to as *brain-drain* among this category of youths who pass through the NYSC scheme.

It would appear that the essence of the orientation that corps members undergo during the service year is to prepare them for the tasks ahead of them by introducing them to their new environment, its potential and the challenges they are likely to face. Apart from that, corps members are also equipped with some additional skills while in camp, apart from the ones they have acquired from the various institutions of higher learning they are coming from. These new skills are usually referred to as entrepreneurial skills. The essence of the acquisition of these skills is both for immediate and life-time usage by corps members as will be seen later in the paper. However, let us start with the main thrust of the paper as suggested in the title, namely, the relationship between the NYSC scheme and the labour market.

### The Labour Market and its Dynamics

Having examined what the NYSC stands for, it is important to know what constitutes the labour market before going further to interrogate the relationship that has been existing between it and the NYSC scheme in Nigeria. By simple definition, the labour market is also known as the job market. It refers essentially to the supply of and demand for labour, in which employees provide the supply and the employers provide the demand. Labour is a commodity that is supplied by labourers in exchange for a wage paid by demanding firms. Labour can be classified into two main categories, namely, unskilled and skilled labour. As the job market continues to change and evolve, it is important to understand the demand for unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled

labour. Specialised skills are becoming more and more sought after in our increasingly technical world, while the demand for unskilled labour continues to go down. A brief definition of these categories of labour may throw more light on the argument being advanced in this paper. Unskilled labour refers to workers who possess no particular skills and are likely to have no formal education. This type of work usually involves simple duties that do not require judgement. In some cases, unskilled labour requires physical strength and exertion. While unskilled labour jobs are dwindling due to technological advancements leaving fewer and fewer jobs for these types of workers in the developed economies, the opposite is the case in the underdeveloped countries (Nigeria inclusive) where there is less technological advancement.

Semi-Skilled labour does not require advanced training or specialised skills. It does, however, require more skills than an unskilled labour job. People who perform semi-skilled labour usually have more than a high school certificate but less than a college degree or its equivalent. The types of skills necessary for this are not complex, but usually include the ability to monitor and perform repetitive tasks. Skilled labour refers to workers who have specialised training or skills. These labourers are capable of exercising judgement and have knowledge of the particular trade or industry where they work. People who perform skilled labour will most likely have a college degree.<sup>12</sup> Unskilled and semi-skilled jobs are, however, dwindling because the world is drastically different now than it was 50 years ago, and menial jobs are no longer in surplus. Technology is changing the way things are being done, and we need the skill-set to keep up! When we invest in training and education therefore, we try to market our skills and thus guarantee that the world will open up to us. But this is only true for the developed countries where technology has been fully incorporated into the

production process. In most of the so-called developing countries (Nigeria inclusive) where technology is still at a low ebb in the production process, menial jobs seem to be preponderant. This scenario seems to negatively impact on the tertiary/service sector, which has a greater variety of jobs that require different skills, and may partly be responsible for the present increase in the number of unemployed graduates in the country. We shall return to this issue later in the paper.

When we talk of labour, we are referring to the number of workers in the economy, and the effort they put into producing goods and services. Labour force participation is therefore an important component of economic growth: as more people participate in the labour force, firms are able to expand employment and increase production. Greater labour force participation is associated with higher tax revenues because the number of employed people and, therefore, the number of people paying income and payroll taxes tend to rise. It becomes imperative for both the public and private sectors in Nigeria to ensure the full participation of several thousands of corps members that pass out every year into the labour market. In the labour market, it is assumed that workers move to where there is demand for their labour.<sup>13</sup> It follows therefore that labour markets or job markets function through the interaction of workers and employers. In this paper therefore we are looking at the corps members as the employees and government and private businesses or corporate organisations as employers. Experts have advised that the labour market should be viewed at both the macroeconomic and microeconomic levels since it is a major component of any economy, and it is intricately linked to markets for capital, goods, and services. While unemployment rates and labour productivity rates are two important macroeconomic gauges, individual wages and number of hours worked are two important microeconomic gauges.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See [corporatefinanceinstitute.com](http://corporatefinanceinstitute.com) > labour

<sup>14</sup> [www.investopedia.com](http://www.investopedia.com), August 31, 2020

For the purpose of this paper however, we shall be focusing more on the macroeconomics because it is the study of aggregates or averages covering the entire economy, such as total employment, national income, national output, total investment, total consumption, aggregate supply, aggregate demand, etc.<sup>15</sup>, hence it is more relevant to the present effort. For instance, at the macroeconomic level, supply and demand are influenced by domestic and international market dynamics, as well as factors such as immigration, the age of the population, and education levels. Here, also, relevant measures include unemployment, productivity, participation rates, total income, and gross domestic product (GDP). This is why the study of macroeconomic variables is indispensable for understanding the working of the economy. Jhingan seems to have gone further to justify this position by noting that:

Macroeconomics is extremely useful from the point of view of economic policy. Modern governments, especially of the underdeveloped economies, are confronted with innumerable national problems. They are the problems of overpopulation, inflation, balance of payment, general underproduction, etc. The main responsibility of these governments rests in the regulation and control of overpopulation, general prices, general volume of trade, general outputs, etc.<sup>16</sup>

The above quotation has thrown some light on why more emphasis has been given to macroeconomic concepts than microeconomic ones in this paper. For one, whether we are considering the NYSC or the labour market we are dealing with aggregates with usually widespread consequences for the entire country and its economy. Secondly, Nigeria is one of the underdeveloped economies that is confronted with virtually all the problems that are enumerated in the above quotation. Some

<sup>15</sup>M.L. Jhingan (2008) Macro-Economic Theory (Delhi: Vrinda Publications (P) Ltd., 11<sup>th</sup> Revised Edition, p.1

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p.3

of these problems have given rise to the present high level of graduate unemployment and youth restiveness in the society. We shall return to this point at a more appropriate time as the paper progresses. Finally, what we must not fail to point out here is something that affects supply and demand in the labour market. This has to do with the threat of automation as computer programs gain the ability to do more- complex tasks; the effects of globalisation as enhanced communication and better transport links allow work to be moved across borders.

## **Relationship between the NYSC Scheme and the Labour Market**

In looking at the relationship between the National Youth Service Corps scheme and the labour market, two issues engage the attention of the researcher, namely, the age of the population and education levels, which, at the macroeconomic level, are among the factors influencing supply and demand in the labour market. We have earlier mentioned other factors, though only in passing, in this paper. As a scheme that brings together young graduates from higher institutions of learning whose age bracket is between 18 and 30 years, the NYSC scheme can be said to be a supplier of young and highly educated middle cadre manpower to the labour market. In other words, the scheme can be said to supply more of skilled and less of semi-skilled labour. The relationship between the NYSC and the labour market can therefore be better understood in terms of human capital formation or development. But, first, we need to know what is meant by human capital. Human capital is the stock of habits, knowledge, skills, education, the right experience, social and personality attributes embodied in the ability to perform labour so as to produce economic value.<sup>17</sup> Human capital is unique in the sense that it differs from the physical capital. A comparative study of these two forms of capital has revealed that,

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<sup>17</sup> See M.L. Jhingan (2016) *The Economics of Development and Planning*, Vrinda Publications (P) Ltd., Delhi, pp.424-5

The growth of Western European countries and the USA has been based more on investment in physical capital than in human capital in their earlier phases of development. But in the case of the underdeveloped countries the need for human capital in the form of educated persons in different vocations is greater to provide the missing components in the initial stages of their development.<sup>18</sup>

Human capital is therefore an intangible asset that can be classified as the economic value of a worker's experience and skills. In its wider sense, human capital includes assets like education, training, intelligence, skills, health, and social services in general which employers value such as loyalty and punctuality.<sup>19</sup> In its narrower sense however, it implies education and training which has become more conventional to talk about because expenditure on education and training is more capable of measurement than expenditure on social services.<sup>20</sup> But all of them are called human capital because people cannot be separated from their knowledge, skills, health, or values in the way they can be separated from their financial and physical assets. Education, training, and health are therefore the most important investments in human capital. According to Jhingan,

Economists are, therefore, of the view that it is the lack of investment in human capital that has been responsible for the slow growth of the LDCs. Unless such economies spread education, knowledge, and know-how, and raise the level of skills and physical efficiency of the people, the productivity of physical capital is reduced.<sup>21</sup>

It is for the above reason that governments and corporate organisations who want to accelerate their growth rate usually

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp.426-7

<sup>19</sup><https://en.m.wikipedia.org>. Accessed 21/09/20 <sup>20</sup>Jhingan, The economics of Development..., op.cit., p.425

invest in human capital through education and training. When economists speak of “education”, the focus is not strictly on workers obtaining college degrees. Education is often broken into specific levels, namely; primary – junior secondary school; senior secondary – middle school, high school, and preparatory school; and post-secondary – university, community college, vocational schools.

We have earlier alluded to the fact that a country's economy becomes more productive as the proportion of educated workers increases, since educated workers will then be more equipped to efficiently carry out tasks. We hasten to add that this is more so when such tasks require literacy and critical thinking. However, obtaining a higher level of education also carries a cost. A country does not have to provide an extensive network of colleges and or universities, as is the case in contemporary Nigeria, to benefit from education; it can provide basic literacy programs and still see economic improvements. It is however unfortunate that despite the extensive network of colleges and universities in the country, there seems not to be proportionate economic improvements. This situation is compounded by both the undue emphasis on certificates rather than knowledge and the relegation of technical and vocational qualifications in preference to university degrees. Worse still, today, the country's general literacy level is anything but low. As we all know, the best the conventional universities can offer is in the realm of theories and this realm needs to combine sufficiently with the practical aspects of knowledge to be able to translate into economic improvements. It is this gap that the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) program of the NYSC attempts to fill as will be seen later in the chapter.

Though the NYSC is often presented as a child of circumstance because of the Nigerian civil war that preceded it, it is however clear that economic growth and the general development of the nation formed part of the considerations that went into its formation. As already noted in this paper, part of the mandate of the NYSC is 'the development of Nigerian youths

and Nigeria into a great and dynamic economy'. This is purely an economic consideration and experts seem to reason that education and training can lead to improved levels of quality and production.<sup>22</sup> It is therefore not by accident that the first criterion for one to be called up to serve under the NYSC scheme is evidence of higher educational qualifications. This is mainly because it has become clear to policy makers and top business managers that knowledge and skills of workers available in the labour supply is a key determinant for both business and economic growth. The productivity of an economy is also said to rise as the number of educated workers increases since skilled workers can perform tasks more efficiently. Moreover, in this era of information and communication technology (ICT), economies and virtually everything in life is rapidly becoming knowledge-driven. Understanding how education and training interact with the economy therefore can help to explain why some workers, businesses, and economies flourish, while others falter. A study on how demographic factors relate to participation in the labour force by the American Congressional Budget Office (CBO) in the US shows, among other things, that people with more education are more likely to participate in the labour force than people with less education. The study goes on to show that:

In 2017, the participation rate of men ages 25 to 54 with at least college degree was 9 percentage points higher than the rate for men without a college degree. For women, the difference was 13 percentage points. For both sexes, since about 2000, the difference in labour force participation between people with more education and people with less education has grown. Between 1990 and 2017, the share of men with at least a college degree increased from 27 percent to 33 percent and share of women with at least a college degree climbed from 23 percent to 38 percent. In CBO's estimation, those shares will continue to increase,

boosting labour force participation higher than it would be if educational attainment did not rise over time.<sup>23</sup>

Though lack of adequate database seems to limit the extent to which we can carry out a similar study like the above in Nigeria; the result of such a study as presented here may not be far from what we are likely to get in this country since America has always been our role model in virtually all aspects of our national life. Since the NYSC scheme, as earlier noted, provides an avenue for both the assembling of graduates from different institutions of higher learning across the country and their training in different skills for the purpose of national development, it clearly demonstrates the importance its founding fathers attach to education as one of the factors affecting the participation of people in the labour force. As noted in the CBO report on the rate of labour force participation for people between ages 25 to 54, those ages are typically done with schooling but not yet near retirement age, and as a group they have the highest participation rate in the labour force.

We have already noted that apart from the requisite educational qualifications that prospective participants in the NYSC programme are expected to come with from their various institutions, they are also subjected to some form of training in the orientation camps before they pass out to serve. This training is usually conducted under the aegis of the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) program. This brings us to the issue of the specialised skills that the NYSC scheme supplies to the labour market. But before we go into this there is a concern that should continue to agitate the minds of the reader. The concern is that in trying to draw a relationship between the NYSC and the Nigerian labour market, what immediately comes to mind is the challenge of the geometrical increase in youth unemployment in contemporary Nigeria. This challenge brings to the fore the question of the impact of the

NYSC on nation building. And it is because this challenge seems to be persistent that some stakeholders have recently started to question the rationale behind the continuous existence of the NYSC scheme. As we write, there is a whole lot of debate in public domain in country on whether or not the NYSC scheme be scrapped. Perhaps, by the time we go through the specialised skills that the scheme is expected to supply to the labour market, the picture may be clearer.

### **Some of the Specialised Skills that the NYSC Scheme Supplies**

From the various institutions of higher learning where the participants of the NYSC scheme are usually drawn, the graduates acquired different specialised skills as natural and social scientists- in-the-making: as public administrators, teachers, lawyers, psychologists, laboratory scientists, nurses, medical doctors, civil, electrical and mechanical engineers, pharmacists, etc. etc. At the various NYSC orientation camps, corps members are usually made to acquire some entrepreneurial skills during the three weeks spent in the various orientation camps as already noted in the paper. After graduating from the orientation camps, corps members are assumed to have been well-equipped to face some of the challenges they are expected to face not only during the service year but throughout life. Some of these challenges include the need to put both the knowledge they have acquired from their various institutions of higher learning and the specialised skills they have gotten in camp to use in their daily life as they strive towards achieving their tasks in life. But the question that quickly comes to mind is what are these skills in-camp and how are they acquired by the corps members?

The National Youth Service Corps runs a program that is aimed at the acquisition of various skills by corps members during the orientation period as earlier noted, which is known as the NYSC Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SEAD) program. It is a response to the youth unemployment challenge with a mission to create a platform

that will facilitate access of young graduates to requisite skills and resources necessary for successful entrepreneurship as a means of enhancing national development.<sup>24</sup> The circumstance that informed the setting up of SAED by the NYSC is succinctly captured in the Executive summary of the program thus,

Youth unemployment is a major challenge in the country, bringing along with it several serious socio-cultural and economic challenges. There have been several developmental initiatives across various sectors and tiers of government to address the issues... The NYSC, by virtue of her mandate, is unarguably the most critical influencer in the development of the Nigerian youth... Consequently, the scheme has been grappling with strategies to deal with these challenges with a long shot at skill acquisition, economic empowerment activities and entrepreneurship development for self-employment initiatives. This is drawing on the experience that the Nigerian educational system places little or no emphasis on skill acquisition. This gap, the NYSC is poised to close, which led to the creation of the Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) program.<sup>25</sup>

There is no doubt that SAED is part of the mandate of the NYSC scheme. It is clearly stated in the SAED program that,

The NYSC was established to, among others, promote self-reliance in the Nigerian youth through entrepreneurial development and skill acquisition... It is in recognition of these realities that the NYSC set up a Skill Acquisition & Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme as a pragmatic response to the youth unemployment challenge with

<sup>24</sup> See *Strategic Framework for the Skill Acquisition & Entrepreneurship Development (SEAD) Program of the National Youth Service Corps*, a publication of the NYSC Directorate, p.12

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.06

a mission to create a platform that will facilitate access of young graduates to requisite skills and resources necessary for successful entrepreneurship as a means of enhancing national development.<sup>26</sup>

From the above quotations, it is clear that SAED was born out of both the economic realities of contemporary Nigeria and the imbalance in the country's educational system. And by emphasising skills acquisition and entrepreneurship, the NYSC, through SAED, can be said to have taken the right step in the right direction *ab initio*. What we expect to see is the right result. However, in specific terms, the focus of the SAED programme is to, among other things,

contribute meaningfully to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all & SDG-8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and descent work for all) as well as the Federal Government's commitment to economic transformation through promotion of entrepreneurship and self-reliance particularly amongst the youth.<sup>27</sup>

How the NYSC intends to achieve the above laudable ideals, using SAED, is also enunciated in the Executive summary where it is stated that:

The SAED program has an ambitious vision to enable the creation of at least 20,000 sustainable enterprises annually, and get a minimum of 150, 000 corps members to be productively engaged, generating sustainable economic value through employment or entrepreneurship annually.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p.12

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp.07-08

In the bid to achieve the above vision, twelve 'high growth sectors' are said to have been initially selected within which the SAED programme would achieve its mandate. These sectors are: agro- allied, food processing and preservation, culture and tourism, cosmetology, information and communications technology, construction, environment, horticulture and landscaping, power and energy, education, film and photography, and automobile.<sup>29</sup> These are therefore the areas of specialised skills that the NYSC scheme can be said to be supplying to the country's economy. These skills can be said to constitute the various aspects of input of manpower that can be applied to various aspects of the Nigerian economy, though areas such as healthcare, manufacturing and mining, among others, seem to be conspicuously out of the selection by the scheme for now. This, however, does not foreclose their inclusion in the future.<sup>30</sup>

The SAED programme is resting on three well defined pillars, namely, entrepreneurship and business management, skill acquisition, and preparation for employment.<sup>31</sup> But the question to ask is how thorough or deep is the training that the corps members are made to undergo under SAED during the service year? Considering the fact that the training usually lasts for just three weeks during the period of orientation of corps members (in-camp) and at most the service year<sup>32</sup> (out-camp), it may not be deep or thorough enough to make its impact felt, though this may also depend on how intensive the training had been during this period. If one's experience is anything to go by, in the late 1980s when this writer was a corps member, the SAED programme, though not as well developed then as it is presently, was taken casually by both corps members and their staff. The reason for this nonchalance may not be unconnected to the fact that graduate unemployment level then was nowhere near what

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p.08

<sup>30</sup>On page 18, of the SAED Book, under Sector Focus Areas, it says: This selection...should not be viewed as final.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.13-14

<sup>32</sup>The General Policy Guideline for NYSC Orientation Courses specifies three weeks' duration for any orientation. See also *Ibid.*, p.12

it is today and so both the government and the citizenry never gave the programme the attention it deserved. It may also be that because the SAED programme was not what it is today in terms of organisation and funding, people tended to give it only little or no attention. But even today, can we say that government and the citizenry have given this programme the required attention? How many corps members who passed through this programme are entrepreneurs today? Going by the vision of the programme which we quoted above, it is expected to create 'at least 20, 000 sustainable enterprises annually'. But when we compare this figure to the over 2,000 corps members that established their businesses over the period of about four years as reported by a past D-G of the NYSC, Brig. Gen. S. Z. Kazaure<sup>33</sup>, it becomes clear that the vision may not only be ambitious as already alluded to in the vision statement quoted above, but may also be facing some challenges. Some of the challenges which the former D-G listed included lack of skill centres particularly in the rural areas for post camp training, training equipment, development of a friendly and less rigorous condition for assessing micro-credit required to start businesses by corps members, training and re-training of NYSC staff for efficient management of the programme for sustainability, and support for regular monitoring, supervision and evaluation of corps entrepreneurs' activities.<sup>34</sup> But the good news today is that some of these inadequacies are already being taken care. The current D-G of the NYSC, Brigadier-General S. Ibrahim opines that,

We have SAED Mega Centers in Gombe for the North-East geo-political zone. We also have one in Kazaure, Jigawa State for the North-West zone which is almost at 95% level of completion... We are about to start the construction of a SAED mega-Centre for the North-Central in Keffi. The scheme also has a SAED centre in

<sup>33</sup>The SAED Book, *op.cit.*, p.01

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

Ekiti State for the South-West and we intend to expand the scope.<sup>35</sup>

As the first pillar of the NYSC SAED programme, entrepreneurship is also said to be the key to contemporary global economic development. Jhingan, for example, has observed that, whatever be the form of economic and political set-up of the country, entrepreneurship is essential for economic development. In a socialist state, the state is the entrepreneur. So is the case in underdeveloped countries where private entrepreneurship is shy in undertaking the risks associated with new ventures. But in advanced capitalist societies, private entrepreneurs have played the crucial role in economic development.<sup>36</sup>

If entrepreneurship has become the focus in global economic development strive, the NYSC in particular, and Nigeria in general, must do everything possible to remove all the bottlenecks that impede progress in this area of human endeavour. In his analysis of the factors that impede the development of entrepreneurship in underdeveloped countries, Jhingan opined that,

Entrepreneurship is inhibited by the *social system* which denies opportunities for creative faculties. The force of custom, the rigidity of status and the distrust of new ideas and of the exercise of intellectual curiosity, combine to create an atmosphere inimical to experiment and innovation. In LDCs, traditional attitudes discourage full utilisation of the human resources. People are ranked not according to their capacity to do particular jobs but by sex, caste, clan and kinship. Individualistic spirit is absent. People prefer traditional trades and professions rather than venture in new trades.<sup>37</sup>

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\*NYSC NEWS: A Journal of NYSC Directorate Headquarters, APMAJU522020, p.70

<sup>35</sup>Jhingan, *The Economics of Development...op.cit.*, p.439

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp.440-1

In his address during the 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NYSC, which we have quoted below, the current Director-General of the scheme named some of the challenges of the NYSC to include 'other dynamics of the operating environment.' Needless to state here that this phrase expresses exactly the same thing with what is referred to as the 'social system' in the above quotation. And that all the characteristics of this system as expressed above are what have been playing out in contemporary Nigeria means they constitute part of what is generally but negatively known as the "Nigerian factor", which is nothing but simply the failure of leadership in the political history of the country.<sup>38</sup> As a matter of fact, these characteristics impede not only the achievement of the SAED programme of the NYSC or the entire scheme only, but also all other things that make for the socio-economic development of the country. This is why Acemoglu and Robinson have rightly observed that "Countries differ in their economic success because of their different institutions, the rules influencing how the economy works, and the incentives that motivate the people."<sup>39</sup> They go further to conclude that, Political and economic institutions, which are ultimately the choice of society, can be inclusive and encourage economic growth. Or they can be extractive and become impediments to economic growth. Nations fail when they have extractive economic institutions, supported by extractive political institutions that impede and even block economic growth. But this means that the choice of institutions – that is, the politics of institutions – is central to our quest for understanding the reasons for the success and failure of nations.<sup>40</sup>

Nigeria and indeed majority of countries in the world operate extractive political and economic institutions, which explains why they fail. They are extractive institutions because they are designed to extract incomes and wealth from one subset

<sup>38</sup> See Chinua Achebe (1984) *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Heinemann Educational Books, Essex, UK.

