

BEYOND RHETORIC

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND
POLITICAL VOICE
IN NIGERIA

EDITED BY ISAAC OLAWALE ALBERT
MARTIN IKE-MUONSO N.
M. OZONNIA OJIELO



Beyond Rhetoric

**Youth Empowerment and Political
Voice in Nigeria**

Edited by

**Isaac Olawale Albert
Martin Ike-Muonso N.
M. Ozonnia Ojielo**



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Contents

<i>Preface</i>		<i>vii</i>
<i>Contributors</i>		<i>xii</i>
SECTION ONE		
Chapter 1:	Introduction: Taking Sides With Nigerian Youth – <i>Isaac Olawale Albert</i>	1
SECTION TWO		
Chapter 2:	Youth Empowerment and Political Voice in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: A Background Paper – <i>Isaac Olawale Albert, Martin Ike-Muonso N. and M. Ozonmia Ojielo</i>	19
Chapter 3:	A History of Youth Empowerment and Political Voice in Nigeria – <i>Isaac Olawale Albert and Olumayowa Oreoluwa Albert</i>	42
Chapter 4:	The Youth and Political Participation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic – <i>Dhikru Adewale Yagboyaju and Muheeb Ibraheem Oladipo</i>	59
SECTION THREE		
Chapter 5:	Nigerian Youth and the Social Media – <i>Ayobami Ojebode and Joseph Oyedele Obasanjo</i>	99
Chapter 6:	'Talking While Eating': Anti-'Normative' 'Youth' Politics of Dino Melaye and Shehu Sani in Nigeria – <i>Oludayo Tade</i>	130
Chapter 7:	Reduction of the Legal Age of Candidacy and the Continued Challenge to Youth Political Voice in Nigeria – <i>Hassan Taiwo Soweto</i>	152
Chapter 8:	The Youth, Money and Political Voice in Nigeria – <i>Adeolu Akande</i>	176

Chapter 9:	Youth Empowerment and Political Participation in Nigeria: Investigating Influence of Nigerian Social Realities on Mental Health and Safety of Youth Corps Members in North-Central Nigeria – <i>Ruth Ochanya Adio-Moses</i>	193
Chapter 10:	Political Education for Youth Empowerment and Political Voice in Nigeria – <i>Danladi Atu</i>	209
Chapter 11:	Youth Empowerment as a Corporate Social Responsibility in Nigeria – <i>Isaac Olawale Albert and Temitope Bello</i>	222
Chapter 12:	Mark Zuckerberg, Emmanuel Macron, Bill Gates and Political Voice for Nigerian Youth – <i>Olumayowa Oreoluwa Albert</i>	234
SECTION FOUR		
Chapter 13:	Youth Empowerment and Political Voice in Southwest Nigeria – <i>Jide Ojo</i>	255
Chapter 14:	Youth Empowerment and Political Voice in Nigeria's Southeast Zone – <i>Freedom C. Ornuoha</i>	278
Chapter 15:	Youth Empowerment and Political Voice in South-South Nigeria – <i>Paul Nyulaku</i>	306
Chapter 16:	Youth Empowerment and Political Voice in North Central Nigeria – <i>Oluremi Olayide Albert and Benjamin Adeniran Aluko</i>	328
Chapter 17:	Youth Empowerment and Political Voice in Nigeria's Northeast Region – <i>Chris M.A. Kwaja</i>	364
Chapter 18:	Youth Empowerment and Political Voice in Northwest Nigeria – <i>Nathaniel D. Danjibo</i>	372
<i>Index</i>		397

CHAPTER NINE

Youth Empowerment and Political Participation in Nigeria: Investigating Influence of Nigerian Social Realities on Mental Health and Safety of Youth Corps Members in North-Central Nigeria

Introduction

Young people are at the centre of developmental goals and aspirations of any nation desirous of sustainable development. This is because this vital population does not only represent hope of regeneration; it is also the population that shoulders the burden for advancement. Young people are central to socio-economic development as significant proportion of the manpower needed to drive developmental efforts are borne by them.¹ Young people today, become leaders of tomorrow. While it is not out of place to have young people in leadership positions today, their most important usefulness to societal growth and development is anchored on the roles they are to take up in piloting affairs of state at adulthood. Opening up the political space for young people as well as other conscious efforts to equip them for the challenges today and the ones ahead are thus critical to attaining national developmental goals.

