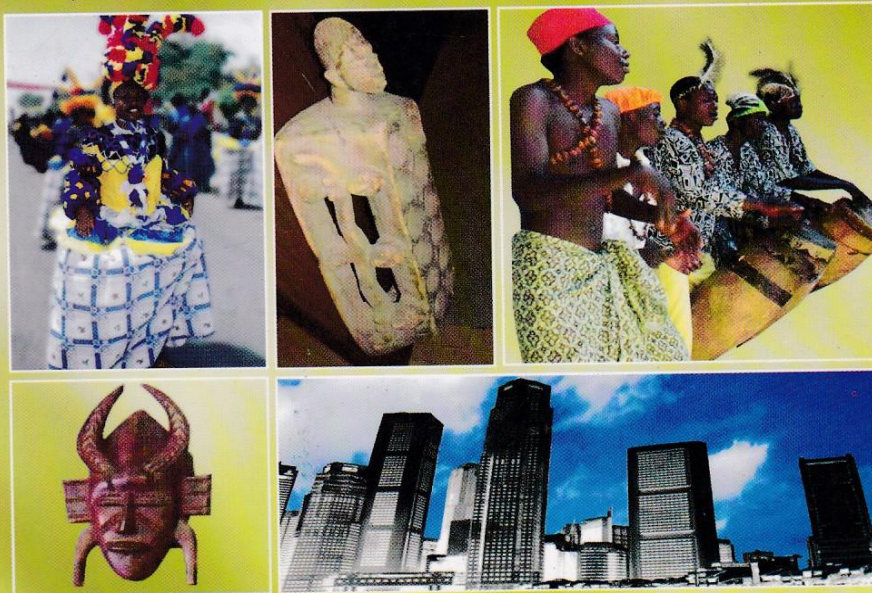


Cultural Rejuvenation for National Integration and Sustainable Development in Africa



Tunde Babawale

Chapter 2

Youth mobilization strategies for political participation

- Ekanem M. Ekanem¹ & Dukana B. Ikpe²

Introduction

Nigeria is a youth-dominated nation with about 83.5% of her population falling within the zero and 39-years age bracket. However, very little is coming from the society to motivate and enhance the ideals of youth in Nigeria. In most contemporary developing societies the role of the youth in societal development has been largely ignored and maligned. It is indisputable that youths have a significant role to play in the political system, and Nigerian youths have been vigorously involved in several political activities over the past years. Development of the society and people, and the sustainability of life and the environment as the goal of any nation can only be effectively attained if the solution set is people centred. Nigerian society should direct her developmental thoughts, goals and policies towards enhancement of the well being of youths. Their patterns of involvement in political activities are disjointed, disoriented,

¹ Department of Geography & Regional Planning, Uyo

² Department of Political Science/ Public Administration, University Of Uyo, Uyo

disorganized and incoherent. This leads to misdirection of youthful energies into unconventional and village political activities such as thuggery, arson, murder and various types of election rigging. The danger is that if this pattern of behaviour stabilizes in these youths as appropriate modes of politicking, then the future of Nigerian democracy is insecure. The fact is that youth are identified more with antisocial behaviour than with behaviours that are in tandem with development. Where youths are not used as cannon fodders for civil disturbances, they are involved in different forms of brigandage. Today in Nigeria armed robbery, political thuggery, rape and arson are some of the vices that are used to describe the youths of the day. There is need for a new orientation of the youths toward political participation that is supportive of liberal democracy. This calls for long and short term measures. Long term measures begin with the socialization process which as at now is completely disoriented. This will be followed by education, training and retraining of youth, to acquire skills for proper participation and to decongest the political arena. Short term measures include creating appropriate political roles for the youth to enable them formally participate instead of being thugs to political bigwigs. The existing laws against thuggery and other electoral crimes which involve a large member of youth should be enforced diligently. This development calls for concern hence the need to identify the social causes of these vices and ways to ameliorate the ugly situation. Are the youth mobilization strategies wrong or simply inadequate? How was the *traditional African system* able to handle this youth challenge? The aim of this chapter is to capture the process of youth mobilization for optimal development process in the polity.

Globally human development processes have suffered tremendous challenges including that of providing a sustaining economic ability to an astronomically growing family. This situation has put so much challenge to the productive ages, including the youth. There are socio-economic pressures among working adults and more in the unemployed, resulting from unabated poverty and diseases. The experience of this economic scenario is distributed unevenly through the various social classes

of the society. But generally, the inflationary trends and global market indices have all suggested that the solution is in right leadership, good governance and appropriate decision making by the ruling political class. This makes human energy to be largely directed forwards polity both in the developed and the developing countries of the world. Political participation by men and women since twentieth century seems to have taken entirely an unprecedented trend, with an amazing range of youth involvement. The drive is based on the belief that better governance would sure provide answers to the glaring social, economic, political, educational problems and even hunger that is prevalent in the world systems.