<sup>39</sup> Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson (2012) *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*, Crown Publishing Group, New York, p.73

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83

of society, especially the great mass of the people, to benefit a different subset, who are mostly a few. On the other hand, inclusive political and economic institutions allow and encourage participation by the great mass of the people in economic activities that make best use of their talents and skills and that enable individuals to make the choices they wish.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Impact of the NYSC on Nation Building**

Set against the foregoing background, it is apparent that as a pool of human capital, the NYSC usually deploys same to the various sectors of the national economy as already noted in this paper. We have also noted that human capital affects economic growth by helping to develop an economy by expanding the knowledge and skills of its people. And that since skills provide economic value, it is undoubtedly a knowledgeable workforce that can lead to increased productivity. From a broader perspective however, the NYSC can be seen as an organisation that is expected to be of benefit to the country in three main areas: 1) to contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy, 2) to develop common ties among the Nigerian youths and promote national unity and integration and 3) to remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups. It is based on this trajectory that we shall proceed to examine in detail the impact of the scheme on nation building.

From the onset, it is important to note that the environment in which the corps members operate matters a lot in assessing the impact of the scheme on nation building. The kind of input in terms of manpower that the NYSC supplies therefore depends to a large extent on the quality of skills participants in the NYSC scheme have acquired and the conduciveness of the environment within which they operate. We must not lose sight of these two variables when looking at the performance of the NYSC scheme in the socio-economic development of the

country, or what is usually regarded as nation building. This point has been emphasised in the previous section of this discourse.

It could be argued that the NYSC programme, from inception to date, may be said to have done well in certain areas of nation building but not do well in other areas. This is because of certain challenges that the scheme is confronted with. Though we have briefly touched on some of these challenges in the paper, we shall be seeing more of them in this section of the paper. But first, it is important to understand what nation building is all about. Different scholars tend to look at the issue of nation building from different angles based on the biases of their various disciplines and the particular nation they are focusing on. This is because every nation has its peculiar problems that any attempt at nation building must have to address. However, for most African countries (Nigeria inclusive), colonialism and its legacies seem to have constituted most of the obstacles to nation building. Several definitions of nation building have become available, but for the purpose of this paper we shall be looking at the one offered by A.E. Afigbo, who sees nation building as "the search for collective identity which is co-extensive with the territorial boundaries of the nation-state, a collective identity that can become the basis of consensus, solidarity and the shared acceptance of a patterned normative order."<sup>42</sup> He goes further to argue that nation building consists of five elements namely, (a) the territory; (b) the people; (c) the institutions and systems (i.e. family, economy, religion, law, socio-political systems, etc.); (d) the technology of the society; and (e) the ideas, ideologies and other theoretical constructs which give meaning and legitimacy to the other elements of nation building.<sup>43</sup>

The problems of nation building that were to become serious obstacles to the Nigerian nation state began with the amalgamation of 1914. There existed substantial differences in

<sup>42</sup> Obaro Ikime (2006) *History, the Historian and the Nation: The Voice of a Nigerian Historian*, Heinemann Educational Books Plc, Ibadan, p.144.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*

the two protectorates (Northern and Southern Protectorates) that were amalgamated in terms of language, religion and cultural practices even though in the Northern Protectorate Islam was said to have enjoyed a wide acceptance.<sup>44</sup> The problem with the manner in which the amalgamation was made is succinctly captured by John Hatch when he observed that,

For the amalgamation to be meaningful in terms of nation building the process would have been allowed to evolve gradually or in the alternative, since the colonial situation did not allow for this, the colonial authorities would have opted for "full amalgamation" – that is "having the two sets of societies interact". Only governmental services were amalgamated. These two sets of societies were deliberately kept apart.<sup>45</sup>

We may not need to reprimand the British colonial authorities for the style of amalgamation as represented in the above quotation for the simple fact that, "...the British were pursuing their "own goals, goals which most certainly did not include the promotion of Nigerian unity."<sup>46</sup> As a result, there emerged the North-South dichotomy and all other allied dichotomies in Nigeria's national life.<sup>47</sup> In the educational sector, for instance, similar dichotomous policies were made. It has been noted by scholars that generally, neither the missionaries nor the colonial authorities were interested in producing high level manpower. All they wanted was to produce low level religious ministers and clerks for the commercial houses and government bureaucracy so that even in the south where education was not inhibited, the colonial authorities were not enthusiastic over government assistance to voluntary agency schools.<sup>48</sup> In the North – especially the Muslim areas, the Christian missionaries

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.293

<sup>45</sup> John Hatch (1971) *Nigeria: A History*, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., Ibadan, p.159

<sup>46</sup> Ikime, *op.cit.*, p.123

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.122. See also Hatch, *op.cit.*, p.159

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* Also see Hatch, *ibid.*

were not tolerated.<sup>49</sup> Commenting on the educational dichotomy between the North and the South, Okwudiba Nnoli noted that:

Western education was tolerated in non-Muslim parts of the North hence on the eve of independence (1957) whereas the South had 13,473 and 176 primary and secondary schools with 2,343,317 and 28,208 pupils and students respectively, the North had 2,080 and 18 primary and secondary schools with 185,484 and 3,643 pupils and students respectively.<sup>50</sup>

In view of the foregoing, it could be argued that as far as the problems of ethnicity and educational imbalance in our country are concerned, the NYSC programme seems to have been positioned to tackle them, at least from the point of view of the involvement of the educated youths. For apart from exposing the corps members to the diversities that are there in the country, some of the participants found themselves serving in educationally disadvantaged states of the federation where their services are usually most needed. In the process of mixing up with the groups that are found in their Place of Primary Assignment (PPA), some of the corps members take up permanent employment while others derive their spouses from there. This way, the NYSC scheme can be said to be a bridge builder, a role that is very crucial to nation building. During the 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the NYSC, the current Director-General of the scheme, Brig-General S. Ibrahim, had this to say:

In its 46 years of existence, the NYSC has recorded tremendous success in the areas of national unity and integration, health, education, rural infrastructure, free movement of labour, inter-ethnic marriages and free legal aid services to indigent persons, among others.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49.</sup>Ikime, *ibid*.

<sup>50.</sup>Okwudiba Nnoli (1980) *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Fourth Dimension Publishers, Enugu, p.118.

<sup>51.</sup>NYSC NEWS: A Journal of NYSC Directorate Headquarters, OCNODE512019, p.9

Many examples of the success story of the NYSC scheme abound in virtually all the areas that the Director-General mentioned in the above quotation. In the area of free movement of labour and inter-ethnic marriages, for instance, a participant in the scheme, Mr. Andelheme, was reported to have said that, "The NYSC brought me to the North in 1978 and many years later I am still working in the North and I'm married to a Northerner".<sup>52</sup> The present Governor of Ondo State, Chief Rotimi Akeredolu, is among many Nigerians who found love in another ethnic group in the course of their participation in the NYSC programme, having met his wife while serving in Enugu State. His Royal Highness Ovie Omeleh, Omo Ubie Aka II, paramount ruler of Yenaka community in Yenagoa, was also quoted as saying that he met his wife during the NYSC which brought her to Bayelsa State.<sup>53</sup> The Journal of the NYSC Directorate Headquarters, in its recent editorial, succinctly captures the essence of this attempt at national unity and integration when it states that, "...in 47 years of the scheme...walls of ethnic suspicions have continued to be pulled down; conversely, bridges of lasting relationships – cutting across inter-ethnic marriages, friendships, business relationships have continued to be erected."<sup>54</sup>

The scheme is equally said to be making invaluable contributions to the health sector where the consultants are being harvested by foreign countries where they are paid heavily. Corps members are standing in the gap. Here, a survey in healthcare delivery is likely to reveal that most of the rural healthcare clinics in the country are being serviced by NYSC medical personnel most of whom are not indigenes of such communities.<sup>55</sup> The concern of the scheme over the health needs of the people, especially the rural populace, has given birth to the NYSC Health Initiative for Rural Dwellers (HIRD). The scheme, according to reports, runs the biggest advocacy project against

<sup>52</sup> STANDARD FOCUS - Special Edition, Issn24667530, p.9. Mr. Andelheme was a former Deputy Registrar of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.9-10 and 11

<sup>54</sup> NYSC NEWS: A Journal of NYSC Directorate Headquarters, APMAJU522020, p.03

<sup>55</sup> STANDARD FOCUS,*Ibid.*, p.10

HIV/AIDS in the globe through a scheme known as Peer Education programme which is said to have reached out to, and sensitised millions of Nigerians in over fifteen years of its existence.<sup>56</sup> Following the recent outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the NYSC Management gave directive to NYSC Secretariats nationwide to ensure sufficient support to State Governments in the battle against Covid-19. Available report shows that “the Scheme has been in the front line of the battle against COVID-19, by deploying Corps Medical Team which works complementarily with medical teams in the fight against the Coronavirus pandemic.”<sup>57</sup> The NYSC also embarked on the production and distribution of face masks, hand sanitizers, and palliatives, as well as other products aimed at mitigating the spread of the pandemic with an overwhelming result that attracted commendations from many State Governors and recently from the Federal Government itself. A news report anchored by Yunusa Tanimu captures part of the commendation thus:

The Federal Government has commended the National Youth Service Corps for contributing to the on-going efforts at containing the spread of COVID-19 through the production of face masks, antiseptic liquid soap and hand sanitizer for public use. The commendation was made in Abuja during the public unveiling of the face masks, liquid soap and hand sanitizer...<sup>58</sup>

The same is the case in our education sector where corps members have been augmenting the dwindling number of teachers nationwide where the profession is seen as not lucrative. In fact, in some states, they do not only complement but form the bulk of teaching staff in our primary and secondary schools. This writer had the opportunity to confirm this position when as a lecturer in the Taraba State College of Education,

<sup>56.</sup> NYSC NEWS, APMAJU522020, *ibid.*, p04

<sup>57.</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>58.</sup> *Ibid.,op.cit.*, p.05

Jalingo, he used to go out every year to supervise students on teaching practice in secondary schools across the state. It was clear that most of the secondary schools in the rural areas had only the principals, vice-principals and only one or two permanent staff, and the rest of the teaching staff were corps members. Some of the principals of these schools used to visit the State Secretariat of the NYSC every year to specially request for a good number of corps members to be posted to their schools. In an interview with Mr. Audu Yamusa, a retired principal, this is what he had to say:

In my over twenty years' experience as a principal, I found that if it were not for the NYSC members that were posted to teach in many of our schools in the state, many core subjects like Mathematics, English, Chemistry, Physics and Geography would have not been taught in several secondary schools in Taraba State.”<sup>59</sup>

He went further to explain that this reality of his time made him to maintain a very close and constant contact with the State Secretariat of the NYSC in order to ensure a steady supply of corps members whom he usually encouraged by paying them extra stipends from time to time. He said his cordial relationship with the NYSC staff at the Secretariat and corps members earned him the name, “the good principal”, as a result of which many corps members were always willing to be posted to his school.<sup>60</sup> Corps members also help in the administration of the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination, where they see to the successful conduct of examinations.

The centrality of national unity and integration as core requirements of nation building has ever remained the driving force of the NYSC programme as can be seen in the scheme's

<sup>59</sup>. Interview with Mr. Audu Z. Yamusa, retired Principal 67 at his residence no.46 Adibyewi Street, Wapan-Nghanku Ward, Wukari, Taraba State, 22/08/20

<sup>60</sup>. *Ibid.*

objectives and mode of operation already outlined in this paper. In achieving this, corps members are usually posted to states other than their states of origin. Given the conducive working environment most of them find in such states, they end up taking up permanent employment and by implication, permanent residence, after their service year. Some of them even go as far as to inter-marry among the people. By this, they are exposed to the diversities and cultural differences that uphold the nation. This is a clear demonstration of national unity and integration.<sup>61</sup> Commenting on this issue, the Minister of Works and Housing, Barrister Babatunde Raji Fashola, was quoted as saying that the objective of setting up the NYSC scheme has been achieved given the challenges that prevailed at the inception of the scheme. In his words, "If there are new threats to the perfection of our union today, they are different from those which informed the establishment of the NYSC in 1973."<sup>62</sup>

When it comes to the area of rural infrastructure, a visit to some of the sites where corps members usually carry out their Community Development Service (CDS) would convince one of the contributions of the NYSC in this area of national development. An editorial, captioned "At 47, NYSC still a Pivot of National Unity and Development", has this to say,

Beyond the forging of national unity among corps members many of whom settle and get integrated in their respective states of service, the Corps has been involved in community development service. Public conveniences, bus-stop stands, school buildings, culverts, bridges, water boreholes, classroom blocks, among so many other projects, have been initiated and executed by corps members through the mobilisation of their host communities, public-spirited individuals and corporate bodies for development.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> See <https://www.quora.com> accessed 22/07/20

<sup>62</sup> STANDARD FOCUS, *op.cit.*, p.11

<sup>63</sup> NYSC NEWS, APMAJU522020, *op.cit.*, p.03

The editorial goes further to opine that,

...the greatest achievement of the Corps is in the area of youth-development, giving the over three hundred thousand youths mobilised for service every year focus, helping them attain their potentials and assisting them in gaining financial freedom through the NYSC Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development programme.<sup>64</sup>

As a youth's vanguard therefore, the NYSC can also be said to be contributing to the reduction of unemployment among this group. While in the service, corps members are paid a paltry sum of 20,000 naira monthly as stipend, though recently the amount was increased to about 30,000 naira. This is apart from the money being paid to some of them by the organisation they work for. Though this money can be said to be small given both the economic reality of the times and in comparison to the services they are expected to render as graduates, it however goes a long way to keep the corps members from societal vices, by keeping them busy. This way the government is likely to be spending less on security than it possibly should have been spending if the corps members were not being engaged via the scheme. In addition, with the rapidly growing population of the country, the NYSC can be said to be in the forefront of smothering the harm that usually befalls a population that is not planned for, by giving the Nigerian youths a respite and also nursing them to discover themselves on time before they could think of going criminal.

Corps members are purveyors' belt for development, behavioural change and nation-building. Since they can be found in the 774 Local Government Areas of Nigeria where they are serving the nation in all the sectors of the economy, they can be said to constitute agents of change in those localities. According to the present Director-General of the NYSC, "Corps

members are everywhere in the nooks and crannies of this country. Even in the Escravos you see our corps members either working as medical doctors, nurses, medical laboratory scientists/technicians, teachers and so on.”<sup>65</sup> They seem to drive the economy through their unquantifiable contributions to the small and medium scale enterprises while the larger market is not left aside. When it comes to the conduct of credible elections in the country, the members of the scheme are also seen as largely impartial and intellectually equipped to consolidate and extend the Nigerian democratic frontiers with little or no training, and this they have done credibly well since 2011. In the words of the current Director-General,

During my interactions with the INEC Chairman, he keeps telling us that “without the NYSC we won't be able to organise any election in this country”. Corps members are knowledgeable, smarter and can be held accountable. This is why corps members are always used for the conduct of elections in Nigeria.<sup>66</sup>

The NYSC has also carved a niche in galvanising several other programmes of the Federal Government, acquitting itself well each time it is called upon to perform strategic national assignments in the country's quest for development. The scheme has played several roles in “midwifing strategic national programmes such as elections, census, immunisation campaigns, etc.”<sup>67</sup> Recently, corps members in their thousands, in collaboration with other stakeholders, namely, women youth groups, labour unions, civil society organisations and students participated in a road walk tagged “ Nigerian Youths March Against Corruption” in the 36 state capitals and in Abuja. In Kano State, NYSC NEWS reported that the current D-G of the scheme was among the dignitaries who participated in the walk,

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.69

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>67</sup> STANDARD FOCUS, *op.cit.*

which was jointly organised by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC).<sup>68</sup>

### Some Challenges Confronting the NYSC Scheme

Having looked at some of the successes that the NYSC could be said to have recorded in the different spheres of our national life over the years, it is important to examine some of the challenges that may be inhibiting the scheme from achieving its set goals in full. During the 2019 NYSC Annual Conference in Abuja, the current Director-General of the Corps, Brigadier-General Shuaibu Ibrahim noted some of these challenges to include “operational challenges occasioned by non-discharge of statutory responsibilities by some critical stakeholders and other dynamics of the operating environment.”<sup>69</sup> The D-G specifically named the problems that the scheme has been grappling with to include dilapidated conditions of NYSC orientation camps in some states, inadequate Corps lodges and lack of befitting office accommodation, among others. In highlighting the areas of discussion during the conference, the D-G mentioned the NYSC enabling Act and bye laws sustaining the relevance of the scheme; establishment of NYSC radio; welfare and security of corps members and staff; deployment of ICT solutions for effective service delivery; etc.<sup>70</sup> In his own address during the occasion, the Minister of Youth and Sports Development, Mr. Sunday Dare, seemed to have resonated the D-G by calling on stakeholders to honour statutory responsibilities and went on to declare that, “I am concerned that the successes recorded by corps members in the past are being impaired today by the inability of critical stakeholders, especially States and Local Governments, to fully discharge their statutory responsibilities to the Scheme.”<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> NYSC NEWS, APMAJU522020, op.cit., p.07

<sup>69</sup> NYSC NEWS, OCNODE512019, op.cit., p.9

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., <sup>71</sup> Ibid., p.8

Apart from the above problems that have been identified by the two critical stakeholders of the NYSC programme, there are many more challenges that have been identified by other stakeholders and the general public, which may not be necessary for us to into here. When the current Director-General proposed the deployment of ICT solutions for effective service delivery as noted above, one feels that it is something that needs serious and prompt attention because the world is rapidly going digital. But the question to ask is how prepared are Nigerian youths for the burgeoning digital economy?

In a paper titled, 'National Youth Service Corps and the Future of Nigeria's Digital Economy', published on April 10, 2019 in *Youth Transforming Africa*, Damilola Adeniran said the following as an answer to the question: how prepared are the youths for the emerging digital economy?

According to Wikipedia, the digital economy simply refers to an economy that is based on digital computing technologies. In Nigeria, the digital economy is expected to generate 88 billion dollars and three million jobs for citizens by 2021...we may not be prepared right now, but the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) provides the perfect incubator to prepare the youths for the digital future of work. Each year, the NYSC enlists at least 250, 000 graduates to gain work experience while serving the nation in locations that are new to them. The program has however been under-utilized, as policy makers have failed to recognize its potential. To change the narrative, my idea is to create a digital platform for NYSC members to sign up as digital Economy Ambassadors (DEA). This platform will provide networking and funding opportunities; learning resources and specified strategies for NYSC members to drive digitalization during the duration of their service year.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup><https://blogs.worldbank.org> 25/07/20

This is not only a good recipe for the NYSC's handlers but also a wake-up call to the country's policy makers and the whole political leadership. But beyond this and all the other challenges that have come to be associated with the NYSC, as a result of which there have been calls in some quarters for the scheme to be scrapped off, the problem is that of the entire Nigerian state and it is squarely the problem of leadership which is deeply rooted in the problem of underdevelopment. As a poor or materially backward country, the Nigerian leadership has been displaying lack of capacity towards economic development which has recently become more pronounced. If, for instance, the educational system, especially at the tertiary level where the participants of the NYSC scheme are produced, has been crawling, what can the latter do in the area of youth mobilisation towards nation building? As a nation therefore, we need to begin to tackle the problem of leadership in order to be able to deal with the challenges of underdevelopment which is presently manifesting in different facets of our national life.

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## **SECTION FOUR: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS**



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## Chapter Twenty

# THE TRANSMUTING CHALLENGES OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS SCHEME

*Chris S. Orngu*

*Department of History  
Benue State University  
Makurdi*

### Introduction

This chapter examines the challenges of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme from its inception in 1973 to 2020. The scheme was introduced by General Yakubu Gowon's administration for the purpose of national integration in order that national unity can define the essence of the country's corporeality. Regrettably, the scheme has been confronted with some challenges that seem to overwhelm the potency of its mandate. These challenges have continued to evolve and assume different forms and dimensions overtime. The transmuting challenges confronting the scheme are identified and analyzed here for the purpose of coming up with some novel approaches to dealing with them. The research enterprise employed the use of oral interviews and focus group discussions (primary sources) as the main sources of data collection. In addition to the primary sources, secondary sources were handy in providing the basis for content analysis and also complementing some shortfalls in the primary sources of data. It is the combination of these sources that facilitated the reconstruction of the history of NYSC with specific focus on its dynamics and transmuting challenges. Preliminary investigations reveal that since its inception, the challenges confronting the scheme are not static. This is largely because of

the drastic changes that have constantly characterized the socio-economic and political trajectory of the country. Security challenges, for instance, particularly since the outbreak of the Boko Haram menace in 2009 and the post-electoral violence that greeted the conduct of the 2011 general elections, have appeared preeminent in the plethora of challenges confronting the scheme in contemporary times. Again, the herdsmen/farmers conflict which is also a major security drawback confronting the country has posed a major challenge to the functionality of the scheme in recent times. The discourse recommends some realistic approaches to repositioning the NYSC scheme and ameliorating the transmuting challenges that daily confront the functionality of the scheme in the country.

The challenge of national integration in Nigeria predates the attainment of independence in the country. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has remained entrapped in a complex web of challenges that manifest national solidarity crisis that often inadvertently translates to a sustained fragile unity and a crippling national integration process. This is the reality that has, over time, necessitated the experimentation of a number of remedial approaches to achieving national solidarity and national integration in the country. Whether or not these remedial approaches have taken the country to the threshold of achieving the desired national integration is an intellectual task that this discussion is set to examine against the backdrop of the establishment of the National Youth Service Scheme in 1973.

From the national population census/head counts crisis of 1962, the Federal Electoral crisis of 1964 to the Western Regional Electoral crisis of 1965/6 through the thirty-month civil war that lasted between May 1967 and January 1970, socio-economic and political challenges have continued to hamper the country's national unity. Expectedly, and as noted earlier, it is the existence of these challenges and their impact on the country's socio-economic, cultural and political trajectory that have engineered some concerted efforts by successive governments in the country towards ensuring national cohesion. The National

Youth Service YouthCorps (NYSC) scheme is, therefore, a product of the concerted efforts aimed at national unity and, most fundamentally, national integration.

Undoubtedly, since its inception in 1973, the scheme has attained some modest achievements in the direction of articulating the mandate for which it was created. One of the achievements of the scheme is that it has provided a sustained platform for cross-cultural socialisation among Nigerian graduates. However, the modest achievements recorded by the scheme have apparently fallen short of expectations by certain parameters of evaluation. For instance, the national integration, for which the scheme was conceived, has not been sufficiently achieved. It is, therefore, argued that the under-performance of the scheme is a function of a multiplicity of transmuting challenges. These challenges, which are instigated by the socio-cultural, economic and political dynamics of the country, have, in no small measure, hampered the effective and efficient functionality of the mandate for which it was created. Scholars, public affairs analysts and social commentators have, in the past, examined some of these challenges.<sup>1</sup> However, the lack of a desired historical approach to the analysis of the challenges has often led to the methodological inappropriateness of the study of the NYSC problem as well as the analytical and conceptual underdevelopment of the fundamental issues at stake. In essence, much is still required to properly understand and analyse the transmuting nature of the challenges of the NYSC scheme. This is the main thrust of this disquisition.

### National Integration: Some Conceptual Insights

Generally, there abounds the temptation to misappropriate the conceptual underpinning of certain concepts that are characterised by interpretative manipulation in differing mental constructs; and national integration appears to be one of such

<sup>1</sup>See, for instance, Adeoti, Y.F. and O. O. Olaewe, O.O., "Problems and Counselling Needs of Corps Members," *African Research Review*, Vol. 3(1), 2009, 500.

concepts. Added to that is the fact that national integration occupies a central place in the conversational domain of this work and, therefore, its meaning requires to be explored for the purpose of giving a sharp focus to the progress of this work.

For us to appreciate the analytical basis of the transmuting challenges of the NYSC from its inception, it is reasonable to build our argument around the idea and philosophy of national integration. To begin with, the colonial scheme brought African peoples into common territories of un-integrated societies.<sup>2</sup> As a corollary, post-colonial African states inherited the challenge of very weak national centres that lacked and still lack internal and national cohesion.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the weak national centres in post-colonial African states, including Nigeria, significantly explain the roots of the challenge of national integration in the context of state-reconstruction. In the main, national integration gravitates from the consciousness to attain a collective identity and national cohesion in the interest of national development and collective greatness.<sup>4</sup> Fundamentally, therefore, national integration is an enterprise that entails a collective identity within a nation as the basis for consensus, solidarity and the shared acceptance of a patterned normative order.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, for a national integration project to gain its grounds, there must be consciously evolved policies and strategies that will stimulate national consciousness in a people to the extent that they can unconditionally surrender their love and loyalty to their nation. Through this consciousness, the various peoples of ethno-religious and cultural diversity within a nation are expected to willingly accept and accommodate one another on

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<sup>2</sup>Orngu, C.S., *A Reconstruction of Nigeria's National Security Discourse for Nation Building*, Makurdi, Bookmakers, 2010, p.11.

<sup>3</sup>Zolberg, A., "Patterns of Nation Building," in Paden, J.N. and Soja, E.W., (eds), *The African Experience, Vol. 1 Essays*, Evanston, North Western University Press, 1970, p.70.

<sup>4</sup>Orngu, C.S., *A Reconstruction of Nigeria's National Security Discourse for Nation Building*, Makurdi, Bookmakers, 2010, p.12.

<sup>5</sup>Ikime, O., *History, The Historian and the Nation: The Voice of a Nigerian Historian*, Ibadan, Heinemann Educational Books, 2006, p.144.

the basis of equality, collective identity and national solidarity. National integration is a dynamic process that involves the continuous shaping of attitudinal patterns of citizens towards positive contributions for the attainment of national cohesion and solidarity. It defies the characteristic elements of heterogeneity such as ethno-religious sympathy, hegemonic cultural tendencies and majority/minority dichotomies through strategic policies that unite rather than divide the citizens along parochial and primordial lines within a nation. The policy that informed the establishment of the NYSC scheme was inspired by the desire of the Yakubu Gowon-led Federal Military Government of Nigeria to achieve the basic tenets of national integration through cultural socialisation and shared value orientation.

**A Historical Sketch of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)** The history of the NYSC can be traced to the myriads of problems that followed the independence of Nigeria in 1960. Beginning from the census controversy of 1961/62 which reawakened fears of ethno-religious dominance that characterised the pre-independence periods to the Federal Election crisis of 1964/65 through the Civil war of 1967-1970, the Nigerian state has remained a geopolitical entity of forced unity. The problems tersely mentioned here did not only lead to the collapse of the First Republic in 1960, but also eclipsed the prospects of national cohesion in the country. The census crisis, for instance, was occasioned by the vehement rejection of census figures by some political elites. The reasons for the vehement rejection of the figures were rooted in the fear of ethno-religious hegemonic dominance and the vicious struggle for political control that had its origins in the 1952/53 National Census. Giving credence to this strand of thought, Larry Diamond notes as follows:

The 1962 national [population] census was not the first in Nigeria to become embroiled in suspicion

and controversy. Previous attempts to count the Nigerian population had met with popular distrust and resistance, accusations of regional bias and favouritism, and widespread suspicion of the results. These had all been sharply reflected in the most recent and professional census to date, that conducted in 1952 and 1953. Widely suspected as a plot to increase the tax burden or to spy on families and their property, the 1952-53 census was avoided by many Nigerians, and became engulfed in political controversy when the results, showing a majority of Nigerians in the Northern Region, were used to justify the assignment of half the seats in the Federal Legislature to the North. Southern politicians alleged that the British administrators had inflated the Northern population figures to ensure that political power in the country remained with the northern politicians.<sup>6</sup>

The rejection of the figures on the premise of manipulations in the north and the subsequent "campaigns" by southern leaders towards the 1962 census exercise and the "huge" figures returned in the south at the end of the exercise triggered the outright rejection by Northern leaders. The results of the 1962 census showed that the population of the north had gone up from 16.5 million in 1952 to 22.5 million in 1962, indicating an increase of 30%.<sup>7</sup> In some parts of the east, there was an upsurge of population figures of more than 70% and about 70% population increase in the west.<sup>8</sup> The census figures stood momentarily and were later replaced with figures from the 1963 population census. The 1963 population figures were equally rejected by the Eastern and Western regions as untrue representation of the authentic population spread of the country. The results of the 1963 census showed that the north

<sup>6</sup>Diamond, L., *Class, Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria: The Failure of the First Republic*, London, Palgrave, 1988,131.

<sup>7</sup>See Okolo, A., "The Nigerian Census: Problems and Prospects," *The Nigerian Statistician*, Vol.53, No.4 (November, 1999), pp.321-325.

<sup>8</sup>See Okolo, A., "The Nigerian Census: Problems and Prospects," *The Nigerian Statistician*, Vol.53, No.4 (November, 1999), pp.321-325.

had recorded an additional population increase of 8.5 million. Thus, the raging controversies that sprouted from the census figures did not only reawakened fears of ethnic and religious dominance but also regenerated a deep-seated sense of unpatriotic behaviour among the political elites. The consequences of these reflected monumental impact on the attitudinal disposition of political party followers and regional or ethnic patriots, led to the upsurge of unbridled ethno-regional jingoism in the country during the first republic.<sup>9</sup>

The second issue was the 1964 federal election crisis. The crisis did not only have a significant impact on the country's electoral process, but also on the country's national integration process. The federal election crisis occurred in 1964-5 as a consequence of the refusal of political elites of the Western and Eastern regions to accept the elections results of the 1964 federal elections. The crisis, as indicated by an informed source, was occasioned by feelings of marginalization, mutual suspicion, fear of ethnic domination and the struggle for power between the North and the South and the feelings of political deprivation which the southern political elites had harboured over the results of the elections in Northern Nigeria.<sup>10</sup> The results of the elections showed the dominance of the north over the south in numbers of seats in the federal parliament and were, thus, outrightly rejected by the southern elites. Besides outright rejection, the political upheavals in Tivland that characterised the conduct of the elections were disastrous. The Tiv violence was aimed at dissipating the perceived and feared hegemony of Northern peoples—Hausa-Fulani dominance in Tivland.<sup>11</sup> The political instability that reached a cataclysm with the western regional elections crisis of 1965 set the motion for the collapse of the First Republic on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1966.

The third issue was the January 1966 coup and its aftermath. The January 1966 coup ushered the intervention of the Nigerian

<sup>9</sup> Diamond, L., *Class, Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria: The Failure of the First Republic*, London, Palgrave, 1988,131.

<sup>10</sup> Aderonmu, J.A., "Civil Society and 2011 Elections in Nigeria," in Egwemi, V., (ed), *Issues in the 2011 General Elections in Nigeria*, Ibadan, Sam-Alex Printers, 2013, p. 18.

Military into the country's political space. With the coup, it was thought the military would engineer their acclaimed messianic efforts of bridging the gaps that had persisted among the ethnic nationalities and were hampering national integration in post-colonial Nigeria. However, the way and manner the coup itself was executed further exacerbated suspicion and systematically plunged the country into a deepened conflict of trust. For instance, while the coup was successful in Northern and Western Nigeria with the elimination of top politicians such as the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Premier of Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Premier of Western Region, Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola, Finance Minister, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh; and top military officers such as Brigadier Zakariya Maimalari, Colonel Kure Mohammad, Brigadier Samuel Ademulegun, Colonel R.A. Shodeinde, Lt Col J.Y Pam; Lt Col A.C Unegbe and Lt. Col Abogo Largema, the experience in eastern Nigeria was sharply different as virtually no military or civilian official from the axis was killed in the plot.<sup>12</sup> Besides, majority of the coup plotters were from the Igbo extraction domiciled in the Eastern Region (namely Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna, Major Don Okafor, Major Chris Anuforo, Major Tim Onwuategwu, Major Humphrey Chukwuka, Captain. Ben Gbulie and Captain Ogbu Oriji), with the exception of Major Adewale Ademoyega, who was the only Yoruba Officer from the Western Region.<sup>13</sup> This development generated, consolidated and reinvigorated the conflict of trust that heralded the country's independence. Eventually, the rowdy political atmosphere instigated by the succession of these events culminated in the 29<sup>th</sup> July 1966 military counter-coup and the mutiny that was manned by young northern military officers.

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<sup>11</sup> Oral Interview with Rtd. Sergeant Anihundu Bako, World War II Veteran, 102, Mbaazagel Council Ward, Buruku LGA, Benue State, 15/8/2020.

<sup>12</sup>Orngu, C.S. and Kertyo, P.M., "The Military and Economic Diplomacy of the Nigerian State: The Ibrahim Babangida Years in Perspective" *Kaduna Journal of Humanities*, Vol. 2, Number 1, 2018, p. 190.

<sup>13</sup> Adesote, S.A. and Falade, D.A., *Distinct Comprehensive History for Senior Secondary Schools 1-3*, Ondo: Unique Mercy and Features Publisher, 2020, pp.148-158.

The brutal murder of General Aguiyi Ironsi by young northern officers completely eroded trust among ethnic nationalities and severely hampered the country's national integration process. What followed the coup was the Igbo pogrom in northern Nigeria and the subsequent secessionist agitations that resulted to the outbreak of Nigerian civil war in 1967. The outbreak of the civil war ravaged trust and led to the deaths and wanton destruction of unquantifiable property. Besides, the war itself came as a result of a combination of political, economic and cultural factors that were embedded in the general fear of ethno-religious dominance that apparently stood against national unity. The war, however, came to an end on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1970. The concomitant effects of the war on Nigeria's corporeality meant the introduction of national cohesion palliatives. The first of such was the introduction of the tripartite concepts of Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation (3Rs) by General Yakubu Gowon's administration.<sup>14</sup> The 3Rs meant a complete resuscitation of trust and confidence in the Nigerian project and was aimed at ensuring the restoration of unity and peace in the country. The NYSC scheme was birthed as a child of the 3Rs.

Arising from the above, the NYSC was established through the instrumentality of Decree No. 24 of 1973 on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1973 to function as a platform for the mobilisation of lettered Nigerian youths for nation building and to also prepare them for patriotic and loyal service to the country. The service corps commenced operation on June 4, 1973, and six weeks later, precisely on July 2, 1973, 2,364 graduates were mobilised as pioneer participants to commence the mandatory national service. The statutory mandate of the NYSC was, therefore, to:

- i. inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry of work, and, of patriotic and loyal service to Nigeria in any situation they find

<sup>14</sup>Mgbada, C.O., "The Igbo Struggle for Political Accommodation in Nigeria Since 1970: Issues, Problems and Prospects," Okonkwo, U.U., et al (eds) *History, Africa and Development: Festschrift in Honour of Professor U. D. Anyanwu*, Vol. 1., Morrisville, Lulu Press, 2018, p. 611.

themselves;

- ii. raise the moral tone of the Nigerian youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideas of national achievement, social and cultural improvement;
- iii. develop in the Nigerian youths the attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest;
- iv. enable Nigerian youths acquire the spirit of self-reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self-employment;
- v. contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy;
- vi. develop common ties among the Nigerian youths and promote national unity and integration;
- vii. remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups; and
- viii. develop a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of Nigeria.<sup>15</sup>

In order to articulate the mandate for which the scheme was created, the establishment was/is to ensure that:

- i. the equitable distribution of members of the service corps and the effective utilization of their skills in areas of national needs;
- ii. as far as possible, Nigerian youths are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin;
- iii. such group of Nigerian youths assigned to work together is representative of Nigeria as far as possible;
- iv. the Nigerian youths are exposed to the modes of living of the people in different parts of Nigeria;
- v. the Nigerian youths are encouraged to eschew religious intolerance by accommodating religious differences;

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<sup>15</sup>National Youth Service Corps Act. CAP N84 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004.  
NYSC ACT 1-3.

- vi. members of the service corps are encouraged to seek at the end of their one-year national service, career employment all over Nigeria, thus, promoting the free movement of labour; and
- vii. employers are induced partly through their experience with members of the service corps to employ more readily and on a permanent basis, qualified Nigerians, irrespective of their states of origin.<sup>16</sup>

The reasons for which graduating Nigerian youths were and have remained the primary target for the scheme have long been advanced. However, as further amplified by V. Ogwuche, the key reason was because of the conviction of the military leadership under General Yakubu Gowon that the youths are potential leaders.<sup>17</sup> Besides, graduating youths were considered to be more elitist and well informed in their thought patterns and ideological worldview. The basic idea was to encourage young graduates to understand the country's cultural diversity, especially when viewed against the backdrop of the challenges of national unity that confronted Nigeria immediately after independence, a combination of which ultimately snowballed into the outbreak of the fratricidal civil war.

The civil war itself played a significant role in compelling the Nigerian government to evolve strategic policies for national integration. In the first place, the war was a corollary of cascading divisive tendencies among ethno-regional champions and their military conspirators in post-colonial Nigeria. The irreconcilable antagonisms among these ethno-regional champions were anchored on their lack of proper appreciation of Nigeria's cultural diversity as evidenced in the variegated issues of political animosity with its roots in 1953 following the

<sup>16</sup>National Youth Service Corps Act. CAP N84 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004. NYSC ACT 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> Oral Interview with Victoria Ogwuche, Civil Servant, 40, Makurdi, 7/9/2020.

motion of self-government by Chief Anthony Enaharo.<sup>18</sup> M. Audu corroborates this notion when he argues that the NYSC came in 1973 courtesy of attempts by General Yakubu Gowon's administration to rebuild the country from the debris of the civil war and to ensure that the youths as leaders of tomorrow understand the nation's cultural diversity in the post-war years.<sup>19</sup> Besides helping young Nigerian graduating youths to understand and appreciate the nation's cultural diversity, the scheme was to assist and build manpower development for the economic growth of the country. Thus, going by the statutory mandate of the scheme, corps members were emphatically to provide the needed manpower in places like Onitsha and other eastern states that were ravaged by the civil war.

From the 2,364 graduating youths at inception in 1973, the scheme now mobilises over 300,000 participants yearly.<sup>20</sup> As stated by A. Oyeniran, as at 2018, 4,071,581 Nigerian youths had participated in the scheme, and the scheme has continued to exercise its constitutional objectives since creation in 1973.<sup>21</sup>

### Transmuting Challenges of NYSC

Established as a national integration and nation building palliative after the civil war, the NYSC has fared modestly well in articulating the mandate for which it was established. For instance, the scheme has, overtime, served as a veritable platform for young graduating youths to stay outside of their states of origin for a statutory period of one year with a view to understanding the reality of cultural diversity and thus overcoming cultural prejudices. By doing this, the NYSC has become the pacesetter in expanding the horizons of Nigerian youths and providing the platforms for interaction with their contemporaries from different parts of the country. This has

<sup>18</sup>Orngu, C.S., *Socio-Political Conflicts and Nigeria's External Relations, 1953-2005*, Lagos, Bahiti and Dalila, 2014.

<sup>19</sup>Oral Interview with Monday Audu, Civil Servant, 38, Makurdi, 7/9/2020.

<sup>20</sup>A. Oyeniran, "NYSC At 46: Its Success, Challenges: Independent, June 5, 2019, <https://www.independent.ng/nysc-at-46-its-successes-challenges/>. Assessed 30/8/2020.

<sup>21</sup>A. Oyeniran, "NYSC At 46: Its Success, Challenges: Independent, June 5, 2019, <https://www.independent.ng/nysc-at-46-its-successes-challenges/>. Assessed 30/8/2020.

inspired long-lasting bonds of friendship and built bridges across cultural divides. Indeed, NYSC has become a pivot of national unity as several inter-tribal marriages have been contracted as a result of exposure of youths to the service corps scheme. Again, since its creation, the scheme has, to an extent, promoted national unity by way of allowing graduating youths from different states of the federation to cross-ventilate ideas about the peace and development of the country through cross-cultural socialization that has sometimes resulted into inter-ethnic marriages. Besides, the Community Development Service (CDS) of the scheme has exposed corps members to challenges in their host communities which some have been addressed within time and space, although not without some constraints. Through CDS, corps members have provided basic amenities like boreholes, toilet facilities, culverts in communities in Kastina-Ala, Gboko, and Otukpo, amongst other places in Benue State.<sup>22</sup> In 2016, a corps member, Joy Chinemerem Anuforo, who did her primary assignment with Mbagen Community Health Clinic, Abwa Mbagen, Buruku LGA, Benue State, between 2015 and 2016, rallied round to raise some funds for the provision of an incubator for the maternity section of the clinic+.<sup>23</sup>

The NYSC has also encouraged many corps members to settle in the states they were deployed to serve, having pulled down the barriers of ethnic suspicions and unfounded stereotypes resulting from first-hand experience of other cultures. Some former corps members that have remained in states where they were posted have immensely contributed to the development of such states. In Benue State, for instance, Chief Isaac Akinkunmi, the owner of Titogate Enterprises, has contributed to the development of the state. Titogate is a thriving business enterprise established in Makurdi by a former Corps member who served in Benue State. The business enterprise engages in the production, distribution and sale of various

<sup>22</sup> Oral Interview with Victoria Ogwuche, Civil Servant, 40, Makurdi, 7/9/2020.

<sup>23</sup> Oral Interview with Joy Chinemerem Anuforo, Former Corps member, 32, Abuja, 28/10/ 2020.

brands of yoghurt and table water. It is into restaurant/catering services, fast food/eateries and confectionaries with a wide spread of distribution network. The staff strength of the enterprise is drawn from the local populace - which clearly indicates that the business has sustained itself and has, at the same time, tackled a percent ratio of unemployment challenge for the state. Thus, while making profit and creating job opportunities for the indigenes of the state, the business is contributing to the economic growth of the state as well.<sup>24</sup>

Equally important is how the scheme has been contributing in supplementing manpower deficit in the country. The posting of corps members to different establishments across the country for their primary assignments means a critical intervention in the manpower deficit of some of the establishments. Due to a number of factors, some establishments like schools, banks, hospitals and construction firms, among others, have always depended on the skilled manpower supply from the NYSC scheme for their sustainability and growth. In Benue State, for instance, Mbagen Community Health Clinic largely depends on medical graduates on NYSC scheme for professional services. This is a major contribution to the growth and development of the nation's economy.

In spite of the above and other successes of the scheme, the NYSC has also experienced transmutation of challenges. A closer look at some of these challenges is necessary for the purpose of identifying and dissecting them for analytical purposes. The challenges are not discussed in any particular order of importance or significance. In most cases, they appear to be interlaced both in their characters and manifestations. But in the main, the security challenge, which appears the most disturbing, is accorded the most detailed and elaborate attention in this work. Since its establishment in 1973, funding appears to have remained the major challenge of the scheme. The funding

<sup>24</sup> Researcher's field work/survey, Makurdi, 7/9/2020.

that is required to effectively drive the scheme and cater for youth corps members has always been inadequate. As a deliberate effort to address the persistent shortfalls in the funding of NYSC, the Federal Government has, in the last few years, stepped up the annual budgetary allocation to NYSC. The annual budgetary allocation of NYSC has been pegged at N70 billion (\$194 million) per annum since 2017.<sup>25</sup>

There is also the challenge of red-tapism otherwise known as bureaucratic bottlenecks. The National Headquarters of NYSC appears to be operating a system of over-centralized administration where the various state secretariats lack the operational capacity to respond rapidly to emerging challenges without recourse to the approval of the centre. Security challenge appears predominant in the face of other plethora of challenges confronting the NYSC scheme, especially beginning from 1999, when a new democratic order was instituted in the country. To say the least, the cascading security problem in the country has adversely affected the articulation of the statutory mandate for which the NYSC scheme was established.<sup>26</sup> Next is the introduction of Sharai in parts of the country, generated anxiety in corpers and their parents across the country. By the end of 2001, 11 other states (Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe) joined Zamfara in enacting wide-ranging legislation aimed at making their jurisdictions more sharia-compliant, incorporating both civil and criminal matters, than had formerly been. In summary, the introduction of Sharia Law meant that:

- i. All Sharia States reinstated Islamic criminal law in their jurisdictions.
- ii. All Sharia States also enacted Sharia Law Courts, establishing new inferior Sharia Courts, with original jurisdiction to apply the full range of Islamic law, civil and criminal, to Muslims.

<sup>25</sup> A. Oluwakayode, "Has the NYSC Outlived Its Usefulness?" *Vanguard*, April 19, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Oral interview with TerwaseOrban, Civil Servant, 43, Makurdi, 31/8/2020.

- iii. A wide range of other legislation was enacted and aimed at particular 'social vices' and 'un-Islamic behaviour', such as the consumption of alcohol, gambling, prostitution, unedifying media, and the excessive mixing together of unrelated males and females.
- iv. A range of other '*ulama* institutions' were established – Sharia Commissions and Councils of Ulama with advisory and executive functions; Zakat and Endowment Boards and Committees for the collection and distribution of zakat and the administration of *wakfs*; *hisbah* organisations to monitor and try to enforce Sharia compliance; and others.<sup>27</sup>

The Boko Haram menace is another serious security challenge confronting the NYSC scheme, especially in the North East geopolitical zone of the country. Since the killing of its leader – Mohammad Yusuf by security agencies in 2009, Boko Haram terrorists have ravaged the North Eastern geopolitical axis and have constituted and remained Nigeria's greatest security quagmire. The height of the activities of the group particularly from 2010-2014 have led to the temporary closure of NYSC orientation camps in states like Borno, Adamawa and Yobe.<sup>28</sup> Deployment of graduating youths to these states has become a serious challenge for the scheme. Initially, prospective corps members who were deployed to these states had their orientation camps in other states like Benue, Kogi, Nasarawa and Abuja and were assigned to places of primary assignment in urban areas in these states. But as time progressed, especially with the capture of Chibok girls and the attack on schools by the terrorists, the designated areas of deploying corps members to local government areas in the north east has drastically reduced.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, with the capture and declaration of local government areas like Bama, Mubi and Damoa as caliphates by the Boko Haram sect in 2014, corps members were no longer

<sup>27</sup>"Sharia Implementation in Northern Nigeria After 15 Years"

<https://www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/content/sharia-implementation-northern-nigeria-after-15-years>. Assessed 3/9/2020.

<sup>28</sup> Oral Interview with Victoria Ogwuche, Civil Servant, 40, Makurdi, 7/9/2020.