This chapter therefore focuses on the various strategies of mobilizing the youths for the political participation, with particular reference to Nigeria circumstance.

Conceptual framework

For purpose of unambiguity, the main concepts of the topics of this chapter are identified and explained. These concepts are the concept of youths, mobilization strategies and political participation.

Youth

A youth has been defined by different groups and individuals differently. For instance, Chukwuma (2000) has defined youth as any person between the ages of 12 and 35 years who is passing through mental and physical development process to face the challenges of adulthood. A *youth* is referred to as the state of or time of being young. It is also referred to as a period of time when someone is young, especially the period between being a child and being fully grown (Akpan, & Ekong 2006). Furthermore, youth is the period of life from puberty to the attainment of full grown adult.

Mobilization

Mobilization according to Tilly (cited in Giddens 1989: 744), involves the way in which a group acquires control over

sufficient resources to enable collective action possible. Such resources may include supply of material goods, political support or weapons and so on. Mobilization requires a change of orientation by the citizenry and expressed commitment by the leadership. The change of orientation by the citizenry depends primarily on the perceived sincerity of the leaders by the citizens. It also depends on the capacity of the leaders to captivate the imagination of the people with the efficiency and utility of the expected new benefits.

Mobilization therefore means creating a state of readiness for involvement in an activity; that is, organizing human and material resources of the society to achieve identified goals. For instance, although, the constitutional provision empowers every citizen who has attained the age of 18 years to contest election, such an individual must be mobilized to actualize the provision. Mobilization here implies that the individual must be made to be mentally ready to accept the challenges of contesting, or voting and possessing the necessary resources required to perform those functions properly.

Mobilization strategies

Mobilization strategies involve those processes needed to equip or expose individuals to set goals or challenges. For instance, when citizens are politically mobilized they become activated to participate in politics. It is dangerous for any system or organization to direct the energy of the citizens without channelling them into something that promotes the cause of the society as perceived by the ruling political regime. It is the mobilization strategies employed in the systems that harnesses the promotion of such cause and achievement of set goals. The strategies include awareness creation, innovation and information generation, public enlightenment at the grassroots, media publicity, formal and informal education etc.

Political participation

According to Ikpe (2000; 18) political participation refers to the disposition, ability and willingness of citizens to take active part

in political activities with the implicit or explicit aim of influencing the decisions of government. Influence on the government in various countries is legal, illegal and sometimes extra legal acts but are greatly subject to political actions. But there are differing thoughts from scholars as to whether illegal activities, unsuccessful attempts to influence the government and involuntary action should be included in the definition of political participation. For instance, Akpan & Ekong (2006; 168) have quoted Jerrold Rusk (1976) of criticizing Verba and Nie in 1972 for excluding interest group on activity and protest behaviour which have had tremendous influences on government.

However, political participation is being classified as conventional and unconventional. The conventional participation refers to those activities that are accepted as appropriate by the dominant political culture such as voting, seeking elective position, and working for a candidate or a political party, writing letters to public officials and so on. While unconventional forms of political participation are not accepted by the dominant political culture as being appropriate. These include all kinds of political protest which may or may not violate the law.

Historical background of youth mobilization in politics

Youths are undoubtedly strong agents of change and where they are properly mobilized, great deal of results could be achieved politically. This fact was realized even in the past political scenes in Nigeria. It could be said that youths were mobilized in the past by the indigenous political organization and leaders; and then by the nationalist who both had their motives paramount over national interest. Therefore youth mobilization was haphazardly conducted through the mass media particularly radio, public enlightenment campaigns of parties which emphasized slogans aimed at consolidating ethnic solidarity. There was no programme that was directly aimed at mobilizing the youths for any purposeful role in the political systems. Rather, youths were

unintentionally involved, and by default, owing to their utility in initiating electoral malpractices and political violence. Hence youths were used as thugs and combatants for the parties and bodyguards for the political leaders.

The first and second republics saw the same political scenario in youth mobilization. It was in the third republic, about 1987 when directorate for mass mobilization, social justice and Economic Self Reliance (MAMSER) and Centre for Democratic studies (CDS) were established. While MAMSER was for political mobilization of the masses and political education, CDS was for induction of political elites into respective roles and democratic norms respectively.