<sup>29</sup> Oral Interview with Victoria Ogwuche, Civil Servant, 40, Makurdi, 7/9/2020.

posted to the local government areas and eighteen (18) other local government areas across the three states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states. Besides, corps members that were posted to these states were given the leverage to redeploy to states of their preferred choice. This development has thrown up a major challenge to the statutory mandate of the scheme as noted above.

Another serious security challenge facing the scheme is electoral and post-electoral violence. Since the involvement of the youth corps members in the conduct of general elections which began with their participation as polling clerks in the conduct of Kogi State Governorship re-run election on 29th March, 2008, corps members have continued to participate in the conduct of general elections in the country. The success of this first involvement led to further engagement of corps members in the conduct of bye- elections, re-run and supplementary elections. What followed on the heels of the Kogi re-run elections was the use of corps members as *ad hoc* staff during the February 2010 Anambra Governorship election. Initially, as observed with the Anambra experience, corps members were neither molested nor killed during electioneering process. Elaborating on this development, K. Okafor notes that:

The use of corps members as INEC *ad hoc* staff proved to be effective in Anambra State. The corps members were patriotic and discharged their functions diligently. As youths who were deployed to Anambra State for national assignment, their security was guaranteed as the locals ensured they were not hurt and maximally cooperated with them to ensure the re-election of Mr. Peter Obi as the Governor of Anambra State.<sup>30</sup>

The Anambra experience informed the decision of the then INEC Chairman, Professor Attahiru Jega, to officially collaborate with NYSC authorities as critical stakeholders to

<sup>30</sup> Oral Interview with Kelvin Okafor, Business Owner, 45, Gboko, 4/8/2020.

facilitate the subsequent engagement of corps members as *ad hoc* staff during electioneering periods in the country. The first general election that witnessed the mass deployment and engagement of corps members as *ad hoc* staff was the 2011 general elections. However, the experience of the 2011 general elections proved disastrous as corps members suffered during the post-election violence that greeted the five (5) northern states of Bauchi, Kaduna, Gombe, Niger and Kano.<sup>31</sup> The causes of the post-electoral violence were numerous but most essentially they were politically motivated.<sup>32</sup>

In any event, it is instructive to note that the bases of the causes of the post-election violence were anchored on the fear of ethno-religious dominance that had become an imposing characteristic of post-colonial Nigeria. The fears of ethno-religious dominance were traced to the announcement of the presidential election results that returned Goodluck Jonathan as Nigeria's president during the 2011 presidential election. In the first place, the political atmosphere during the election under review was charged with ethno-religious rhetoric and antagonistic sloganeering that presumably heralded the probability of a violent outcome. Moreover, there was already a charged atmosphere and an uneasy tension that were instigated by the zoning crisis that were hinged on the eligibility of Goodluck Jonathan to contest the presidential elections under the circumstances of an acclaimed violation of geopolitical power shift.<sup>33</sup>

With the announcement of the presidential results, irate youths in some northern states unleashed terror that resultantly led to the death of corps members who participated in the election as *ad hoc* staff. The scenario, which was tantamount to terror, was informed by what A. Jega called "crisis of

<sup>31</sup> Aderonmu, J.A., "Civil Society and 2011 Elections in Nigeria," ...p. 20.

<sup>32</sup> Egwemi, V., "issues in the 2011 General Elections in Nigeria: An Introduction"

Egwemi, V., (ed), *Issues in the 2011 General Elections in Nigeria*, P. 1-12. Also, see

Azaigba, K.T., "The Historicity of Electoral Violence in Nigeria" in Tsuwa, J.T. and

Ikpanor, E.T., (eds), *The 2015 General Elections in Nigeria: Emerging Issues*, Abuja,

Donafrigue Publishers, 2017, pp. 1-13. <sup>33</sup>O. Adeniyi, *Against the Run of Play: How an*

*Incumbent President was Defeated in Nigeria*. (Lagos: Prestige, 2017), 12.

expectation" from some youths in Northern Nigeria.<sup>34</sup> In Bauchi, for instance, CPC supporters took to violence as a means to express their dissatisfaction with the election result. In the process, at least 50 people including nine serving corps members in the state were killed. The nine corps members were Adewumi Seun (Ekiti), Teidi Tosin (Kogi), Adowei Elliot (Bayelsa), Okpokiri Obinna (Abia), Gbenjo Ayotunde (Osun), Ukeoma Chibuzor (Imo), Nwazema Chukwuonyerem (Imo), Adeniji Jehleel (Osun) and Akonyi Sule (Kogi).<sup>35</sup> The killing of these corps members by irate youths led to the evacuation of some corps members by their respective home governments and parents. Akwa Ibom, for instance, in the wake of the post-electoral violence, evacuated eighty-three (83) corps members from Bauchi. Arguing on why they were evacuated, the then Governor of the state, Obong Godswill Akpabio, stated that:

We acceded to the numerous requests and pleas of worried and agitated parents across the state whose sons and daughters were trapped in the troubled area of Bauchi following the post-election violence...<sup>36</sup>

Another serious security issue that is confronting the scheme is the herdsmen/farmers violent conflicts in some states in North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria, especially Benue and Plateau States. Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, herdsmen/farmers violent conflicts have remained a serious security challenge for the country and the NYSC scheme. For instance, herders/farmers clashes in Yelwa-Shendam area of

<sup>34</sup> The then INEC Boss Professor Attahiru have in different intellectual discourses argued that the post-electoral violence that greeted the 2011 general elections was informed by crisis of expectation from some northern youths for felt their preferred candidate General Muhammadu Buhari of the defunct CPC won the elections.

<sup>35</sup> S. Tukur and M. Lere, "Some NYSC Members Killed in Bauchi were PDP's IT Consultants – CPC Spokesman, Fasakin" *Premium Times*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/113299-some-nysc-members-killed-in-bauchi-were-pdp-it-consultants/>. Assessed 9/10/2020.

<sup>36</sup> S. Tukur and M. Lere, "Some NYSC Members Killed in Bauchi were PDP's IT Consultants – CPC Spokesman, Fasakin" *Premium Times*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/113299-some-nysc-members-killed-in-bauchi-were-pdp-it-consultants/>. Assessed 9/10/2020.

Plateau State between 2002 and 2004 led to the loss of about lives in Gwer-West, Kwande, Logo, Makurdi between 2002 and 2014.<sup>37</sup> The trend has assumed the characteristics of a recurrent decimal. In January 2016, herdsmen massacred over three hundred farmers in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State and killed over forty people while within the same period, a good number of farmers were killed by herdsmen in Nimbo village in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State.<sup>38</sup> The death toll of people occasioned by herdsmen attacks in Benue State from 2014 to 2016, according to the Executive Governor of the state, Samuel Ortom, was one thousand, eight hundred and seventy eight.<sup>39</sup> In 2018, attacks by herdsmen in states like Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa, Adamawa, Plateau, Ebonyi, Delta, and Kaduna had hit a mind-boggling figure of over nine hundred and four deaths and from January to April 2019, herdsmen had killed over fifty people during attacks in Guma, Makurdi, Kwande and Logo Local Government Areas of Benue State.<sup>40</sup> The unabated killings of people by herdsmen in Benue State have instilled founded fears in prospective corps members that are posted to Benue and other sister states like Plateau in the Benue valley.<sup>41</sup>

Other security challenges that have confronted the scheme in Benue State and other parts of the country were characterized by communal conflicts. In Benue State, the experience in Okpokwu Local Government Area, where corps members in the local government were redeployed readily illustrates this reality. The general state of insecurity in local government areas like Kastina-Ala, Ukum and Logo popularly referred to as "Sankara axis" of Benue State has attained an inexplicable level of

<sup>37</sup> Ameh C. Godwin, "Full Text of Governor Ortom's Speech During Buhari's visit to Benue," *Daily Post*. 12 March 2018, <https://www.dailypost.ng>. Assessed 5/8/2020.

<sup>38</sup> Ajibo, H., et al., "Dynamics of Farmers and Herdsmen Conflict in Nigeria: Implication to Social Work Policy Intervention," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 8, No. 7, 2018, p. 157.

<sup>39</sup> Godwin, "Full Text," ...

<sup>40</sup> "Over 904 Killed Across Eight States in First Four Months of 2018," accessed 5 December 2018, <https://www.theeagleonline.com.ng>; J. Charles, "Again, Herdsmen Kill Five in Benue" *Punch*. 4 April 2019, <https://punchng.com/again-herdsmen>. Assessed 5/6/2019.

<sup>41</sup> Oral Interview with Ayodele Samuel, Corps Member, 27, Makurdi, 10/9/2020.

destruction of lives and properties and distortion of numerous human activities.<sup>42</sup> Corps members in these local government areas live in perpetual fears to the extent that many of them have always sought redeployment to safer places.<sup>43</sup>

Another transmuting challenge of the NYSC scheme is poor remuneration. Arguably, the poor remuneration has provided the motivational basis for prospective and serving corps members to show desperation for “juicy” postings. Generally, the economic realities of the Nigerian state have raised the cost of living to a very high level that has become unreachable to many income earners. Earnings are not rising in consonance with the micro and macro-economic trends in the country. This has adversely affected the material condition of an average Nigerian. The monthly allowance of a corps member, which was N19,800 and has recently been increased to N33,000, is still inadequate to support an average meaningful livelihood. Thus, survival instincts in the face of biting economic realities have played an active role in pushing some prospective and serving corps members into the lobbying game for juicy postings.<sup>44</sup> Clearly, therefore, there is a connecting link between the country's security challenges and its unfavourable economic realities in explaining and understanding the growing trend of lobbying for juicy postings by prospective and serving corps members.

The issue of undue redeployment and outright rejection of corps members by some private organisations, government ministries, departments and agencies is another challenge of the scheme. Outright rejection, for instance, by private organisations under the claims of lack of adequate finance and accommodation facilities to cater for the welfare of corps members, is particularly worrisome. In Benue State, for instance, corps members who are being rejected in their places of primary

<sup>42</sup> Oral Interview with Alfred Tyopav, Political Party Chieftain, 49, Katsina-Ala, Benue State, 6/9/2020.

<sup>43</sup> Oral Interview with Ayodele Samuel, Corps Member, 27, Makurdi 10/9/2020.

<sup>44</sup> Focus Group Discussion with Corps Members at NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Wannune, Tarka Local Government Area of Benue State, 10/9/2020.

assignment for some of the reasons identified above usually become stranded, frustrated and psychologically affected.<sup>45</sup> Most corps members who suffered outright rejection end up absconding from the national service.<sup>46</sup> In some instances, some government ministries and agencies in Benue State accepted corps members without giving them local allowances and accommodation facilities and thereby exposing them to undue hardship.<sup>47</sup> This is particularly true of ministries of Information, Culture and Tourism; Youths and Sports; and Women and Social Development who do not pay corps members their expected local allowances and do not provide accommodation facilities.<sup>48</sup>

Infrastructure deficit is another issue of serious concern. The dilapidation of structures in most orientation camps is also a challenge confronting the scheme. In most orientation camps, structures such as halls, toilets, bathrooms and hostels are in dilapidated forms. In specific terms, infrastructure deficit as evidenced in the unremitting poor state of permanent orientation camps for prospective corps members in the country has remained a huge challenge. The state of infrastructure at the NYSC permanent orientation camp at Wannune, Tarka Local Government Area of Benue State, clearly illustrates the deficit of infrastructure – bad road network, epileptic power supply, accommodation deficit, lack of equipment and inefficient water supply, among others.<sup>49</sup> In Wannune orientation camp, many of the structures are sliding to a sorry state.<sup>50</sup> This challenge is replicated in most of the permanent orientation camps in the

<sup>45</sup> Focus Group Discussion with Corps Members at NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Wannune, Tarka Local Government Area of Benue State, 10/9/2020.

<sup>46</sup> Oral Interview with Mrs. Comfort M. Orngu, Civil Servant, 47, Makurdi, 10/9/2020.

<sup>47</sup> Focus Group Discussion with Corps Members at NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Wannune, Tarka Local Government Area of Benue State, 10/9/2020.

<sup>48</sup> Focus Group Discussion with Corps Members at Makurdi Local Government Area Secretariat, Makurdi, 10/9/2020.

<sup>49</sup> Oral Interview with Tyolumun Upaa, Civil Servant, 50, Wannune, Tarka LGA, Benue State, 10/9/2020.

<sup>50</sup> Focus Group Discussion with Corps Members at NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Wannune, Tarka Local Government Area of Benue State, 10/9/2020.

country. The same picture is replicated in Ekiti State orientation camp and the orientation camps in Kebbi, Ondo and Taraba states. Lack of basic amenities in orientation camps, most times, dampens the morale of corps members who are posted to these states of the federation.<sup>51</sup> There are other areas where temporary orientation camps are provided without the minimum standard requirements of infrastructure. The general consequence of this on the mental and psychological disposition of many corps members is negative since the first impression does not present a positive atmosphere that motivates a commitment of a call to national duty.<sup>52</sup>

The yearly increasing number of Nigerian graduates who fall within the national service scheme of NYSC presents another challenge. At the point of its inception, the establishment probably did not expect that there was going to be such a drastic upsurge in the number of Nigerian graduates that would be participating in the NYSC scheme. Today, the scheme caters for an average graduate population of over 300,000 yearly. Accommodate this yearly increasing numbers has become a major challenge. This situation is further exacerbated by the upsurge in the number of federal, state and private universities as well as the proliferation of other tertiary institutions in the country over the years. The granting of approval to some Colleges of Education to run degree programmes have also contributed to the yearly increase in the number of Nigerian graduates being mobilised for NYSC<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Oral Interview with Desmond Kpamdue, Former Corps Member, 33, Anyin, Logo LGA, Benue State, 5/9/2020.

<sup>52</sup> Focus Group Discussion with Corps Members at Makurdi Local Government Area Secretariat, Makurdi, 10/9/2020.

<sup>53</sup> There are no fewer than 170 universities (federal, state and private) currently operating in Nigeria. This is aside from the 119 polytechnics (federal, state and private) that are currently in the country. Added to this are monotechnics and other degree-awarding institutions in the country. Apart from these, there are foreign universities that turn out graduates of Nigerian citizenship. Such graduates that fall within the age specification of the NYSC scheme are eligible for participation in the national service. For more on Nigeria's university system, read Orngu, C.S., "Public University System in Nigeria: Some Conceptual and Historical Discourses," in Orngu, C.S. and Wuam, T., (eds), *Public University Governance in Nigeria: A Festschrift, Professor Msugh Moses Kembe*, Lagos: Cosmopolitan Book Services, 2018.

Associated with the above, the challenge of irregular academic calendar in our institutions of higher learning. The upsurge in the number of Nigerian universities and polytechnics and the proliferation of other tertiary institutions coupled with incessant strikes by unions have made it practically impossible for the existence of a uniform timeline for graduation in the country. This challenge is compounded by persistent strikes by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and other relevant trade union organisations within the country's tertiary education sector such as Non Academic Staff Union (NASU) and Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU). The failure of the relevant authorities and the trade unions to resolve the nagging and contentious issues at stake explains the notorious character of this persistent challenge.

Closely related to the above is the cascading rate of post-service unemployment in Nigeria. The rate of unemployment of graduates in Nigeria has been continuously rising in astronomical proportion. Beginning from 2010, close to three hundred thousand (300,000) Nigerian youths are drawn yearly into the labour market at the completion of their NYSC service year. About 13.9 million Nigerian youths are currently unemployed going by the data of the National Bureau of statics.<sup>54</sup> This development has pushed a good number of serving corps members to engage in illegal activities like drug trafficking, armed robbery, thuggery, kidnapping and other outlandish social vices that have continued to hamper the socio-economic and political development of the country. Thus, rather than contribute to the meaningful development of the country, they are caught in the web of crime in the desperate efforts to make and save money to be able to confront the challenging realities of their post-service life. The situation does not offer a defensive excuse for perpetuation of crime by affected corps members; but it paints a clearer picture of a frustrating experience that drives

<sup>54</sup> Official figures of unemployed youths in Nigeria as released by the National Bureau of Statistics. August 2020.

and ruins the lives of many potentially enterprising youths who have lost their potentials and prospects in the cause of rendering their statutorily mandatory service to their fatherland. This is indeed a challenge that has sprouted out of the unenviable realities of the Nigeria's social and economic uncertainties.

There is also the challenge of the growing number of fake corps members in various orientation camps and some places of primary assignment. The menace of fake corps members is identified as an evolving social issue that relates to the litany of problems within and outside Nigeria's university education system. The number of fake or incompetent graduates has been growing increasingly in the country over the last one or two decades. The situation is compounded by the upsurge in the acquisition of foreign degree certificates and the proliferation of illegal universities and other higher institutions of learning in the country. For instance, in 2018, the authorities of the NYSC informed the National Universities Commission (NUC) of the presence of corps members who displayed the lack of academic ability and intelligence level expected of genuine Nigerian graduates, which were consistently exhibited by three graduates of the Enugu State University of Science and Technology.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, a panel of investigation was instituted by NUC to look into the issues relating to the academic deficiency of the affected graduates. The management of ESUT was also prompted to investigate the matter. Following the reports of the investigation panels set up by the NUC and the university, the ESUT Senate at its 239th regular meeting held on Wednesday, June 5, 2013, received and considered the reports of the

<sup>55</sup>The names and particulars of the affected graduates were Nwankwo Elias Chukwuebuka, code number NG/11B/1660, B.Sc Electrical/Electronic with call-up No. NYSC/EST/2011/ 177093; Mba, Linda Alumnae, code number LA/11B/5245, B.Sc Electrical/Electronics, call- up number NYSC/EST/2011/178882 with matriculation number ESUT/2005/96998; and Okochi Adaeze Kate, code number AD/12B/0389, B.Sc Geography and Meteorology with call-up No. NYSC/ ESUT/2012/148292, matriculation number ESUT/2006/10400. For further details, see Iyabo Lawal, "Fishing Out Fake Graduates in NYSC," *The Guardian*, August 15, 2019, p.1.

<sup>56</sup>Iyabo Lawal, "Fishing Out Fake Graduates in NYSC," *The Guardian*, August 15, 2019, p.1.

investigation panels and upheld that the certificates issued to the affected graduates be withdrawn.<sup>56</sup> Apart from the mobilization of improperly groomed graduates for national service, there is also the growing menace of fraudulent mobilization of fake corps members for national service in the country.<sup>57</sup> These categories of fake corps members are mainly made up of students who have not been able to satisfy the necessary requirements for graduation from their universities or other tertiary institutions but are able to forge the relevant documents in conspiracy with some fraudulent elements to obtain their call-up letters for national service.<sup>58</sup> The resultant outcome of these fraudulent exercises is the constant flooding of the various orientation camps across the country with fake corps members who eventually find themselves in different parts of the country for their national service. This is an integrity challenge for the NYSC scheme.

Age falsification has also become a common denominator in Nigeria. It is prevalent in the public and civil service and in the country's educational system where a lot of people alter their date of birth to fit into their target schemes. For eligible participation in the NYSC scheme, a Nigerian graduate is expected to fall within the age of thirty years or less. Any age above thirty years is not acceptable. However, for certain reasons, students who graduate above thirty years of age still find their way to participate in the national service through the falsification of their age status. This is encouraged by the poroqosity in the process for statutory declaration of age in Nigeria's judiciary. This has created the room for a good number of wrong persons to participate in the NYSC scheme on a yearly basis.

## **Efforts at Mitigating the Transmuting Challenges of NYSC**

Over the years, there have been some institutionalised efforts in addressing some of the challenges associated with the NYSC

<sup>57</sup> Iyabo Lawal, "Fishing Out Fake Graduates in NYSC," *The Guardian*, August 15, 2019, p.1.

<sup>58</sup> Focus Group Discussion with Corps Members at NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp, Wannune, Tarka Local Government Area of Benue State, 10/9/2020.

scheme, some of which have recorded appreciable levels of achievements. Oyeniran argues that NYSC scheme has continued to renew and make itself indispensable through evolving policies and programmes that have clearly identified it as a foremost institution and vehicle for driving national unity and development in the country.<sup>59</sup> For instance, as a way of mitigating the serious infrastructural deficit, the scheme, in collaboration with state governments, has established 37 permanent orientation camps across the thirty-six states of the federation including Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. In addition to this, through the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model, NYSC has completed the building and equipping of a 1,000-capacity integrated skills acquisition training centre in Gombe State and Ekiti State. The centres are to be replicated in each of the six geopolitical zones to enhance the training of corps members for skills acquisition while in service.<sup>60</sup> This policy is intended to equip and prepare serving corps members for their post-service life. Again, in Benue State, for instance, the NYSC authorities, in collaboration with the Association of Local Government Chairmen of Nigeria (ALGON) and the Benue State Government have constructed a Multi-Purpose Hall and provided electricity at the Wannune NYSC permanent orientation camp.<sup>61</sup> Through collaborative efforts, a number of motorised boreholes have been constructed in some orientation camps across the country to ease the challenge of perennial water scarcity and to provide adequate water supply for corps members during their mandatory three weeks orientation camp.<sup>62</sup> Some Local Government Chairmen in Benue State have intermittently donated items like food stuffs and gasoline generators to areas that are either not connected to public power supply or areas that do not enjoy steady electric power supply.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup> A. Oyeniran, "NYSC At 46: Its Successes, Challenges" Independent. June 5, 2019.

<sup>60</sup> A. Oyeniran, "NYSC At 46: Its Successes, Challenges" Independent. June 5, 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Oral Interview with Victoria Ogwuche, Civil Servant, 40, Makurdi, 7/9/2020.

<sup>62</sup> Oral Interview with Victoria Ogwuche, Civil Servant, 40, Makurdi, 7/9/2020.

<sup>63</sup> Oral Interview with Victoria Ogwuche, Civil Servant, 40, Makurdi, 7/9/2020.

Since insecurity has emerged and remained a notorious challenge confronting the scheme, the authorities of NYSC have consistently taken innovative steps in the direction of ensuring the safety of corps members wherever they are serving in the country. In the experience of Benue State, Ogwuche notes that the scheme has collaborated with security agencies like the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), Directorate of State Service (DSS), the Nigerian Army and other security agencies in ensuring the safety of corps members; and further indicates that the safety of corps members was guaranteed following communal conflicts in Okpokwu Local Government Area as a result of the prompt response of the Nigerian Police Force.<sup>64</sup> At the national level, a Distress Call Centre (DCC) was commissioned in February, 2012 by the Federal Government and domiciled in the National Directorate Headquarters of the NYSC.<sup>65</sup> The Centre is equipped with communication facilities that are manned 24 hours daily to ensure a timely and well-coordinated response to distress calls from Corps members who find themselves in a distressed situation, through contact with the nearest offices of security agencies and other key stakeholders at critical times in addition to the production of Security Tips booklets issued to all serving corps members.<sup>66</sup> The document contains easily digestible security tips, which help to keep them off from all security-related dangers.

To tackle the problem of post-service unemployment, the NYSC authorities introduced the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development Programme (SAED) in 2012. Since the introduction of SAED into the service scheme as a yearly exercise, SAED has proved impactful. The programme is designed to give corps members the opportunity to learn vocational skills of their choice right from the orientation camp and throughout the service year, to prepare them for self-employment and self-reliance at the end of their mandatory

<sup>64</sup> Oral Interview with Victoria Ogwuche, Civil Servant, 40, Makurdi, 7/9/2020.

<sup>65</sup> Oba, J., "Nigeria: Federal Government Commissions NYSC Distress Call Centre," *Leadership Newspper*, February 21, 2012.

<sup>66</sup> A. Oyeniran, "NYSC At 46: Its Successes, Challenges" *Independent*. June 5, 2019.

national service.<sup>67</sup> Presently, corps members across the thirty-six states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory are exposed to vocational training at their orientation camps in Agro-allied, Automobile, Construction, Cosmetology, Culture and Tourism, Education, Environment, Film and Photography, Food Processing/Preservation, Horticulture and Landscaping, Information and Communication Technology and Power and Energy. SAED has also partnered with other government agencies like the Central Bank, Bank of Industry and other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in ensuring that the mandate for which it was created is effectively articulated.<sup>68</sup>

As part of the efforts to encourage corps members to embrace skills and entrepreneurship for self-reliance, the NYSC authorities launched a programme tagged War Against Poverty (WAP) in October, 2009. The programme specifically seeks to empower corps members to become viable entrepreneurs in agro-based and allied businesses.<sup>69</sup> Through this programme, interest-free loans are readily accessed by interested corps members ranging from N200,000 to N300,000 and repayable over 30 months for purposes of self-employment and wealth creation, eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, and boosting of agricultural productivity for national food security which are in tandem with the nation's Social Development Goals (SDGs). So far, over 5,000 corps members have been fully empowered and are doing well in their chosen careers as agro-entrepreneurs.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, the Scheme has, through the NYSC Foundation, given loans to existing corps members with their certificates as collateral security instrument to enable them engage in useful business ventures in order be self-reliant.

Apart from the introduction of SAED, the NYSC authorities, in line with the diversification calls of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, have ventured into agriculture and have reinvigorated

<sup>67</sup> Oral Interview with Mrs. Emem Essien, Civil Servant, 50, Makurdi, 7/9/2020.

<sup>68</sup> Oral Interview with Mrs. Emem Essien, Civil Servant, 50, Makurdi, 7/9/2020.

<sup>69</sup> A. Oyeniran, "NYSC At 46: Its Successes, Challenges," *Independent*, June 5, 2019.

<sup>70</sup> A. Oyeniran, "NYSC At 46: Its Successes, Challenges" *Independent*, June 5, 2019.

and upgraded its agricultural projects with the establishment of Integrated Farm Settlements in each of the six geopolitical zones of the country. These Farm settlements, equipped with modern farm implements and corps lodges, are operational in the FCT, Bauchi, Kebbi and Oyo States.<sup>71</sup> A number of corps members who served in these farms, as confirmed by an oral source, have taken up farming as a profession due to the practical experience they gained and are now contributing to the nation's objective of actualizing self-sufficiency in food production.<sup>72</sup>

Since Community development Service projects is one of the cardinal objectives of the scheme, the NYSC authorities have, over time, carried out sensitization programmes to educate corps members about the importance of this programme and how to source finances in executing their identified community projects.<sup>73</sup> This has effectively discouraged female corps members from going into sexual relationships with men of influence with the aim of financing their community projects. In Benue State, at each orientation camp, special seminars and workshops are organized for prospective corps members on the thematic importance of community projects and how to finance them. This has led to the significant increase in the number of community development projects in the state by corps members.

Then too, to check fraud, false age declaration and fake degrees, the leadership of the NYSC has fully embraced technology as a tool in its operations. Under the current dispensation for instance, there is a zero tolerance on fake degrees and certificates, false age declaration and general misconduct. Today, it is practically impossible to find fake corps members because of the full deployment of modern technologies in the operations of the Directorate. It is also to the credit of the leadership of the NYSC scheme that our corps members are alive to their responsibilities of serving the nation with dignity.

<sup>71</sup> A. Oyeniran, "NYSC At 46: Its Successes, Challenges" Independent, June 5, 2019.

<sup>72</sup> Oral Interview with Cletus Apav, Public Servant, 53, Makurdi, 9/9/2020.

<sup>73</sup> Oral Interview with Victoria Ogwuche, Civil Servant, 40, Makurdi, 7/9/2020.

## Conclusion

Since its creation about 47 years ago, the NYSC scheme has fared modestly well in articulating and propagating some of the objectives for which it was created. Since its creation, the scheme has continued to function as the bridge for young men and women in the country to converge, associate and cross-ventilate ideas that are meant to enhance and promote nation building. This has offered a veritable platform for social and cultural socialisation among the lettered youths of Nigeria from different historical, social, cultural, economic and geographical experiences. The cross-cultural interaction platform offered by the scheme has contributed significantly to the enhancement of the general knowledge among Nigerian graduates about the cultural and historical peculiarities of the various peoples of the country. The target of this convergence is helmed in the desire to achieve national integration for national development. However, it goes without saying that the NYSC scheme has not been able to achieve the desired level of national integration that was envisaged at the time of its conception and establishment. The circumstances that have stood in the way of achieving the height of national integration embedded in the philosophy of the scheme are encapsulated in a multiplicity of transmuting challenges. These challenges have been identified and dissected in this disquisition. It is clear that the security challenge occupies a strategic place in the circle of other challenges. The reasons for this reality are not far-fetched. The internal security architecture of the entire Nigerian state is in a fundamental crisis with severe consequences for the survivability of the country's sovereignty. The issues relating to the internal security crisis of the country apparently manifest the incapacity of the Nigerian state in managing its security challenges and since the NYSC scheme is a microcosm of the Nigerian system, it takes a little imagination

to conclude that the security challenge will continue to hold down the functionality of the NYSC scheme until when the country will be able to adequately address its internal security problematic. It is recognised that deliberate steps have been taken by NYSC authorities and other relevant critical stakeholders in addressing the multifarious challenges that confront the functionality and service delivery of the scheme. The calculated steps taken by the NYSC authorities and other relevant critical stakeholders in dealing with the kaleidoscopic phenomenon of internal security crisis as it affects the scheme have yielded modest outcomes in the context of the safety of serving corps members. In a country where there is an increasingly rising wave of terrorism, armed banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, cyber-crime, ethno-religious conflicts, land disputes and various other forms of unhealthy atmosphere, it is quite difficult to expect much from a national integration scheme. The experience of the NYSC scheme in Nigeria generally indicates that it has tried as an institution, and we are therefore making progress.

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## Chapter Twenty-One

# THE NYSC BEYOND THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

*Godwin O. Odeh*  
*Sokoto State University,*  
*Sokoto*

### Introduction

The idea of building a nation out of diverse ethnic groups has been the major challenge since the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates that brought into existence the geo-political entity called Nigeria. This singular act of political engineering was motivated to maximise economic fortunes to the British Empire by reducing administrative costs of managing the vast colonial territory, Nigeria. Arising from this, no effort was made to deliberately create unity among the people of Nigeria, but rather imperial administrators, one after another, continued to promote division by the tactics of divide-and -rule. It is against this backdrop that the political independence of 1960 failed to produce the desired nation, as the first post-colonial government and subsequent ones were unable to resolve issues of differences among Nigerian ethnic nationalities. These colonially inherited challenges were to lead to series of *coup* and counter *coups*, which resulted in the Nigerian civil war between 1967 and 1970. It was during the war that it became clear that keeping Nigeria one would require physical and psychological orientation and re-orientation. Consequently, in the post war era, the Federal Government launched the national policy of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction that was targeted at promoting national unity to forestall divisive tendencies that might lead to another bloody war<sup>1</sup>. The NYSC scheme founded in 1973 was an offshoot

<sup>1</sup>Luke Aneke, Mazi S. Ohuabuna, Mazi O. Thompson, (eds) *The Nigerian 1966 Coup and Biafra: Myths and Realities*, Alaigbo Development Foundation (ADF) publication, Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 2018, pp. 73-74.

of this programme of national unity and reconciliation though its history antedates the policy.

In its formative years, the NYSC was considered an instrument of nation building; therefore, its operation was perceived to be limited to Nigeria. However, decades after its establishment, the NYSC is known to have begun to inspire other nations and to draw international recognition. Instances of these were the hosting of the Global Youth Conference in 1994<sup>2</sup>, participations in global conferences of National Youth Service and the epic role Nigeria played through the Technical Aid Corps in the establishment of The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme (GNYSS) in 1996, among others. Against the backdrop of the national and international attention the scheme has continued to draw despitess several challenges, this prospects the fortunes of the NYSC the future of the NYSC. The chapter is structured into seven sections, inclduing the introduction and the conclusion.

## Conceptual Clarifications and Theoretical Frameworks

Youth is one concept that has refused to be tied to a single definition. As a result, few conceptions would be taken. Taiwo considered the legal, biological, and sociological view of the concept and argues that seeing youth as the period between the ages of 12 and 20 is misleading.<sup>3</sup> To him, youth is the ages between adolescence and young adult, which straddles the time young people are in school or have graduated, but are yet to enjoy full status, without access to all family, professional and political rights.<sup>4</sup> This definition, though rewarding, is fraught with crises of age bracket which is very fundamental to the

<sup>2</sup>Uche Agu, *NYSC and Nigerian Unity: A Critical Appraisal*. (Enugu: Agene Publishers, 1995), pp.102-103. Related information on international engagement of the Scheme is also found in NYSC Archives, TX/RX NO: 1373, A A. Kaka, "Minutes of the Meeting on Planned Collaboration between NYSC and United Nations Volunteers (UNV)", National Directorate Headquarters Yakubu Gowon House, Maitama, Abuja.19<sup>th</sup> August, 1996.

<sup>3</sup>O.O, Taiwo, "Globalization, Society and Culture: Wither Nigerian Youths" in *Nigeria and Globalization: Discourses on Identity Politics and Social Conflict*, Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC) National Theatre, 2004, 246-248.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

definition of the understanding of youth in the context of national mobilisation for service. The pegging of franchise right at age 18 by the Nigerian Constitution did not solve the problem too; rather, it compounded it as the bracket is left unclosed. Be that as it may, section 2 (1) of the NYSC enabling Act puts the bracket in its stipulation that a person shall not be called to serve in the Service Corps if at the date of graduation he/she is over the age of thirty.<sup>5</sup> This appears consistent with the United Nations' view, which defines youth as anybody between adolescent ages of twenty five.<sup>6</sup>

However, given the elastic nature of the concept, several developing countries expanded the age to thirty five and even more. Thus, age target for national service varies from country to country. The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme for instance targets youths between the ages of seventeen to thirty five,<sup>7</sup> while the Zambia National Youth Policy defines youth as a male or female person between the age of 15 and 25 years.<sup>8</sup> It could be inferred then that within the context of NYSC, youth is defined as graduates between the ages 18 and 30, though it is difficult to have a graduate of 18 years old in Nigeria given the entry qualification into Nigerian schools and universities.

Michael Sherraden, in Odeh, views national service as:

an organised period of substantial “engagement” and “contribution” to local, national, or world community, recognised and valued by society, with minimal monetary compensation to the participant.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> NYSC Decree. Retrieved from, <https://www.nysc.gov.ng>.

<sup>6</sup> National Youth Service Corps Report of the Committee to Draft Terms of Bilateral Agreement between the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and Countries Requesting for Technical Assistance Submitted to the Director General, Brig.Gen. S M. Dule, Fss, MSS, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 1999. The report was a response to Circular NYSC/DG/153/S.9/SEC/ dated 08 Dec., 1998.

<sup>7</sup> E D.Mendy, *The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme Annual Report*, 31<sup>st</sup> December,2017. Office of the Executive Director, The Gambia National Youth Service Hedaquaters, Opposite Friendship Hotel, Bakau, The Gambia.

<sup>8</sup> Republic of Zambia National Youth Policy, Lusaka, Zambia, 1994, p.3.NYSC Archives, File No. GC/94/ PP/23, National Directorate Headquarters, Yakubu Gowon House Maitama, Abuja.

<sup>9</sup> G O.Odeh, “NYSC's Engagement in the Development of Abuja 1982-2011”, in *Rima International Journal of Historical Studies*:A publication of the Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Sokoto State University, Sokoto, (1)2018, p.142.

Donald Eberly defines National Service simply as,a way to make military draft more equitable;a way to ease the problem of youth employment;citizen responsibility; and a form of experiential education.<sup>10</sup>

In analyzing the future of the NYSC, we would align our analysis with those of William James, John Dewy and Rosenstock-Huessy. The trio laid the foundation for the ideas of national service. In his Moral Equivalent of War speech in 1906, William James proposed military conscription, instead of conscription of the entire youth population, for constructive labour for a short duration of time, against the backdrop of enormous energy young people possesses.<sup>11</sup> The application of the conscription is to channel youthful energy from destructive ventures such gangsterism and hooliganism, to productive engagements such as mining, fishing and even farming. William Shakespeare and the famous Italian Mazzini appear to have a shared view of youthful age that is consistent with William James'. Against the background of the valour of youth, Shakespeare, cited in Chikendu, opines thus:

...Then a soldier, (i.e the youth), full of strange oaths,  
and bearded like the pard. Jealous in honour, sudden  
and quick in quarrel, seeking the bubble reputation.  
Even in the cannon's mouth.<sup>12</sup>

Mazzini, in Odeh, buttresses this in his assertion:

Place the youth at the head of insurgent multitude; you  
know not the secret of the power hidden in those  
youthful hearts nor the magic influence exercised on

<sup>10</sup> D J. Eberly, *The Changing Face of National Service in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. A Paper presented at the Second Global Conference on National Youth Service, Abuja, Nigeria, October, 10-14, 1994, p.2. S A. Sofoluwe, *National Youth Service Corps: Challenges and Prospects*. A paper presented at the Two-Week Orientation Course for the 5<sup>th</sup> Batch of the Technical Aid Corps Volunteers at the Cultural Centre, Calabar, Cross River State, Monday, October 3, 1994, 6. D J. Eberly, *The Changing Face of National Service in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. A Paper presented at the Second Global Conference on National Youth Service, Abuja, Nigeria, October, 10-14, 1994, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> . D.J. Eberly, *The Changing Face of National Service in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, p.2.

<sup>12</sup> PN. Chikendu, *Imperialism and Nationalism*, Enugu: Academic Publishing, 2004, p.7

the masses by the voice of the youth. You find among the youth a host of apostles of the new religion.<sup>13</sup>

Given the limitless potential inherent in youths, Mazzini in his writings and speeches, appealed to them to enter in their structure, the struggle for the unification of Italy and the fight to rescue it from the clutch of foreign domination. To William James, military training and orientation would knock out or eliminate elements of childishness in the youths and transforms them to healthier citizens who would be able to fight for the course of the society. This sense of discipline may be what informed and formed the paramilitary packages in the NYSC's three weeks orientation/camping period and farming operations of the scheme. More so, some national services are military - oriented, and evolved from it. After all, the NYSC is one of the most enduring legacies of the Nigerian military. James Dewy advocates Service- Leaning that is anchored on practical experiences and orientation.<sup>14</sup> This may have found expression in the activities of the NYSC in the area of teaching instruction package during orientation camp, deployment of corps members to schools, Community Development Services and the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development that took off fully on the 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2012.<sup>15</sup> Instances of similar schemes elsewhere completely devoted to skills acquisitions, handwork and what seems like internships and apprenticeships abound to buttresses Dewey's proposition. Thirdly, is the idea of National Service as a way of strengthening ties among the people of the world proposed by Rosenstock-Huessy.<sup>16</sup> He proposed civilian youth service for Germany in 1912 and advocates that team of young people work everywhere in the world for national productivity and global wellness. Though the entire idea of national service appears local or national in outlook, the

<sup>13</sup> G.O.Odeh, *NYSC Scheme and the task of Nation Building in Nigeria: Abuja Experience, 1983-2010*. First Draft of MA Dissertation, Department of History Benue State University, Makurdi, 2012, p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> D.J. Eberly, *The Changing Face of National Service in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, p.2

<sup>15</sup> *National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition*, pp.141-145.

<sup>16</sup> D.J. Eberly, *The Changing Face of National Service in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, p.2.

emergence of overseas service corps, global interactions of youth organisations in form of visits, conferences, technical assistance and the NYSC International Volunteers, among others, buttress the current of his argument.<sup>17</sup> More importantly, national youth service schemes are institutions in states that naturally have intercourse with others underpinned by doctrine of interdependentness of states. From the foregoing, contextualising the debate within the frameworks of military exigencies, service-learning and international intercourse as espoused by William James, John Dewey and Rosenstock-Huessy should be consistent with the direction of the chapter.

## The NYSC Beyond Nigeria

It may be recalled that the National Youth Service Corps was established by Decree No. 24 of 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1973, which was rescinded by Decree No. 51 of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1993, afterwards amended as NYSC ACT CAP N84 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004.<sup>18</sup> The pioneer corps members were two thousand, three hundred and forty six (2,346) graduates of the first generation universities, in the 1972/1973 academic

<sup>17</sup> NYSC participated in the global youth conferences from 1992 to 2000. In short, in 1978, Adebajo Akinnagbagbe, a member staff of the NYSC scheme was delegated to attend the first world youth congress in Havana, Cuba. It was through its assistance that the Gambia National youth Service was founded in 1996. More so, several African countries such as Liberia, Sierra lone, among others, have approached the NYSC to help them establish a similar scheme like Nigeria's model. For Detail see S A.D.Olisa, For Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, *Attention: Alhaji M. Bulama; Re-Request for Technical Experts to Help Run The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme*, (Directorate of Technical Aid Corps, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abuja), Ref. No: TAC/RC/002/V, 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1995, p.1. Pius Ross Imienwarin, for Director General, *Press Release: Pioneer NYSC Member Appointed Administrator of Gambia Youth Service*, Ref: NYSC/ NDHE/PRD/T.2, 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1996, Enegewea Personal File and record.Gregory Kas Enegewea, "Appointment of Technical Experts to Help Run The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme:- Request for a Return Ticket and Estacode, for Impending Preliminary Assignment in The Gambia",19 December,1995, pp.1-3,( Abuja: Gregory Kas Enegewea Personal File), *National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition*, pp.100-102.

<sup>18</sup> G O Odeh, *The National Youth Service Scheme and the Challenge of Nation Building in Nigeria (1973-2008)*, Abuja: Olowu Publishers, 2009, pp.24-25. *National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition*, (Abuja: NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, 2013), 17. NYSC Sokoto State Batch "B" Orientation Programme and Service Guide, Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> November-Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2016 p.10.

session.<sup>19</sup> International engagements of the NYSC over the years have taken the form of official visits/ delegation, conferences, technical support and volunteering. Promoting world peace and international engagement was not the focus of national youth services until the United Nations provoked attention towards "Development participation and peace" in 1985 during the international year of the youth and the consequent declaration of 1986 as international year of peace.<sup>20</sup> Since then it appears "International Youth Day" has come to stay as 12 August. 2019 was as well declared, with the population of about 1.2 billion young people across the world expected to have celebrated.<sup>21</sup> In short, a review of the founding objectives the NYSC reveals that its operations and similar schemes are essentially national, and not international.<sup>22</sup> However, as an institution of a state that interacts with other states in Africa, America, Asia and Europe, it was internationally exposed few years after its establishment. Thus, years after its vision/ mission statement began to read: "To be the leading light of youth organisation in Africa".<sup>23</sup> The exposure and involvements are as follows: First, in 1978, Adebanjo Akinnagbagbe, a member staff of the NYSC was delegated to attend the first world youth congress in Havana, Cuba.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, Col. S.K. Omojukun, the Director General (DG) of the scheme, upon invitation, visited Tanzania and other

<sup>19</sup> National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition, p.16. G O.Odeh, "Politics of Appointment of Vice Chancellor in Nigerian States Universities: The Experience of Professor Nuhu O. Yaqub, OFR, 2012-2017" in *History, Globalization & Relations in Africa: Festschrift in Honour of Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jnr, P I.Ukase, S I. Ugbegili, B J.Audu, ET. Ikpanor (eds,), Lagos: Integrity Publishers, 2018, p.771.*

<sup>20</sup> A.O.Sanda, *Youth Service and World Peace*, p.1.

<sup>21</sup> International Youth Day, 12 August, 2019: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, <https://www.un.org>.

<sup>22</sup> GO Odeh, *The National Youth Service Scheme and the Challenge of Nation Building in Nigeria (1973-2008)*, 14-17. National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Edition, pp. 17-18.

<sup>23</sup> Mission Statement written on the flex displayed at the Ground Floor, the NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, Yakubu Gowon House, Maitama Abuja. The line of mission statement was not there, though Nigeria maintained conspicuous and colossus place in the affairs of Africa. It is no doubt an indication of international aspiration of the scheme.

<sup>24</sup> NYSC Year Book: 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1973-1998 (Abuja: Publication of the NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, 1998), p. 174.

East African states to assess the activities of national youth services at about the same period.<sup>25</sup>

In 1985, the NYSC was among the youth organisations that participated in the international forum for youth experts held in South Korea on the project titled, *SAEL (New) MAUL (Village Community) UNDONG (Movement)*. The project focuses on the following among, others:

- a. bringing together people to construct better, richer and stronger nation;
- b. striking a balanced growth between the industrialised urban areas and purely farming villages; and,
- c. popular mobilisation of the populace for self-reliance, diligence at work and cooperation.<sup>26</sup>

The South Korea project may have given serious impetus to the Community Development Service (CDS) programme of NYSC. The scale of the pre-1990s international fora attended by delegates of the Scheme were not as global in terms of deliberations, magnitude and international linkages compare to events inaugurated by the first global youth conference of 1992 held in the United States.

The First Global Conference on National Youth Service held in Racine, Wisconsin, USA from 18<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> June 1992 remained a watershed in the history of NYSC. The theme of the epic conference is "National Youth Service: A Global Perspective". The conference stresses the need for cooperation among national youth services across the globe. This was what Rosenstock-Huessy of Germany prophesied decades earlier. NYSC's delegates to the conference were Major General Hafiz B. Momoh, the then Director-General of the Scheme, Gregory Kas Enegwea (now an Emeritus of National Youth Service and Mr. E.S. Essien.<sup>27</sup> The following fourteen countries attended the

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<sup>25</sup> NYSC Year Book: 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1973-1998, p.174.

<sup>26</sup> NYSC Year Book: 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary..., p.174.