However studies show that through the mobilization effort of MAMSER, most of the youths who had never participated in an election before became excited and enthusiastic, while the older people sank deeper into pessimism and disenchantment (Ikpe; 2000: 138-139). But the reality was that when actual electioneering ensued, the old political techniques returned with stronger vehemence, and the youths once again took their position as the executors of electoral malpractice formulated by the political leaders.

Youths have generally been mobilized by political class because they tend to thrive in thuggery, violence and the like, apparently because of poverty, unemployment and the selfish motive of people who exploit them. A situation where politicians, chiefs and businessmen recruit youths as thugs and reward them for terrorizing people is greatly counter-productive. The youths need to be encouraged to participate actively in political processes. Such encouragement could mean building necessary social structures and providing the enabling atmosphere for the realization of individual talents, personality development and group survival.

Youths in political history of Nigeria

Historically, the political story of Nigeria would be incomplete without the indelible records of past youth participation and involvements. The Pre-independence efforts of Nigerian youths

contributed much to the achievement of independence in Nigeria as a nation. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Chief Anthony Enahoro and others who championed the cause of Nigerian Independence were young students. They started their agitation for independence as student union activists, and carried on formidable groups that challenged colonial rule. Anthony Enahoro was about twenty one years old when he moved the motion for the independence of Nigeria. Yakubu Gwon was only twenty-nine years old when he became the Head of State of Nigeria. Late Isaac Boro, fresh from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was in his thirties when he formed the Niger Delta Volunteer Force and later fought for the emancipation of his people.

Factors affecting youth mobilization and participation

The pattern of political socialization and culture

Youth participation in politics is tremendously affected by the pattern of culture and political socialization. Political culture refers to the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations towards political activities among members of a political system. In other words, political culture consists of all attitudes and beliefs held commonly by the people which form the basis of their political behaviour. It is the subjective realm that gives meaning to political actions. The individual orientations involve several components including knowledge of political beliefs, feelings of attachment, involvement, rejection, and the like about such objects; and judgments and opinions about political objects, which usually involve applying value standards to political objects and events.

But political socialization is the process through which the political culture of a society is transmitted from one generation to another. It is the process by which change in political culture can take place.

It is political socialization that helps the individual in the development of awareness of the political world and

appreciation, judgment and understanding of political events. Therefore when an individual becomes socialized politically, he acquires political orientations and pattern of behaviour which provides him with an opportunity to learn the basic orientation necessary for maintenance of democratic system.

The military problems

Military destroys democratic cultures and also those institutions through which gradual socialization could excel. There is always a cut-throat struggle for power which eliminate orderly and systematic approach to institutionalization of political authority; governance and other political processes. When military remain for long in power the youths in particular have no knowledge of what the proper civil political processes ought to be. Usually the military come to power through coup which usually eliminates the senior officers from their political positions. This results often in the false impression that the youth are in power.

In Nigeria, for instance, the youths were uncritically credited with excessive energy, efficiency and intelligence thus the political slogan "new breed politician" The fourth republic has actually shown a youth dominated political scene in the local government councils, State and National Assemblies, House of Representatives, etc. There is an attendant problem in the development, with regards to training, experience, orientation and imbibed values which the youths are in most cases not adequately equipped for such responsibilities.

Commercialization of politics

Politics has generally become one sure way to wealth and riches. Many politicians have traded in politics, fully intending to amass financial wealth. Politics is not seen as gateway to leadership except for fame and material well-being. According to Ake (1985) politics in Nigeria has from the first republic been seen as the quickest and surest avenue to wealth accumulation. Truly but sadly, wealth accumulation by whatever means has become the

dominant value for most Nigerians. The youth are unredeemably intoxicated with the situation and so have abandoned other values such as education, trading, and vocational training. The strong urge to make it materially and that soonest has constituted the strongest mobilizing influence for youth participation in politics.

Influence of role models

The performance of the political leaders has influenced the youths more than any thing else in their political involvement. Unfortunately, the political elders use the youths as tools to effect their electoral manipulations, malpractices and violence. The youths emulate them in actions that have impacted them negatively in character and behaviour. Most office holders indulge in corrupt practices; they neglect the legitimate channels of seeking power and would rather prefer the illegal and fraudulent channels. It must be said that, when what is in existence is corrupt, it is into the corrupt system that the youths are socialized, and they participate in it, then, mobilization activities will be cosmetic, deceptive, and only designed for window dressing, with no much positive impact.

Political leadership structure

The western world seems to have more flexible political system that allows change of leadership with ease. But in the African political system, as in Nigeria, political leadership structures tend to tilt towards permanent arrangement. They find it difficult to relinquish position but would rather attempt to amend constitutional provisions to elongate their tenures. The old politicians keep circulating from one position to another. This makes upward mobility of the youth very slow and frustration, violence and indiscriminate killings become the means to move up quickly.