<sup>27</sup> G O. Odeh, *Nigeria NYSC's Role in the Founding of The Gambian National Youth Service, 1996- 2004*, A PhD Dissertation Submitted to the Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, 2019, p.

conference, namely; Botswana, Canada, China, Costa Rica, France, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, The Netherlands, Trinidad and Tobago, India, United Kingdom, United States of America and Zimbabwe.<sup>28</sup> It was at this conference NYSC was given the responsibility to hold the second edition in 1994.<sup>29</sup>

Consequently, the second Global Conference of the National Youth Service was held in Abuja, Nigeria, between 10<sup>th</sup> and 15th, October, 1994. The theme of the conference is "Linking Youth Service for Global Understanding".<sup>30</sup> About ninety-four papers delivered at the conference, deliberated on the following core areas of youth development:

- a. Youth service and nation building;
- b. Youth service and human heritage;
- c. Youth service and world peace;
- d. Youth service: A Social Action Agenda; and
- e. Youth service and international cooperation.<sup>31</sup>

NYSC delegates were led by Soyemi A. Sofoluwe, the then Director General of the scheme. The members of the delegate include Departmental Directors, past Director-Generals and several collaborating agencies as observers. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) were represented. The following countries attended the conference; Algeria, Benin, Ethiopia, Fiji, France, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, Mali, Nigeria (the host), USA, Sierra Leone, United Kingdom, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. At the

<sup>28</sup> Gregory Kas Enegwea, interview.

<sup>29</sup> For detail of the 1992 and 1994 conferences, see the Circular on 1994 Global Youth Conference and 1994 Global Youth Conference Communiqué.

<sup>30</sup> S. A. Sofoluwe, *Circular*, 1994 Global Conference on National Youth Service, NYSC/DG/153/5.9/Sec/Vol.VI/391, 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1994, 2. (G K. Enegwea personal files and record). Yakubu Gowon, "Linking Youth Services with Global Understanding": Keynote Speech Delivered at the Opening ceremony of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Global Conference on National Youth Service, Abuja, 11<sup>th</sup> October, 1994, p.7.

<sup>31</sup> Nigel Watt, *Conference Communiqué - Towards Global Youth Service 1994*, (NYSC Archive, National Directorate Headquarters, Abuja GC/94/21), p.1.

conference countries without a standing national youth service scheme were mandated to do so, and bilateral and multilateral cooperation among youth service schemes at global and regional levels was encouraged.<sup>32</sup> This again re-echoes Rosenstock-Huessy of Germany proposition. It was in Abuja, Papua New Guinea volunteered to host the Third Global Conference scheduled for 1996. The success of the conference fired Gambia's confidence in the NYSC, which consummated in the founding of the GNYSS.

The Papua New Guinea's concourse which was the Third Edition was held at Port Moresby, between 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> October, 1996. The theme of the conference was "Global Idea for Local Action". The sub-themes were:

- a. National youth service and global peace and understanding;
- b. National youth service and environment;
- c. National youth service and education;
- d. National youth service and healthy drugs and substance abuse;
- e. National youth service and employment and enterprise;
- f. Participation of young people in management of the NYSC programme;
- g. National youth service for nation building; and,
- h. The Role of UNESCO in national youth service programme.<sup>33</sup>

The conference adopted the Abuja resolution on the establishment of an International Association of National Youth Service Scheme; probably to enhance cooperation of member-nations in dealing with youth-related problems in the twentieth century. The then Director General of the Scheme, Colonel S.M. Dule and Abba Ahmed Tanko represented Nigeria. There was a sharp decline in the number of participants from twenty-three to

<sup>32</sup> Watt, *Conference Communiqué...*, 1-2. Sani Abacha, *Address, Opening Ceremony of the Second Global Conference on National Youth Service*, held in Abuja, Tuesday, 11 October, 1994, 3. Gowon, "Linking Youth..." 7. NYSC Year Book: 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.. p.176.

<sup>33</sup> NYSC Year Book: 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary...p.176.

sixteen. Participants included Australia, Ghana, Cook Islands, Nigeria, India, Papua New Guinea (the host) Indonesia, Israel, Solomon Islands, New Zealand, Kiribati, New Caledonia, South Africa, USA, United Kingdom and Zambia. The coordination committee for International Voluntary Service at UNESCO in Paris, France, and the National Clearing House for youth studies, Australia, were in attendance too. The next conference was scheduled for London, United Kingdom in 1998.

Between 18 and 21 June, 1998, the Fourth Global Conference was held at Windsor Castle, London, United Kingdom. The theme of the conference was "National Youth Service in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". Countries that attended the conference were: Argentina, Australia, Botswana, China, France, The Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, India, Israel, Italy, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Spain, United States of America, United Kingdom (the host) and Zambian. The NYSC Director General, Brigadier General S.M. Dule, Adebajo Akinnigbagbe, Emmanuel Ochim and an ex corps member, Sani Garba represented Nigeria and the scheme.<sup>34</sup> In the year 2000, Nigeria participated at the Fifth Global conference held in Israel. Brigadier-General Walter Oki (Rtd), the former Chief Executive of the NYSC led the Nigerian delegates.<sup>35</sup> The conference was a watershed as it was the first of its kind in the twenty first century. Consequently, it was anticipated that the next editions of the conference would be held in 2002, 2004, and even thereafter. However, it appears the biennial global conference of the national youth service were not held in the scheduled years 2002 and 2004 as available evidence would have one believe.<sup>36</sup>

Apart from conferences and visits, another area in NYSC

<sup>34</sup> NYSC Year Book: Book: 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary...177. NYSC Year Book, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, p.241.

<sup>35</sup> NYSC Year Book, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, p.241.

<sup>36</sup> G K. Enegwea, Interview. NYSC Year Book, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition should have contained data on the 2002 and 2004 NYS Biennial Conference if they were held given the time it was published in the year 2008. However, it did not. Many prominent NYSC Administrators engaged on the discourse about the possibilities of 2002 and 2004 conferences confessed that they were not sure it held. There is therefore lack of evidence on the holding of 2002 and 2004 Global Conferences of National Youth Service.

external relations is technical support/ assistance. Several countries have solicited NYSC's hands to help establish their national youth service. One of such, which remained the most impressive engagement, was The Gambian experience (1996 – 2004). Attempts by the Gambian Congress Alliance Democratic (DCA) in the 1960s to mobilise the youths in a manner of the NYS thereby putting the country on the road of Ghana and Nkruma progressive trajectory failed.<sup>37</sup> However, hopes came when the fame of the Nigeria's NYSC reached The Gambia, following the development at the First Global Conference of 1992 in which Nigeria was to host the second edition in Abuja 1994. At the conference, The Gambian delegates were led by Mrs. Amina Faal-Sonko, the Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture at that time.<sup>38</sup> It may be recalled that the communiqué of the 1994 conference called on nations without a standing national youth service to do so. Sequel to the conference of 1994, the military government of The Gambia, in 1995, directed the Ministry of Youth and Sports to come up with a proposal for the establishment of a national youth programme.<sup>39</sup> Prior to this, Zambia tried to establish a national youth service for The Gambia, but failed, because the Zambia's model had no comprehensive structure compared to Nigeria's NYSC.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture set up a

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<sup>37</sup> H. Ceesay, "Small but Activist: The Gambia and West African Diplomacy, 1965-2015" in *Tarikh: Fiftyyears of Independence in Africa*, (11)1, 2018, p.20. Musa Mbye, c.50 years, Director of Planning/ and Deputy Permanent Secretary Ministry of Youth and Sports; Interviewed at The Quadrangle, Banjul, 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2018. Musa Mbye was one of the past Executive Directors of the GNYSS. He was also among the first batch of fifty youths mobilised in 1990 in the failed attempt of national youth service in The Gambia.

<sup>38</sup>M. Mbye, Interview; Gregory Kas Enegwea, Interview; Victoria Ango, c.56 years, Deputy Director of NYSC; Interviewed at NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, Abuja 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2018. Victoria Ango, was among the first batch of the NYSC experts deployed to The Gambia in 1996. Habibu O.Kurawa, c.56 years, Director General Services of the NYSC; Interviewed at NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, Abuja, 8<sup>th</sup> June, 2018.Habibu O. Kurawa, was among the second batch of the NYSC experts deployed to The Gambia in 1998.

<sup>39</sup> M. Mbye, Interview.

<sup>40</sup> M. Mbye, Interview; Emmanuel David Mendy, c.48 years, Executive Director, The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme; Interviewed at Bakau, 27<sup>th</sup> August, 2018. Emmanuel David Mendy, is the Executive Director of GNYSS. L.K. Enegwea, Interview.

task force that embarked on a global tour in search of a model national youth service scheme, which the NYSC was adjudged the best. This made the Gambian authorities to put forward a request to the NYSC through the Directorate of Nigerian Technical Aid Corps in 1995. The requests may be categorised into two: training and personnel, which broadly include: short-term attachments and study tours.<sup>41</sup> The requests for personnel also specific demands; one administrator and five field coordinators.<sup>42</sup> Upon approval, four batches of the NYSC experts were deployed to The Gambia between 1996 and 2004. The batches are as follows: the first batch (1996-1998) was made up of six NYSC experts: Gregory Kas Enegwea, retired, Mr. Anthony A. Enweonwu (of the blessed memory), Mr. E.E. Akinola, Mr. Nuhu S. Kwaghe, Solomon O. Ochim (now retired) and Mrs. Victoria Ango. Prior to the arrival of team member, Gregory Kas Enegwea, the leader of the group was sent to The Gambia for preliminary analysis of the nature and expectations of the scheme.<sup>43</sup> The preliminary investigation gave birth to the GNYSS in its entirety. The summary of the exercise that gave birth to the GNYSS is captured by Ode as follows:

At the course of the preliminary studies, I discovered that Zambia had tried to help establish a national youth service scheme for The Gambia, but failed because theirs has no structure. So, what I did was to conceive a scheme modeled after Nigerian NYSC and to borrowed ideas from Ghana national youth service,

<sup>41</sup> J.O. Olorunnisomo, A.M. Ozoma and B.N. Kobani, "An Interim Report of the Committee on Technical Cooperation between the Republic of The Gambia and the Federal Republic of Nigeria in the Field of National Youth Service Scheme", submitted to the Director General, Colonel Soyemi A. Sofoluwe, MSS, FSS, PSCon Tuesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 1995, p.3.

<sup>42</sup> Olorunnisomo, et al, "An Interim Report...", p.4.

<sup>43</sup> S A.D.Olisa, For Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Attention: Alhaji M. Bulama; Re-Request for Technical Exports to Help Run The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme, (Directorate of Technical Aid Corps, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abuja), Ref. No: TAC/RC/002/V, 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1995, p.1. Pius Ross Imienwarin, for Director General, Press Release: Pioneer NYSC Member Appointed Administrator of Gambia Youth Service, Ref: NYSC/NDHE/PRD/T.2, 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1996, Enegwea Personal File and record. Gregory Kas Enegwea, "Appointment of Technical Experts to Help Run The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme: Request for a Return Ticket and Estacode, for Impending Preliminary Assignment in The Gambia", 19 December 1995, pp.1-3,(Abuja: Gregory Kas Enegwea Personal File).

(which has two sets; one for degree graduates and another for non-graduates) and *TireloSetshaba* of Lesotho (sic-should have been Botswana going by the name *TireloSetshaba ...Emphasis Added*). Thus, I set up a scheme for The Gambia focusing on school dropouts and WASSC holders, because when I and my team members went there, there was no university in The Gambia. As a result, the question of establishing a scheme that could mobilize graduate youths was out of the plan. More so, it is the young school dropouts which pose the greatest challenge to the society that The Gambian authorities want to engage in skill acquisition through the GNYSS.<sup>44</sup>

In the end, The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme was officially launched by the former chairman of the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC), Captain Yaya A.J.J. Jammeh on Friday, 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1996.<sup>45</sup> Towards the end of the tenure of the first batch, it was recommended that the number of officers be reduced.<sup>46</sup> Thus, subsequent batches have fewer numbers.

The second batch deployed to The Gambia (1998-2000) was made up of three NYSC staff namely: Gabriel Ojo Alonge (now retired), Habibu O. Kurawa and the late Miss. Dorothy Ogbudu.<sup>47</sup> Gabriel Ojo Alonge was the leader of the team. The third batch (2000-2002) was equally made up of three NYSC staff. The team was composed of: Miss. Funke Eniola O.

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<sup>44</sup> G.O. Odeh, *Nigeria NYSC's Role in the Founding of The Gambian National Youth Service, 1996-2004*, A PhD Dissertation Submitted to the Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, 2019, p.116.

<sup>45</sup> G K. Enegwea, Interview. "The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme Programme Handbook for the Convocation Ceremony of the Fifth Batch of Corps Members and Official Launching of the National Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund by His Excellency Alhagie (Dr) Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh, President and Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of The Gambia", Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2001, at the Independence Stadium and Friendship Hotel, Bakau,(A Publication of Public Relations Department, GNYSS,2001),p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> V. Ango, c.56 years, Deputy Director of the NYSC; Interviewed at the NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, Abuja 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2018. Victoria Ango was among the first batch of the NYSC experts deployed to The Gambia in 1996.

<sup>47</sup> H. O.Kurawa, c.56 years, Director General Services of the NYSC; Interviewed at the NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, Abuja, 8<sup>th</sup> June, 2018.Habibu O. Kurawa was among the second batch of the NYSC experts deployed to The Gambia in 1998.

Ambekemo, Chief Gregory Anya and Mr. Adamu Emmanuel.<sup>48</sup> The fourth batch (2002 - January, 2005), which was the last batch, was made up of: Mr. Aloysius O. Idoga and Miss. Tete Ukpong.<sup>49</sup> The last batch was more on consolidating mission; however, no stone was left unturned in the struggle for the survival and growth of the GNYSS. At the end of their tenure, it was believed the operations of the GNYSS have been under- studied by The Gambian nationals. The reader may be interested in pictures in plate 1 below:



**Fig. 37: Pictures of the GNYSS Corps Members on Parade**

**Source:** GNYSS Photo Archive, Office of Executive Director, Bakau. The Gambia

<sup>48</sup> Ambekemo E. Funke, c56 years, NYSC Cross river State Coordinator; Interviewed at Calabar, 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2018. She was the leader of the third batch of the NYSC deployed to The Gambia between, 2000 and 2002. Greg F. Anyia, c.56 years, Assistant Director of the NYSC; Interviewed at the NYSC Orientation Camp, Keffi-Nasarawa State, 29th April, 2018.*Press Release 3<sup>rd</sup> Batch of Nigeria Technical Expert on National Youth Service Scheme (NYSS) Arrive The Gambia* (Gregory F. Anyia Personal File). Sabastine Njie, "The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme Testimonial of Noble Service", (Chief Gregory F. Anyia Personal File). Gregory F. Anyia, was among the third batch of the NYSC experts deployed to The Gambia in 2000.

<sup>49</sup> Aloysius O. Idoga, c.56 years, Assistant Director of the NYSC; Interviewed at the NYSC National Directorate Headquarters, Abuja. 7<sup>th</sup> June, 2018. He was a member of the fourth and final batch of NYSC Experts Deployed to The Gambia in 2002.

The pictures above reveals some resemblance between the NYSC and the GNYSS in the dressing code. (This shall be discussed later). In summary it would be said that the Nigerian Government contributed a great deal to the founding and development of the GNYSS. Nigeria was responsible for the payment of monthly stipends of about \$USD 600 to experts and settling of allowances of \$USD 500 to each of the fourteen member staff of the NYSC upon arrival in The Gambia between 1996 and 2004.<sup>50</sup> This means Nigeria's expenditure for the period stood at \$USD 208, 600. The engagement in The Gambia displayed Nigeria's leadership role in Africa and the international prominence of the NYSC. Victoria Ango captures the international political climate and Nigeria's relationship with the West at the time vis-à-vis the NYSC extended support to The Gambia thus:

At the time of the Abacha regime when we went to The Gambia, the Western countries were not friendly with us, Nigeria. The Gambia and other African countries benefited from Nigeria greatly during that period. Vehicles filled with fuel from Nigeria were lifted to The Gambia by the late General Sani Abacha. Each time Abacha visited The Gambia, it was as if he is visiting one of the States in Nigeria. People came out in multitude to welcome him.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> G O. Odeh, *Nigeria NYSC's Role in the Founding of The Gambian National Youth Service, 1996- 2004*, p.121. "Federal Republic of Nigeria Technical Aid Corps Programme: Agreement between the Federal Government of Nigeria Aid Corps Volunteer", (Banjul: Nigeria High Commission).

<sup>51</sup> Victoria Ango, Interview.



**Fig. 38:** The GNYSS Corps Members on Parade at the Parade Ground in the Orientation Camp

It has also been argued that the hostility of the West made Nigeria to turn to Asia for friendship, while maintaining its warm relations with African states. The basis of such assistance according to Ambassador Oluwasegun Ibido-Obe arises from Nigeria's "material and manpower endowment".<sup>52</sup> The material side of the power is economic resources which The Gambia does not possess, while the manpower angle is the political power or influence of a state which The Gambia possesses. He further notes that:

Nigeria has been a donor country to The Gambia. What Nigeria wants is The Gambia continual votes for her candidate each time the need arises at the AU, ECOWAS, UN, ILO, among others, and this has been working to a greater extent. Through The Gambia, Nigeria should be able to secure votes from Senegal and even Mali since the two are close neighbours and have good relationship, because politics is all about influence.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Oluwasegun Ibido-Obe, c.58 years, Nigeria Higher Commissioner; Interviewed at Banjul, 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Oluwasegun Ibido-Obe, Interview.

The above appears to have underscored the relevance of the doctrine of reciprocity, which The Gambia has been prosecuting. Finally, there is Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and other forms of international partnerships. First, along this line is the Nigerian Graduate Volunteer Programme (NGVP), a National Volunteering in partnership with VSO. The idea was first initiated on 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1996 in the planned Collaboration between NYSC and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV).<sup>54</sup> The aim was to address the constantly dwindling standard of education in schools through the use of ex-corps members and serving corps members. In the programme, teachers in Mathematics, English language and the Sciences are usually engaged. It started fully in 2009 with four schools in Nasarawa and six schools in Kwara. In the second year, the number of schools in Nasarawa increased to eight and in the third year, Kano State was brought on board. Officers of the programme have been to Ghana, Philippines, among other countries, and have also been involved in volunteer organisations such as UNV and Nigeria National Volunteer Service.(NNVS), football training and health campaign.<sup>55</sup> Besides, the scheme has gone into partnering with the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), John Hopkins University, Ea-net Africa, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), with many others eager to key into the various development projects of the scheme.<sup>56</sup> All these are targeted at ensuring the wellbeing of the youths and the society at large.

<sup>54</sup> NYSC Archives, TX/RX NO: 1373, Abiodun, A. Kaka,"Minutes of the Meeting on Planned Collaboration between NYSC and United Nations Volunteers (UNV)",National Directorate Headquarters Yakubu Gowon House, Maitama, Abuja.19<sup>th</sup> August, 1996.

<sup>55</sup> *National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary... 97 – 102.*

<sup>56</sup> G O.Odeh,*The Gambia's NYSS Partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM): Lessons for Nigeria's NYSC Scheme in the Twenty first Century*.A paper presented at the conference organised by the University of Texas at Austin, the Pan African University Press and the Chronicle on the theme *Sweat is Invisible in the Rain: A Conference on Culture, Politics and Contemporary Issues in The Gambia* held at Paradise Suite Hotel, 3 Paradise Beach Place, off Bertil Harding Highway (Kololi), Banjul, The Gambia 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> December, 2019, pp.17-18.

While the above is commendable, it is good that international engagements and partnerships are not just an orthodox one in the name of engagements and partnerships, but one with dividends and based on the reality of the Nigerian State, especially with regards to youth related challenges. From the foregoing, one sees that the pattern of the NYSC international engagement over the years has taken the form of official delegates and visits, conferences, technical support and international volunteering and partnerships. In the subsequent part of the chapter a comparative analysis of the NYSC and youth service elsewhere shall be done.

### The NYSC and Other National Youth Services: Comparative Discourses

The strengths and significance of an institution is partly measured when put side by side with others. Thus, in what follows the NYSC is considered and compared with its counterparts in The Gambia, Ghana, Botswana South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Germany, United States, United Kingdom, Mexico, Indonesia, Costa Rica and other oversea services. Beginning with the GNYSS, we affirm that although the NYSC is its founding father, there are areas of similarities and differences between it and the NYSC. Essentially, the NYSC was a product of a post war reconstruction agenda to tone down ethnic and religious differences. As a scheme, it targets graduates of higher institutions of learning within the age limit of thirty years. The GNYSS, on the other hand, was solely established to engage youths, particularly those who have concluded Junior Secondary School (JSS), West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE), and school dropouts who spend most of their time in ghetto houses drinking Chinese tea called *Ataya*..<sup>57</sup> These categories of youths are highly susceptible to social ills such as unemployment, indiscipline, frustration and drug

<sup>57</sup> *The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme: Brochure*. (A publication of The Gambia National Youth Service, Fajara South Atlantic off Garba Jahumpa Roads Kanifing, Bakau The Gambia), n.d, p.4.

abuse. It may be interesting to note that as at 1996 when the GNYSS was founded there was no university in The Gambia, and so the idea of mobilising graduates was out of it. Although the aim, objectives and organisational structure of the NYSC and those of the GNYSS appear similar, there are differences in their activities/operations. The core objectives of the GNYSS, among others, are to:

- (a) inculcate discipline in the Gambian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work and loyal service to The Gambia in any situation they may find themselves;
- (b) develop common ties among The Gambian youths, promote national unity and integration;
- (c) remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand many similarities among Gambians of all ethnic groups;
- (d) develop a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of The Gambia;
- (e) learn about higher ideals of national achievement and social and cultural improvement;
- (f) expose youths to mode of living of people in different part of The Gambia;
- (g) encourage religious tolerance through the accommodation of each other's religious affinity;
- (h) impart skills and knowledge to the youths and prepare them for employment and or self -employment in the world of work; and
- (i) encourage, train and guide young people for active participation in the social, economic, cultural, and political development of The Gambia.<sup>58</sup>

The NYSC objectives, on the other hand, are to:

- (a) inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work and of patriotic and loyal

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<sup>58</sup> Supplement "C" to *The Gambia Gazette* No. of 1999. *The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme Act, 1999*, Assented to by the President, 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1999, 2-3, ISSN 0796-0298, *The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme: Brochure*, p.9.

service to the Nation in any situation they may find themselves;

- (b) raise the moral tone of the Nigerian youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement;
- (c) develop in the Nigerian youths, attitudes of mind acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilisation in the national interest;
- (d) develop common ties among our youths and promote national unity by ensuring that:
  - i. as far as possible, youths are assigned to job in the states other than their states of origin;
  - ii. each group, assigned to work together, is a representative of the country as possible;
  - iii. the youths are exposed to the mode of living of the people in different parts of the country with a view to removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance and confirming at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups;
- (e) encourage members of the corps to seek, at the end of their corps service, career employment all over the country, thus promoting free movement of labour;
- (f) to induce employers, partly through their experience with corps members, to employ more readily qualified Nigerians irrespective of their states of origin; and
- (g) to enable our youths to acquire the spirit of self-reliance.<sup>59</sup>

From the survey of the objectives one sees absolute transplanting of the NYSC's objectives in The Gambia's GNYSS, and the organisational structure. (see appendixes I and II of the chapter). Unlike the NYSC, the GNYSS corps members do not provide services per say, but rather are made to acquire skills for self-

sustenance within the period of orientation, which usually lasts for twenty months and even more.<sup>60</sup> The reader may consult table 1 below for areas of the GNYSS engagements.

**Table 15:** Areas of GNYSS Engagement

S/No	Skill Area	Institution of Deployment
1	Auto-Mechanics	The Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTII)
2	Plumbing	GTII
3	Electronics	Chamen Training Centre
4	Electrical Installations	GTII and Chamen Training Centre
5	Carpentry and Joinery	GTII
6	Welding and Fabrication	GTII
7	Painting and Decoration	GTII
8	Air conditioning and Refrigeration	GTII
9	Livestock/ Animal Health	Gambia College
10	Home Science and Catering	SOS Adult Training Centre
11	Building construction/Masonry	Insight Training Centre
12	Information Technology	Gambia Telecommunication and Multi-Media Institute (GTMI)
13	Computer Hardware	Gambia Telecommunication and Multi-Media Institute (GTMI)
14	Tailoring	Presidential International Award Centre
15	Hair Dressing	MJ Hair Dressing Training Centre, Vicky Hair Dressing Training Centre and Gaye Njorro Hair Dressing Training Centre

**Source:** E D.Mendy, *The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme Annual Report*, 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2017, 6-7.

The above are technical vocation, education and training (TIVET) arms through which Isatou Drammeh, the first female Auto Mechanical Engineer in The Gambia and the only female engineer staff of The Gambian Port Authority, Banjul was produced.<sup>61</sup> Apart from TIVET, there are those trained through agricultural programmes such as seed multiplication, mechanisation, livestock and horticulture using Sapu and Nyaniberri farms measuring about 4.25 and 30 hectares,

<sup>60</sup> *The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme: Brochure*, p. 5. Musa Mbye, Interview.

<sup>61</sup> Emmanuel David Mendy, Interview. Sait-Tigan, Drammeh, c42 years, Auto-Mechanic Engineer; Interviewed at kanifing, 28 August, 2018.FafaNjie, Interview.Podou Mbye., Interview.

respectively, as demonstrations.<sup>62</sup> The point of confluence here is the NYSC SAED that came into force since 2012 and, the NYSC's 7,000 hectares of land for arable farming across the states of the federation including FCT, Abuja, which are meant for such operations.<sup>63</sup> However, the NYSC through Mobilisation, Orientation training, Primary Assignment and sixteen Community Development Services, usually sends out graduates to render services rather than skills for a period of 12 months before the Passing Out Parade (POP).<sup>64</sup> More so, in the same way as the NYSC, The Gambia Ministry of Youth and Sports entered partnerships with VSO for the development of the youths through the GNYSS.<sup>65</sup> In short, while The Gambia scheme is voluntary, NYSC is mandatory for eligible graduates. The total number of the GNYSS first intake in 1996 stood at one hundred (100) corps members and since then it has never mobilised above three hundred per batch or annum.<sup>66</sup> In 2004, the GNYSS could not mobilise any youth due to economic challenges. Since 1973/74 to 2019, the NYSC has never failed mobilisation in any year. The ability of the GNYSS to adjust to national and global realities that manifested in its partnership with the International

<sup>62</sup> The Gambia National Youth Service Annual Report,2012 ,3-6 Office of the Executive Director, Bakau, The Gambia. E.D.Mendy, *The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme Annual Report*, 31<sup>st</sup> December,2017, 7-10. The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme Accelerated Apprenticeship Training Programme leaflet”, (Office of the Executive Director, GNYSS). *The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme: Brochure*,18. Mendy, *The Gambia National Youth Service Annual Report 2017*, pp.6-7,( Office of the Executive Director GNYSS). “National Youth Service Scheme Terms of Reference for: An Impact Assessment and Tracer Study of the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSS)”, October, 2008, (Office of the Executive Director, GNYSS); National Youth Service Scheme(NYSS): An Impact Assessment& Tracer Study Report, pp.4- 54, Office of the Executive Director Bakau, The Gambia.

<sup>63</sup>National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary....pp.141 -145. P.K.Obasi, NYSC: A Nation attempt at Mobilizing the Youths, Ilorin: Publishing Division of Consultant and Marketers, 1995, pp.161-171. G.K. Enegwea, “NYSC: An Enduring Legacy” in H.I. Ajaegbu, B. J.S.T, Mathew-Daniel and O.E. Uya (eds,) Nigeria: *A People United, A Future Assured, A Compendium*, Calabar: Published for Federal Ministry of Information by Gabmo Publishers, 2000), pp.345-367.

<sup>64</sup> G.O.Odeh, *The National Youth Service Scheme and the Challenge..*,pp.16-20.G.O.Odeh, NYSC's Engagement in the Development of Abuja .p.147-148.

<sup>65</sup>The Gambia National Youth Service Annual Report, 2013.

<sup>66</sup> Office of the GNYSS Public Relation Officer (PRO), Bakau, The Gambia.

Organisation for Migration (IOM) to curtail the tide of illegal movement of youth to overseas is commendable. The first instance of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was to last for two years (2018-2020) and thereafter renewable.

The first intake in 2018 engaged 102 migrant returnees and in 2019, about 163 returnees were engaged bringing the total number of returnees to 265.<sup>67</sup> Despite the efforts of the GNYSS/IOM partnership, a tragic incidence occurred when a boat carrying 150 youths departed the coast of The Gambia on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 2019 and had an accident in the Atlantic Ocean, off the coast of Mauritania on 5th December 2019. About 60 migrants, mainly Gambian youths, lost their lives and many others were injured.<sup>68</sup> Though the NYSC has partnerships, the type with IOM appears to be what GNYSS has done differently. The Gambia model follows Dewy's idea of Service-Learning arising from his emphasis on practical skills, while the NYSC in its operation have in it elements of James Dewey's, with William James and Rosenstock-Huessy models.

Still in the West Africa Sub-region there is the Ghana National Service Scheme that was founded in 1973 under the National Redemption Council Decree 208 during the military regime of Acheampong. It shares similar birth year with the NYSC. The objectives are as follows:

- (a) Encourage the spirit of national service among all segments of the Ghanaian society in the efforts of nation-building through active participation;
- (b) Undertake programmes designed to combat hunger, illiteracy, disease and unemployment in Ghana;
- (c) Provide essential services and amenities, particularly in towns and villages of the rural areas of Ghana;
- (d) Develop manpower through practical training, and;

<sup>67</sup> G.O.Odeh, *The Gambia's NYSS Partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM): Lessons for Nigeria's NYSC Scheme in the Twenty-first Century*, p.14.

<sup>68</sup> Office of the Public Relations Officer (PRO), GNYSS Bakau, The Gambia.

- (e) Promote national unity and strengthen bonds of common citizenship among Ghanaians.<sup>69</sup>

A cursory look at the above does not show serious departure from the NYSC's objectives outlined earlier. Similarly, its organisational structure is not too different from the NYSC. Originally, it was opened to all Ghanaian from age 18 and above, but presently it is limited to graduates of tertiary institutions of not more 40 years old.<sup>70</sup> In the earlier years of its inception, participants were to serve for two years six months, but this has now been reduced to one year and made mandatory like the NYSC. Upon completion, a corps' employer may apply for an extension, not for punishment of recalcitrant corps member as is done in Nigeria, but rather as an indication that the corps member's services are still needed by the employer. In this case, the employer would only give six months. Military training was originally part of the orientation, but was removed and later re-introduced. There is room for exemption, and certificate of completion is offered upon satisfactory service consequent upon endorsement by employer. The Ghana service has the capacity to mobilise 60,000 participants annually, while the NYSC mobilises over 200,000 every year.<sup>71</sup> It appears both Nigeria and Ghana have the challenge of unity and integration and so the two countries believe university graduates are the leaders of tomorrow. From its objectives one sees the applications of James Dewy's idea of Service-Learning and this is more so in its initial decades when O' level participated in the scheme.

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<sup>69</sup> A. Langer and A T, Oshodi, In search of a (new) purpose? An Analysis Ghana's National Service Scheme (NSS). <https://nomadit.co.uk>.

<sup>70</sup> J A. Alooh, , c.28 years, Ghana NYS Personnel; Interviewed at Binduri, Upper East-Region, Ghana, 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2020. G C Emmanuel-Ahadzie, c35 years, Postgraduate Student Interviewed at the University of Ghana, Legon, 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2020.

<sup>71</sup> M. Schroyens, A. Langer, B. Mueleman, *Service to the Nation: Prospective participants' Motivations to Conduct National Service in Ghana*. Centre for Research on Peace and Development, Belgium. Working paper No.49, February, 2016, p. 5. National Youth Service Corps Year Book, 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary..., p.325.

Tirelo Setshaba is a non-military national youth community service launched in Botswana in 1980. Its initial targets were secondary school leavers who were expected to serve under government agencies for twelve months in villages away from their homes. This appears like the NYSC concept of corps member serving in states other than their states of origin. Initially, it was voluntary, but as time progressed it became mandatory, beginning from 1985, as part of preconditions for one to get into tertiary institution. However, it was later made voluntary. The objectives of Tirelo Setshaba are to:

- (a) give an educating, broadening, maturing experience to all O' Level school leavers before they begin further education and employment;
- (b) expose them to the realities of developmental needs in remote areas (and to the challenges of meeting them);
- (c) increase their self-discipline, initiate sense of responsibility, ability to identify, analyse, and help solve problems, and their commitment to the development of their country;
- (d) provide educated manpower to help carry out development programmes in rural areas particularly in remote areas, and;
- (e) create greater understanding among people from different parts of the country.<sup>72</sup>

Most of the objectives of Tirelo Setshaba above are different from those of NYSC, and even the target participants, both with elements of development and national unity. It began with initial participants of 28 and in the 1990s, it increased to 6000 given the mandatory status it assumed. The scheme terminated in the year 2000 due to economic challenges and was re-introduced in 2014. The age bracket now is 18 to 30. Unlike the NYSC under the Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, the Batswanas's is headed by a Director with field officers in districts towns. It appears to lack a solid structure compared to

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<sup>72</sup> M. Rankopo, *The Rise and Fall Tirelo Setshaba(Botswana's Young Community Service): A Personal Reflection.* Vosesa.org.za.Vol-no2.I.PDF.

NYSC. Rather than acquiring skills, participants render services like it is done in the NYSC. The idea of youths being leaders of tomorrow, which Nigeria upholds, is reflected here too, though there are striking differences given the educational requirements with regards to the two schemes.<sup>73</sup>

Another national youth service of note is the South Africa National Service Programme that began in 2004. It is voluntary in nature, but has a compulsory community service for health graduates; participants are between the ages of 18 to 35 and are to serve for a period of 12 months. Other requirements are Grade 12, preferably with Mathematics and Science, candidates residing around the project area. 80 per cent of the youths coming from disadvantaged backgrounds must have Green coded South African identity Document, and 60 per cent are to be females, while 40 per cent males.<sup>74</sup> This raises an interesting gender issue which NYSC may need to address. The programme is structured into three categories namely; one, focusing on unemployed and out-of-school and unskilled youths for accredited learning and skill development. Two, focusing on high school learners and university students in community service engagement while undertaking their studying and thirdly, youths and adults in community volunteer opportunities.<sup>75</sup> Its objectives are to:

- (a) create work and learning opportunities for unemployed youths while at the same time addressing the shortage of artisans in the building industry;
- (b) ensure participation of the youth in community service delivery thereby instilling the spirit of patriotism in South Africans, and;

<sup>73</sup> D.J. Eberly, *The Changing Face of National Service...*, p.5. D. Molefe, T. Mudariki, G. Tsayang and S G. Weeks, "Maximising learning opportunities for Tirelo Setshaba(Botswana unique non-military national service" in *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*. <https://www.tandfonline.com>. A. Langer and A T.Oshodi, In search of a (new) purpose? An analysis Ghana's National Service Scheme (NSS). <https://nomadit.co.uk>

<sup>74</sup> A. Langer and A T.Oshodi, In search of a (new) purpose?..., National Youth Service Brochure, Expanded Public Works Programme. [www.epwp.gov.za>documents](http://www.epwp.gov.za/documents). S. Stroud, *National Youth Service, Employability, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Livelihoods: Overview of the National Youth Service Landscape in Sub-Saharan Africa*.

<sup>75</sup> S. Stroud, *National Youth Service, Employability, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Livelihoods: Overview of the National Youth Service Landscape in Sub-Saharan Africa*.

(c) ensure that youths develop skills, understanding and aspirations for working within the built environment.<sup>76</sup>

The programme is structured into four faces; (one, Initiation; two, Pre-implementation recruitment, Induction and Technical Training; Three, Implementation made up of Tender Process and Construction and, finally, Beneficiary Exit). The entire programme is run by government departments, civil society organisations and National Youth Development Agency (NYDA). In terms of its organisation, it is not as centralised and focused as the NYSC, and the myriads of administration may affect its productivity. South African participants stood at about 54,785 in 2012, while the NYSC has been hundreds of thousands. In terms of funding The Gambia, Ghana and South Africa draws on private sectors and other donors, while the NYSC is solely funded by the Federal Government. Both schemes seem to advocate development and patriotism, but the South African one looks more like internships and skill acquisition programme. The phases are not clearly defined like that of the NYSC and the "initiation" phase sounds like some sort of cult. The model draws largely from James Dewy proposition of Service-Learning and Service Study, given the practical knowledge it aims to instill.

Zambia and Zimbabwe are the last to be considered in African NYS test cases. The Zambian one was introduced in 1963 and later re-introduced in 2005. It was a military force transformed into an agricultural scheme as possession of large military skills was de-emphasised. In the Zambia case, youth between ages 15 and 25 who are at the tragedy of dropouts are targeted. It is voluntary and essentially meant for skills acquisition and entrepreneurship in the field of carpentry, welding, automotive mechanics, bricklaying and agriculture.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> National Youth Service Brochure, -Expanded Public Works Programme. [www.epwp.gov.za>documents](http://www.epwp.gov.za/documents).

<sup>77</sup>Republic of Zambia National Youth Policy, 2-30. S. Stroud, *National Youth Service, Employability, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Livelihoods*.

In 2014, it engaged 198 boys and 34 boys who are expected to serve for about 12 to 24 months. There appears to be some similarities between the ZNS and the GNYSS. It may be recalled that initial attempts were made by the Zambia to help The Gambia establish a scheme, but the attempts failed due to lack of structure, unlike the NYSC. The permanent secretary in the Ministry of Youth and Sport oversees the ZNS. The correlation between the GNYSS and the ZNS in the area of skills indicates that the 2005 reintroduction may have borrowed idea from The Gambia. The ZNS is an application of Dewy's model of national service, though its initial origin appears to be James William's idea of Moral Equivalent of War.

The Zimbabwe scheme, on the other hand, was launched in 2001, and was met with criticisms as it was considered a militia wing of Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU- PF).<sup>78</sup> Its aim is to bring Zimbabweans youths into the realities of life as they graduate into adulthood. It is voluntary and participants, between the ages of 18 and 35, are to serve for about six months or so. Engagements include, but are not limited to, public work services, peace building and leadership development, youth volunteer corps, sustainable livelihoods education, career alignment. The scheme trained 50,000 youths between 2001 and 2008. It is funded by the Ministry of Finance, and is under the National Youth Service, Ministry of Youth Development, Indigenisation and Empowerment.<sup>79</sup> Arising from its intrusion in politics and the military torture it gives, it was disbanded after the fall of President Gabriel Robert Mugabe in January 2018. However, efforts have been on since August 2019 to reintroduce a new brand of it. Mavima, notes this thus:

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<sup>78</sup> R. Mc Govern, *Zimbabwe National Youth Service Programme*, dev.iccp.org. "Zimbabwe: The National Youth Service (NYS) training programme; the type of training involved; age of participants; whether mandatory; whether there are exemptions; and penalty for refusing serve or for desertion(2001-2006)" in refworld. <https://www.refworld.org>.

<sup>79</sup> *National Youth Policy*, Ministry of Youth Development, Indigenisation and Empowerment, <https://www.youthpolicy.org>. S. Stroud, *National Youth Service, Employability, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Livelihoods*.

We have to inculcate the philosophy of *ubuntu/hunbu* in our education system. This is why we are seriously considering coming up with a robust system of discipline now that we know we cannot use corporal punishment within schools.<sup>80</sup>

The aim of the envisioned revised frame work is to instill cultural norms, values and discipline in the youths who are perceived to be leaders of tomorrow. It is to make skills acquisition enterprise relevant. From the forgoing, the Zimbabwe model looks different from the NYSC in duration, operations, requirements, participants and organisation. However, both aim at developing future leaders and their countries.

Outside Africa, there are national services that we should briefly consider. In Germany there was forceful conscription into the military because of the world wars. However, in the post wars era around 1956 or so, there emerged *Zivildienst*. Initially, it was called *Ziviler Ersatzdienst*-alternative civil service, officially recognised (as *Zivildienst*) in government publication in 1970.<sup>81</sup> It has two connotations: first, it means objection to perform compulsory military duty, but rather to be engaged in civilian service and, secondly, concrete duties of *Zivildienst*.<sup>82</sup> It is therefore an alternative work as well as an institution. It does appear that the primary requirement for the youths here is not necessarily education up to bachelor's level, as required under the NYSC, but professionalism and ability to work. Among others, the responsibilities of *Zilvidienst* are captured in table 2 below:

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<sup>80</sup> M. Bureau, "Zimbabwe: National Youth Service to Return, Says Minister," *The Herald* (Harare) 6, August, 2019. <https://allafrica.com>.

<sup>81</sup> A. Ringer, "German Obligatory Service and Changing Social Values" in Thauberger, <https://www.aitheathauerger.com>.

<sup>82</sup> J. Kuhlmann, *National Service Options in Germany*. A Paper presented at the International Conference on the theme; National Service: A Global Perspective, Wingspread Conference Centre, Racine, Wisconsin, USA, June 18-21, 1992, p.11.

**Table 2:** Specializations in the German *Zivildienst*

S/N	Area of Service
1	Nursing assistance and welfares;
2	Mobile social services
3	Handicrafts
4	Ambulance and rescue services
5	Individual care for disabled persons
6	Public assistance
7	Drivers
8	Gardening and farming
9	Environmental protection
10	Business administration

**Source:** Adopted and Modified from, J. Kuhlmann, *National Service Options in Germany*. A Paper presented at the International Conference on the theme, National Service: A Global Perspective, Wingspread Conference Centre, Racine, Wisconsin, USA, June 18-21, 1992, p.13.

In 1991, there were about 31, 207 *Zivildienst* officers in Germany. In 1994 or so there were above 150, 000 young men in *Zivildienst* and other smaller programmes such as Civil Defence or Development Aid.<sup>83</sup> In this so-called *defacto* arrangement, participants serve either in the military or *Zivildienst* for about 12 to 15 months. The arrangement and operation here is totally different from NYSC as there is no clear-cut age limit, education qualification and some services could only fit into CDS, though below standard, military enrollment is not optional; nor is it mandatory for graduates in Nigeria and in all, the organisational structure of *Zivildienst* is not as defined as that of the NYSC.

In the United States there was Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which lasted between 1933 and 1942. It was established by the President Franklin D. Roosevelt Executive Order of April 5, 1933<sup>84</sup> as a relief programme that gave millions of young men environmental protection jobs during the great depression of the 1930s. With the support of the military, CCC members planted

<sup>83</sup> D J. Eberly, *The Changing Face of National Service...*, p.3. J. Kuhlmann, *National Service Options in Germany*, p.11.

<sup>84</sup> *Civilian Conservation Corps, History .com, Civilian Conservation Corps: History*, <https://www.park.ca.gov>.

over 3 billion trees and constructed trails and shelter in more than 800 parks, 46 bridges, 62,000 buildings, 89 miles of telephone lines etc.<sup>85</sup> The enrollees were between the age of 18 to 25 and worked for a minimum of 6 months. Later, army veterans, skilled foresters and craftsmen of native America were engaged. It may be recalled that in 1850, the Scottish Essayist, Thomas Carlyle, avers that: "Unemployed men should be organized into the regiments to drain bogs and work in the wilderness areas for the betterment of society".<sup>86</sup> The CCC appears to be the fulfillment of that prophetic thesis and the Moral Equivalent of War espoused by James William. Given that the Congress never established CCC, it fizzled out of relevance with time and what came to be known as national youth service in United States are myriads of failed and failing attempts to engage youths in a manner that lacked structure and precise focus. For instance, Students Conservation Corps emerged as summer volunteers under National Park Service in 1957 and was transitioned to Youth Conservation Corps in 1965. Since 1970s and 1980s, and even to date, varieties of corps are found across the United States.<sup>87</sup> In short, High School systems of Atlanta, Detroit, Maryland and Washington DC have community service requirements for graduation. This appears to agree with James Dewy's idea of Service-Learning and Study Service. So, there is no organised national youth service for graduates of the NYSC type in the United States. The America Peace Corps established in 1961 and 1962 is a prototype of the Technical Aid Corps in Nigeria designed for graduates to render volunteer services to foreign nations for a period of about two years after three months of training<sup>88</sup>, which conforms to Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy's idea. In Costa Rica, Mexico, Indonesia and the United

<sup>85</sup> Civilian Conservation Corps, History .com., *Civilian Conservation Corps: History*.  
<https://www.park.ca.gov>.

D J. Eberly, *The Changing Face of National Service...* p.3

<sup>86</sup> Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy, [www.ccc.legacy.org](http://www.ccc.legacy.org).

<sup>87</sup> Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy.

Kingdom, multiple organisations of youth engagement exist. The University of Costa Rica runs a programme called *Trabajo Communal Universitario* (TCU- University Community Work). In the arrangement, undergraduate students are assigned to professors to work for about 300 hours on projects of national interest.<sup>89</sup> This is the application of James Dewy's idea of Service -Learning and Study Service. In Nigeria, the resemblance of this is Teaching Practice and Industrial Attachment and, partly, the role corps members play when posted to schools and when they engage in CDS activities, although they do this without the supervision of a university professor. In Mexico through Servicio-Social programme inaugurated in 1937, medical students work for six months in places with medical and health needs and furnish the mentor weekly progress report.<sup>90</sup> This is Dewy's idea again which is only implemented in Nigeria during internship and under the NYSC. However, medical and health graduates under the NYSC platform undertake health campaign and treatment of people in rural communities. In Indonesia, the service appears to have grown out of the war of its independence. Soldiers took up themselves to children in villages when they were not fighting. The military wanted future leaders to take pencils and books to work in project areas such as public health, clean water supplies, and agriculture. In the 1950s, there was the national youth service aimed at providing teachers to secondary schools. However, by 1963 the government gave that role to university juniors who were to work under professors in appropriate areas of needs.<sup>91</sup> The prominent university in this enterprise is the Gadjah Mada

<sup>88</sup> J.Ekong, *National Service and International Co-operation: The Nigerian Experience*. A text of Address by the Ambassador and Director, Nigerian Technical Aid Corps, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the Second Global Conference on Ntaional Youth Service held in Abuja, Nigeria October,1994, pp.1-8. Peace Corps, <https://www.peacecorps.org>, Peace Corps/Mission/History and Facts-Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com>.