When tension mounts excessively on the leadership and they are reasonably threatened, various strategies ranging from divide

and rule, coercion and bribing the various youths leaders to exert control over their members are utilized to keep the leaders in power (Akpan and Ekong: 2006).

Global perspective of youth mobilization

United States of America

In America, a renowned sociologist, Charles Derber with Lt. Gov. Tin Murray observed that emerging democratic crisis in the last 30-40 years was no accident, but has been designed and planned by the political elites who were terrified by the spectre of mass grassroots political activities they saw in the 1960s. He said widespread youth political mobilization caused politicians to intentionally suppress public involvement and alienate them from political process. "There is nothing more dangerous than a mobilized generation" he said.

However, by American political history, Jesse Jackson in 1984, ran for president in the Democratic Primary and 2000 Ralph Nader, another American youth, ran as the presidential candidate in Green Party. But in each instance, it seemed like youth participation was reaching new heights. Whereas in the actual voting youth turn-out (18-20 year-olds) actually declined.

In the Al Gore versus George W. Bush race, an election which turned out to be a defining moment in political history approximately thirty millions young eligible voters had no say. Although voter turnout actually dropped in recent times, the plunge has been particularly dramatic among the youths. For example, in 2000 only 45.5% of the youth registered to vote.

Between 1972 and 2000, the youth voter turn-out rate declined by 13 per cent points among the youths in presidential election years. In 2000, only 42 per cent of youths voted, compared to 70 per cent of the older citizens.

Still, the major political parties in America are making effort to get youths to participate. Both the young Democrats of America and the College Republic National Committee have stepped up their recruitment efforts and are now holding more

events than in the past years. They also both encourage youths to attend political events and register to vote on their web sites.

South Asian American Voting Youth (SAAVY)

In the past ten years, Asian American youths between (18 and 24 years) registered to vote dropped drastically. From 50 per cent in 1990 to only 35 per cent in 2000; which was far lower than any other minority, according to study by CIRCLE (The Centre for Research, Civic Learning and Engagement). Thus we can conclude that South Asian American Youth fell into a bracket of those highly discouraged from political participation.

Thus SAAVY is at present trying to empower South Asian grass roots. Mobilizing efforts to present a unified voice and create a voting bloc that will allow South Asian American issues to be pushed to the forefront of American politics. Though the important tactic here is getting the youth to vote, the overall vision is to educate, organize and mobilize South Asian Youth to create a national united Progressive Voice and thereby increase political participation as well as civic engagement. Youth voting is not just getting more votes to the poll, it is about organizing, and mobilizing the youth to create a united voice and increase political participation.

Kuwait

To encourage youths to participate in the elections, UNDP collaborated with the Kuwait Transparency Society and the Kuwait Forum to publish and distribute a youth Guide to the elections. Its objective was to raise awareness of the elections procedures and enhance the abilities of eligible youths to vote for the candidate that best represents them.

Message used in the media are varied e.g., "Exercise your right let your voice be heard", "Your vote is your decision, participate", "one vote makes a difference," "your vote is a trust according to law and to sharia," etc. These messages adorned the streets and media through bill boards, posters on buses, flyers

distributed at campaign headquarters, TV and newspapers advertisements, etc.

Strategies in youth mobilization for political participation

Strategic groupings

Mobilization organization formation is a *sine qua non* if meaningful mobilization and participation of youth in politics is envisaged. The organizations so formed would aim at making sizeable mobilization effort that could yield the expected results. For instance, in the United States of America, mobilized groups are created to mobilize youths and integrate them into meaningful political participation. These groups include:

America coming together: These groups constitute a large number of members before 2004 but had now shrunk. But they are still around and kicking. They claim to have reached over 42 million voters on 2004 Election Day.

Declare yourself (DY) Non-profit campaign that started in 2004 focused around youth mobilization and has claimed to have registered one million young and first time voters prior 2004 election via DY spoken word and music tour, high school program, and related campaigns.

NAACP National Voters Fund: This is an organization with the Mission to engage in issue advocacy, educate voters on candidates' stands, civil rights and also increase voter turnouts among African Americans Non partisan.

MTV's Choose or Lose – This is youth focused organization that did lots of work prior to 2004 election.

(a) New Voters Project .A non-partisan effort to register young people launched in 2003. The group did some amazing work before the 2004 election and became one of the largest

grassroots mobilization efforts – increasing turnout by 11% and registered about three hundred and fifty thousand youths.

Voto Latino - This organization is non-partisan, and youth driven organization to create a rectified voice for Latino youth.