<sup>89</sup> Costa Rica Innovations in Civic Participations, [www.icicp.org](http://www.icicp.org).

<sup>90</sup> D.J. Eberly, *The Changing Face of National Service...* p.4

<sup>91</sup> D J. Eberly, *The Changing Face of National Service...*,pp.3-4. For further detail on civic participation see, Indonesia: Download PDF, <https://www.youthpolicy.org>.

University, Indonesia. This again is largely a combined application of James William and James Dewy's idea. The points raised about NYSC in the instances are retained. The services in Mexico and Indonesia were affected in the 1980s or so, due to reduction in oil prices. This is a wakeup call to the NYSC.

In the UK, England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, there are several youth polices and organisations. The British Youth Council has over 230 national and local organisations.<sup>92</sup> The UK does not adopt European Union's definition of youth (age 15-25), but a national policy that sees youths as those between ages 18 and 19. However, community and voluntary services adopts 25 years.<sup>93</sup> The UK has service learning programmes christened Community Links with General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE).<sup>94</sup> Books and curriculum have been produced by the community. From the foregoing, the quadruple of Costa Rica, Mexico, Indonesia and the United Kingdom have no independently structured and organised national youth service as the NYSC. Their engagements are smaller forms of the NYSC postings to secondary schools and CDS.

In concluding this section, we reiterate the glaring fact that there has not been any national youth service scheme in the whole of Africa, America and Europe that could be favourably compared to the NYSC in terms of organisation, aim, objectives, operations and achievements. The comparative analysis here appears to validate the 1994 claim of the Gambian study team. In the words of Aminah Faal-Sonko:

Members of The Gambian Study Team that visited America, Europe, the Middle East and a number of African countries in search of a model youth service

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<sup>92</sup> Youth Policy, United Kingdom, <https://www.youthpolicy.org>.

<sup>93</sup> A. Biggart, *National Youth Service Policy in UK: Trends, Issues and Evaluation*, <https://link.springer.com>.

<sup>94</sup> D J. Eberly, *The Changing Face of National Service...*, p5

scheme for The Gambia were unanimous in their report that the NYSC in Nigeria is the best organised Youth Service Programme in the world.<sup>95</sup>

Recent research further buttresses the above thus:

When people try Nigeria's NYSC with other schemes, I usually tell them there is no need for such comparison. This is because such exercise is like comparing the living and the dead. NYSC is a colossus in the comity of national youth service schemes.<sup>96</sup>

These observations are underpinned by the fact that the NYSC is not just a local and national player, but also a global player as well. This does not mean there are challenges facing the NYSC. How it could overcome the challenges remain the focus of the subsequent part of the chapter.

### The NYSC Beyond the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The NYSC has made good its promise in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and at the sunrise of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The vision for the remaining part of the century and beyond lies in its history of over 47 years of national and international engagement. In this history, the NYSC should note its areas of failures and successes to enable it sail through the challenges of the century and beyond. In this history too lies the forces of adjusting to national trends and domesticating global experiences. The prospects of the scheme may be viewed from home and the global fronts. The home front includes, among others, the question of the man in the orientation and the man during the passing out parade. The scheme no doubt has become a household name in Nigeria.<sup>97</sup> But the question is whether it has been able to create a new man out

<sup>95</sup> G.K. Enegewea, "NYSC: An Enduring..," 341. Gregory Kas Enegewea, Interview.

<sup>96</sup> M. Koroma, 47 years, GNYSS Accountant; Interviewed at Bakau, 27 August, 2018.

<sup>97</sup> S. Abacha, Address By the Head of State Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria at the opening ceremony of the second Global Conference on National Youth Service, held in Abuja on Tuesday, 11, October, 1994, p.2

of the man that comes to the orientation camp and stays thereafter for a whole year. The NYSC itself notes this several years ago, but it does appear the challenge is still there. It observes that:

...the foremost challenge of the scheme is to create a new man whose values and attitudinal disposition will be in consonance with the societal/national demands...the central source of concern it would appear is the extent to which the attitudinal disposition of corps member have been affected by the programme and how to measure and sustain such attitudinal change much vital to the future of the scheme.<sup>98</sup>

At fifteen, one of the director generals agreed with the above and points up thus:

The focus of our operation. The final product of our endeavour is a new person in the corps member at the passing out...we must pay attention to the quality of corps member we turn out.<sup>99</sup>

The above shows that the entire programme needs serious overhauling for enhanced performance. The orientation phase is of few days loaded with paramilitary activities with the language instruction most times ending as mere mental exercise as instructors hardly get corps member to learn basic alphabet. The primary assignment and community development service lacked the required monitoring and evaluation. Be that as it may, having a new Nigeria is not a task of a single institution. There is therefore need for a working synergy between the NYSC, National Universities Commission (NUC) and the many degree awarding institutions within and outside Nigeria whose products are mobilised by the scheme. The recent policy in the

<sup>98</sup> A.O.Sanda, *Youth Service and World Peace*, p.14.

<sup>99</sup> A.O.Sanda, *Youth Service and World Peace*, p.14.

scheme by the current Director General whereby foreign prospective corps members and serving ones are made to write qualifying exams for mobilisation and certificate of discharge is commendable, but more commitment is still needed along that direction.

Again, the rural – urban posting formula has issues that should be overcome. Ideally, rural-urban posting formula should be 25 per cent and 75 per cent, respectively.<sup>100</sup> The scheme has been under serious pressure from corps members, parents and politicians as most people want to serve in the capital of their states of deployment. How then could one realise the objective of exposing graduates to different mode of lives and cultures of the people across the length and breadth of Nigeria? The real cultural and traditional people showcasing Nigeria's heritage and who are capable of educating corps members are not living in the city centres, but are in remote communities and villages. Related to this is the desire of parents in wanting their wards to serve in some states rather than allowing the national posting policy to prevail. Such an attitude is inimical to the core objectives of the NYSC.

Furthermore, the CDS groups appear cumbersome and therefore would need reconfiguration to be more focused, precise and sharp. Presently, there are about sixteen CDS groups with a plethora of purposes and activities that sometimes overlap.<sup>101</sup> The challenge is not the number of the groups per say, but rather on the purposes and activities that lack precise focus. The consequence of this is the inability of corps member to fully grasp the fundamentals of the groups, which makes them to end up bringing nothing to the table. Corps members should be posted to groups of interest and academic background. More importantly, agencies with CDS brand names such as EFCC, ICPC, Road Safety, NEMA, NAFDAC, SON, should be made to

<sup>100</sup> A. Sofoluwe, *National Youth Service Corps: Challenges and Prospects...*, p.18.

<sup>101</sup> G O.Odeh, "NYSC's Engagement in the Development of Abuja...", pp.47-48. G O.Odeh, *A Historical Survey of NYSC Community Development Scheme in Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, 1983 – 2010*. M.A. Dissertation, Department of History, Benue State University, Makurdi, 2013, pp.35-80.

seat up and actually work with corps members. It is strongly recommended that stakeholders in the NYSC and collaborating agencies ensure that work experience in the service year is strongly valued as an added advantage, if not made a pre-requisite for graduates seeking employment with the organisation in the post service year.

In addition to the above is the possibility of introducing NYSC related courses in the universities and tertiary institutions. General Sani Abacha made this call in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He recommended that universities should work on a General Studies Course with the brand name, "National Youth Service Community Mobilisation".<sup>102</sup> There is no compelling time for the implementation of this call than now that the nation is fast losing grip of its ethos. Undergraduates ought to have been adequately furnished with the mechanics of the scheme before getting to the orientation camp. Thus, heeding to and implementing the advice of the former head of state would boost the relevance of the scheme in the 21st century and save it from the sledge hammer of critics. Taking the scheme to the hub of academics that would make it more relevant to all and sundry and fast-track the drive towards rural integrated development and national integration is highly suggested.

While the above is being done, the NYSC management, the National Assembly and the masses should press for a legislation that would make certificate of service (not exemption) a compulsory requirement for the offices of the President, Vice President, Senate President and the entire members of the National Assembly, State Governor and State Houses. Historical parallel of this abounds in the United States where it appears presidents of the country are usually products of Ivy League Schools/Universities such as Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Penn, Columbia, Cornell, etc.,<sup>103</sup> The US experience may be a product of

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<sup>102</sup> S. Abacha, Address by the Head of State, Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces..., p.4.

<sup>103</sup> Academic interaction with Dr. E U.Olowu of the blessed memory. Dr.Olowu is a product of the University of Pennsylvania. He is criminology expert whose specialises in penology and victimology. Till his death in March, 2020, he heads Department of Sociology, Bingham University, Karu.

chance, but ours demand legislation to make NYSC a defining factor in Nigeria's citizenship. This may be perceived as discriminatory, but borne out of patriotism to rescue the nation from the hands of narrow minded and ruthless politicians that are completely ignorant of the diversities of the country. In short, notwithstanding the character and comments of some products of the scheme in the National Assembly, those that have thoroughly passed through the NYSC come out with a proper view of Nigeria. Lawal, cited in Enegwea, reinforces this that:

Nobody who have participated in the Scheme comes out with the same level of understanding of both national issues and commitment.... participants at the end come out not as tribal champions, but nationalists with strong moral fibre and appreciable degree of respect for the dignity of labour and understanding the task ahead in national development.<sup>104</sup>

Making appropriate legislations to make the scheme compulsory for leadership positions would attach strong importance to it which will further enhance the status of the NYSC in the twenty first century and beyond.

The possible implementation of the above notwithstanding, the scheme has demographic challenges to contend with and overcome. As already noted in the chapter, the scheme took off in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with two thousand, three hundred and forty-six pioneering corps members and over forty years after, it started mobilising over two hundred thousand annually. This constitutes serious demographic challenge that raises two fundamental issues. One, there may be need to create three arms: one for university graduates; two, for polytechnics and colleges of education and other degree awarding institutes and three, voluntary unit.

Graduates of other institutions other than universities should be engaged in practical training and skill acquisitions. Also, to some extent, university graduates from specialised and professional courses such Agriculture, Engineering, and Commercial Courses, among others. Ghana appears to have operated this system of NYS in its initial decades.<sup>105</sup> The last handle of it is to create a voluntary arm and lift the age requirement bar from 35 to 40 years. It seems the Lower House of the National Assembly is already on the move to jack up age limit of government jobs for graduates from 30 to something between 35 and 40 years. This would not in any way trigger population surge in the scheme, but will rather constitute an economic advantage for the nation. In short, the voluntary arm may be totally devoted to the Agricultural sector of farming.

The scheme needs a management that is curious, creative, innovative and entrepreneurial to drive it to its desired pedestal. A cursory look at the leadership profile shows the NYSC to have been dominated by the military. Understood, its background is military, but even the pioneering chairman, Professor Adebayo Adedeji, is a civilian, and Rev. P O. Okrunamade and Police Commissioner Emakaro are not from the military.<sup>106</sup>

About fifteen heads of the scheme are from the military. The leadership should be demilitarised, democratised and opened to civilians with administrative, entrepreneurial and innovative skills to come on board. After all, this is not a military regime and the Commander-in -Chief of the Federal Armed Forces is no longer a military man, but a "born again" democrat. This is also applicable to the office of the Minister of Defence. Changing or swapping between the military and civilians would lead to cross-fertilisation of ideas and enhance military-civil relations currently being advocated for in the military.

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<sup>105</sup> G.O.Odeh, *The Gambia's NYSS Partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM): Lessons for Nigeria's NYSC Scheme in the Twenty first Century...*, p.18.

<sup>106</sup> National Youth Service Year Book: 40<sup>th</sup> Edition, p.25. G.O.Odeh, The National Youth Service Scheme and the Challenge of Nation Building in Nigeria..., p.40.

There is also the issue of rejection of corps member after being posted from the orientation camp to places of primary assignments. Rejection causes psychological stress and delay in the settling down of corps members. Appropriate legislation should be made to make acceptance of corps members in organisations and establishments compulsory. The challenge sometimes is not that the services of a corps member are not needed, but rather the inability or unwillingness of such organisations to pay him/her some stipends. Towards this end, corps members' allowances may have to be further increased so that even if the required stipends from their places of primary assignments are not paid, they should still be able to cope with the economic realities of the time while serving. After all, it is a service to the fatherland and should be fired by patriotic flavour.

Very crucial to the nation's economy and the relevance of the scheme is the challenge of agriculture. This received lip service, instead of action, in the crusade for the revitalisation of agriculture and the diversification of the economy. The incontrovertible fact is, before oil, there was agriculture and after oil there will be agriculture. Man needs food from cradle to grave. The NYSC has thousands of hectares of arable land across the states of the federation including the FCT. The scheme needs to fully reactivate its operations and partner with relevant agencies, faculties and departments in the universities and other institutions. It is time to mobilise graduates directly to farm with thorough monitoring and evaluation to yield results. The ability of the scheme to champion the restoration of agriculture thereby contributing to feeding the teeming population and substituting import bill would endear it to the society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

This is especially so because of the centrality of agriculture to the security of the nation. This throws enormous challenge to all managers of men and resources, which the scheme happens to be one. Not posting corps members to some states of the federation because of frequent loss of lives is one the major

concerns the NYSC.<sup>107</sup> Thus, the to protect corps members, staff, and come out of security quagmire led to the development of security tip handbook titled “*National Youth Service Corps Security Awareness and Education Handbook for Corps Members and Staff*, Manshasdu Printing Company Ltd, 2004. Like *Zivildienst*, in post-world war Germany, the NYSC should work towards mobilising directly into the military or community police and with proper demobilisation package. This would improve the security climate of the country. After all, the best security architecture is intelligent gathering and graduates are the most intelligent people.

Related to security in the list of challenges confronting the NYSC is the attention generated by female corps members because of their dress code. The recent issue pertaining to the wearing of skirts by two female prospective corps members of the 2019 batch “C” stream deployed to the Ebonyi State orientation camp comes into focus. The debate elicited by the episode centres on the historicity of the NYSC dressing codes for female corps members, the nature of the orientation exercise, the general dressing code for the female gender in the military and paramilitary outfits, and the religious beliefs of the prospective corps members in question. The event casts serious light on the ethnic and religious character and composition of Nigeria, which was what led to the civil (1967-1970) and the formation of the scheme itself. In addressing the Ebonyi episode, the NYSC summarily de-kitted the prospective corps members. Out of the many issues this development raises, very crucial is the question regarding how an issue bothering on female dressing could be resolved in such a way that diverse elements are carried along without jeopardising people's religious beliefs and by so doing, scuttling the unity and discipline which the NYSC seeks to inculcate. Whatever perspective one views it; the wearing of

<sup>107</sup> A.T. Akume, S. Micheal, M.O. Abu, “Conflict, the NYSC Programme and the Question of Policy Relevance in Present Day Nigeria: An Assessment” in *50 Years of Nigeria's Nationhood: Issues and Challenges for Sustainable Development*, Dr. A. Abdulrahman, I. Ogundia, T. Garba, I.M. Dankani, (eds); A Publication of Faculty of Social Sciences, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Ibadan: CrownF. Publishers, 2012, P. 111.

skirts in Ebonyi camp epitomises a fundamental clash between the forces of the old and new order.

To navigate through this challenge and related ones, it is important to come to terms with the reality that building a nation in a multi ethnic state such as Nigeria is a gradual process that involves some sort of "add and drop" to accommodate varying interest groups. Since the NYSC is not yet in a state of perfection, stakeholders and scholars should put heads together for conscious deliberations on the subject of a dress code that revolves around the wearing of *hijabs* and skirts by female corps members of diverse religious persuasions in a manner as to minimise the tension resulting from religious differences. On this note we affirm that wearing of skits as is sometimes done in the military and paramilitary is, therefore, recommended, depending on the activities in the camp.<sup>108</sup>

At the global front the challenge are one, that of reviving global conferences of National Youth Service. It has been noted that the biennial conference went into oblivion and has to be revive by the NYSC given its standing in the comity of national youth services. The scheme would remain internationally relevant as it continues to learn and embrace new challenges at the global fora. According to Abacha, youth service by its nature and concept has a value and relevance that cannot be confined within national borders.<sup>109</sup> Inability to do this may partly render the NYSC a local champion. Secondly, becoming a founding partner of the GNYSS is a role history has thrown on the NYSC and that had great prospects for South-South development strategy as it should ensure the continual survival of the GNYSS. Thus, the demand for the GNYSS renewed partnership with the NYSC should be put into consideration. Concerning this, Mendy, cited in Odeh, notes that:

<sup>108</sup> G.O.Odeh, *Issues in Dressing Code for NYSC Female Corps Member*, (Unpublished), Department of History, Sokoto State University, Sokoto, 2019, pp.1-15.

<sup>109</sup> S. Abacha, Address by the Head of State, Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces..., p.5.

We have good relationship with Nigeria NYSC, which terminated in 2004/2005end biannual support years. We are trying to revitalize the relationship to enable us address the problem of man power by getting more personnel support.<sup>110</sup>

Mbye, cited in Odeh, buttresses this broadly thus:

The GNYSS has helped youths who would have become national liability. This means much to me. Nigeria should try to further help the GNYSS. I know Nigeria is a big brother not only to The Gambia, but to the entire African States. Through the efforts of Nigeria, the dream of ECOWAS, African Union and international community can be achieved in The Gambia.<sup>111</sup>

From the forgoing, it is clear that the continual survival and success of the GYNSS would boost the relevance of Nigeria and the NYSC in the region, sub-region and beyond.

The question at this juncture is, what should the NYSC domesticate to keep it relevant beyond now? Three things stand out here: One, to develop and domesticate a regional or sub-regional conference that is a resemblance of the global youth conference for youth organisations in Africa. Secondly, the need to partner and constantly adjust to changing realities. The GNYSS partnership with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) spoken about is a lesson from whic to learn. In the same manner, the NYSC should adjust and partner with relevant international agencies such as the UN, for example, for comprehensive engagement of youths in the fight against national and global crime. Sanda saw this and cautions that:

<sup>110</sup> G.O.Odeh, *Nigeria NYSC's Role in the Founding of The Gambia National Youth Service, 1996- 2004*. A PhD Dissertation, Department of History and International In studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,2019, pp.176-177.

<sup>111</sup> GO.Odeh, *Nigeria NYSC's Role in the Founding of The Gambia, ... p.177.*

World peace...can however be significantly promoted through the elimination of the limitations of the existing approaches to world peace and the strategic deployment of youth services worldwide in the furtherance of global peace.<sup>112</sup>

This has been a neglected approach to national and global security. Adults appeared to have failed in the area of national and global peace. It is often said that the youths are the leaders of tomorrow, it could be the long spoke about tomorrow having come. Given the awesome cyber intelligence youths possess, they should be put at the forefront of the struggle for national and global peace. Finally, the NYSC should expand its revenue base to ensure that global shocks on oil prices do not affect its operations. History has unveiled the negative consequence of global prices of oil on the activities of the Indonesia and Mexico youth services in the late 1970s and 1980s. This should be a warning to the NYSC under Brigadier General Ibrahim Shauibu to develop a strong Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) base for the scheme. The inability of the GNYSS to mobilise in 2004 due to funding is a warning too. The current DG acted differently by setting up a printing press for the NYSC, and this is commendable.

The NYSC should also domesticate the skill acquisition enterprise of Botswana, The Gambia and Ghana youth services to generate robust revenue and create employment for Nigerian graduates. Also, the scheme's Joint Venture arrangement with the National Directorate of Employment<sup>113</sup> (NDE) which has gone comatose should be revived. In short, research has shown that upon completion of NYSC, only 5.7 per cent of graduates receive offer of employment; 60 to 70 per cent spend up to thirteen to fourteen months doing nothing; 14 per cent spend two to three years, still unemployed,<sup>114</sup> while some never get a

<sup>112</sup> A.O.Sanda, *Youth Service and World Peace*, p7.

<sup>113</sup> A. Sofoluwe, *National Youth Service Corps: Challenges and Prospects...*, pp.21-26.

<sup>114</sup> O.O. Taiwo, "Globalization, Society and Culture: Whither Nigerian Youth?..", p.249.

government job at all. The SAED, therefore, needs serious attention and support to help generate revenue and create employment opportunities for corps members in the post service years. With these and proper funding, successive government support and dismantling of unnecessary bureaucratic bottlenecks, the scheme can survive 20<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> century.

## Conclusion

The chapter has examined the NYSC within the context of its evolution and prevailing national and global realities. The chapter has equally done a comparative analysis of the *modus operandi* of the scheme with similar ones elsewhere in Africa, America, Asia and Europe and found that the NYSC remained the best organised National Youth Service programme in the world. However, it is not yet *uhuru* given the travail the scheme and its operators have to contend with to justify its existence and to advance its course beyond the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The chapter argued that the future appears grimmer if the operators of the NYSC and its stakeholders run the scheme contrary to the ideals of National Service as Moral Equivalent of War, National Service as Service-Learning and Study and National Service as A Way of Strengthening Ties Among Peoples Across the World as espoused by the trio of William James, John Dewy and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. The chapter sums it up by pointing out that the NYSC has come of age to be able to define citizenship that could birth the dream of a new Nigeria. And as a foot soldier in the national building project, the NYSC should brace up as it navigates the bumpy roads of the battle of relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

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### The Book

This study of the National Youth Service Corp Scheme is coming at a time when the Nigerian Society is once again on the boil with the festering fissiparous tendencies across the Nigerian society. After almost fifty years of existence and activities, evaluating the score card of the scheme has become a necessity. This text interrogates the origins of the scheme, her modus operandi, achievements and impact. The book is partly a tale of a major effort made by the Military regime of General Yakubu Gowon to close up the yearning gaps that existed after the war amongst the various Nigerian peoples. It x-rays the strategic attempt that sought to involve the Nigerian Youths in the nation's healing process after a fratricidal encounter. In this sense, the NYSC scheme was a major move towards nation-building. It eloquently demonstrates how state institutions can be created and deployed as a tool for social engineering. The study also interrogates the nature, structure and operations of the NYSC; as well as the growth and the development of the scheme. The book also examines the achievements, challenges and prospects of the Scheme. Given that the scheme has survived for almost half a century, we can safely assert that it is one of the legacies of the Gowon administration that can be rejigged and deployed to address some of Nigeria's contemporary challenges.

### Editors

**Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jr.**, is a Professor of African History and lectures in the Department of History and International Studies, Federal University of Lafia. A Fellow of the Historical Society of Nigeria, he is the current President of the Historical Society of Nigeria.

**Christopher B. N. Ogbogbo** is a Professor of History and lectures in the Department of History, University of Ibadan. A Fellow of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Ogbogbo is the immediate past President of the Historical Society of Nigeria and the current Vice President of the Association of African Historians.