(b) Youth Democrats of America – youth arm of the Democratic Party. Nationwide organization with 43,000 members. It runs lots of programmes to elect democratic candidates, train youths, and aims to stimulate youth participation in the democrat party.

Rock the vote – One of the big youth focused mobilization organizations. It did a lot of work prior 2004 and did it very well. They integrated text messages into their voters' registration/mobilization campaign, incorporated entertainment and youth culture into its activities.

Political education

For effective mobilization, education is a necessary strategy. In most cases the youth and even the political class does not receive the needed political education for meaningful participation. But rather the degree of political participation and involvement is determined by experience in the political scene. In some cases, experience gained without due political education has proved counter-productive. Corrupt political models and god-fatherism have negatively impacted their subjects and the result has always been distasteful.

Ours seems to be an age of lost values and spiritual decadence characterized by among other things, the superficiality of youths. The basic cause of the problem is that the present generation of Nigerian youths has inappropriate role models. Their situation has not been helped by the deepening poverty, inequality and lots of hope engendered by corrupt, violent and irresponsible governments. (Archibong 2006). It is therefore clear that youth

cannot participate adequately without the needed education to correct the ills already enshrined in the Nigerian political system.

Except for the increasing jobless and misguided youths at the political scene, the youths seem to be significantly neglected in politics. The requisite awareness on political process is grossly lacking. The result is that the educated and the skilfully engaged youths have stayed away from participating in politics not for lack of interest, but largely due to the inherent corruption, and dishonest manner with which issues are being treated. This is one reason why the youths are not in politics because they have not been mobilized to vote during election, prepared to stand for election, or contribute towards running effective government but rather to assist older politicians in achieving their political and material interest.

However the mobilization of youths in political system as thugs for violence, carrying and destroying of elections boxes and materials, killing and other such vices have only narrowed participation in politics in its real sense. This form of mobilization rather entrenches distrust, suspicion, intolerance, rivalry and incapability among youths even in their environments. Politics need not be pursued like the military where governance is characterized and also made through coup d'etat.

A situation where politicians, chiefs and businessman recruit youths as thugs and reward them for terrorizing people negates the purpose of mobilizing them for political participation. The youth are to be encouraged to participate meaningfully in all political processes through creation of appropriate social structures and provision of enabling environment for realization of their individual talents.

Recommendations

Mobilization strategies for political participation, whether in the developed world or developing countries, ought to be seen as a democratic process of involving the citizenry in decision making and exerting positive influence on power through voting and

other constitutional measures to enhance national development. The mobilization strategies should involve the youths and the following recommendations are made:

1. Youth mobilization strategies should have a defined purpose to achieve what should be of national interest.
2. The youth's mobilization should have an integrated pattern to educate, organize and monitor them so as to engender united, progressive and increased/political participation and civil engagement.
3. The issue of adequate creation of political awareness is a critical one in youth mobilization process for their political participation. The awareness process should involve use of television, magazines, and internet. At the global political scene internet contributes to a wider awareness of political arguments. Any fear that use of the internet might hurt healthy democratic deliberation are borne out of bias. Internet users, which constitute a large proportion of youths, will have greater exposure to the arguments that challenge their views.

For example, internet has become an essential medium of American politics. President George Bush used internet primarily to grassroots organization and mobilization of youth.
4. The youth should be empowered through government initiative of building youth patriotism, national consciousness and pride; and massive expansion in youth-related programmes. This kind of empowerment will reflect the 1972 declaration of General Gowon administrations "readiness to bring together qualified young men and women and to inculcate in them a sense of discipline, dedication, national pride and consciousness through nationally directed and disciplined training (Umobong: 2006).
5. Yearly budgetary allocation for youth development through training will translate successive government lofty ideas, such as the General Gowon's into realities. This is important

because the youths have the ability and the intellect that can be tapped to make a positive development and a remarkable change in the different sectors of national life. They are said to be "leaders of tomorrow" and therefore, must seriously be invested on and budgeted for.

Conclusion

The stage of our national development like any other developing country of the world in this twenty-first century demands more serious attention in youth participation in politics. There is a growing challenging craze for power, participation in decision making on issues that affect them, and the struggle to be heard by the youths.

The alarming increase in knowledge and technological advancement has created access to the youth for information and means to explore and exploit situation of their interest beyond imagination. Already depriving the youths of their participation in political decision making and their exclusion from youth issues and programs in practical terms, in national development projects, have attracted agitations and alarming youth protest. In Nigeria, the militant groups in the Niger Delta and abduction of expatriates in oil fields are enough threats to national security and development. The youths must be properly mobilized to truly participate in politics.

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