Conceptual clarification of youth is important in furthering the importance of this vital population to development. The concept of youth has attracted various interpretations that have amounted to a state of controversy. This controversy arises because of the difficulty in reaching an agreement on the age bracket that should constitute the acceptable youth age. The Pan-African Youth Chatter (2006) defines youth or young people as “every human being between the ages of 15 and 30 years”.² This is in line with the English

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- 1 F.C. Anyanwu and S.R. Okeke (2012). HIV/AIDS and Youths' Risky Sexual Behaviour: A Challenge to the Realization of Vision 20:2020. *Journal of the Nigerian Association for Physical, Health Education, Recreation, Sports and Dance*, 3 (2): 1-14.
 - 2 Pan-African youth chatter (2006). In: United Nations World Youth Report, 2007. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org>

convention which classifies the period of youth as falling within the ages of 15 to 30 years.³ The peculiarity of the Nigeria situation has led to the invention of social and economic definitions, which treat youth as a thing of the mind and so admits people up to the age of 40 years and beyond. Economically, the lateness of the period of independence for the average young Nigeria leaves them socialising in the realm of youth for as long as they remain dependent on their parents or guardians and this could be well beyond the age of 30.

Understanding the vital importance of youths to nation building and national development, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), (2009) developed a second edition of the National Youth Policy.⁴ In the document, the Nigerian government noted that youth are one of the greatest assets that any nation can have. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the future leaders, they are potentially and actually the greatest investment for a country's development. Young women and men are, in particular, recognised as a vital resource whose future prospects are inextricably tied to that of their country. They are the valued possession of any nation or region. Without them there can be no future. They are the center of reconstruction and development. They serve as a good measure of the extent to which a country can reproduce as well as sustain itself. The extent of their vitality, responsible conduct, and roles in society is positively correlated with the development of their country (FRN, 2009).

According to the World Development Report 2007, there are 1.3 billion people in this age group. Close to 85 per cents of this over 1.3 billion young men and women live in developing countries; this figure is projected to increase to 89 per cent by 2025. Nigeria's population is predominately young. Nigeria has a population of one hundred and forty million people (NPC 2006 provisional results which makes her the most populous nation in Africa). One third of her population is young people between the ages of 10 to 24 years. The recognition of this fact led to the development of the National Youth Policy and the subsequent reviews of the policy. According to the

3 R.A. Wokocha (2002). Youth and the Challenges of Social Development in the Niger Delta In Wokocha, R. A. (2002). (ed). *Development right issues in the Niger Delta*. Port Harcourt. Kite books.

4 FRN (2009). Second National Youth Policy: Document of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Abuja: Federal Republic of Nigeria.

policy document, the review of the National youth Policy is necessary to improve the level of coordination among policies and sectors that affect youth in the country and raise the level of accountability for youth outcomes – many sectors of the economy needs to work together when devising youth policies to influence outcomes, strengthen the voice of young people in monitoring and providing feedback on the quality of youth policy and service delivery in Nigeria, and ensure global best practices in the design and implementation of National Youth Policy.

The document stipulates that the policy represents a declaration and commitment of the priorities, directions and practical support that a country intends to provide for the development of its young men and women. It is a concrete and bold step to put the development and participation of young people at the centre of national development efforts. It is indicative of the readiness of the Federal Government to meet the needs and aspirations of the youth as well as seek solution to their problems. It sets guidelines and provides the framework for all stakeholders to empower the youth to realise their potentialities and take advantage of the opportunities available to make positive contributions to the well being of their communities across the entire country. Unfortunately, social realities point exactly towards the opposite directions for all the laudable programmes and intentions spelt out by and in the policy document. Young people in Nigeria are still at the centre of poverty, hopelessness, crimes, kidnapping, robbery, arson, political thuggery, terrorism, and other acts inimical of the developmental drive to which they can be put. Young people in Nigeria are also at the centre of cultism and ritual killings which in recent times have assumed a worrisome dimension under the name 'Yahoo Plus.' A serious cause of concern is that educated young Nigerians are involved in these destructive tendencies. This thus casts serious doubt on the efficacy of the Nigerian education system to empower Nigerian youths towards national building. The issue of empowerment beyond mere education is thus of important concern for maximising the roles that the youth can play in national development.

To say that Nigeria is desirous of development is saying the obvious. The nation has made and is still making frantic efforts to attain development although these efforts are yet to yield desired results. With the United Nations first decade of development which spanned from 1960 through, premises for the reconstruction of the human development paradigm were created just as approaches to attaining human development emerged. Constructs such as

inclusion, participation, and empowerment emerged as contemporary drives for attaining human development.⁵ Copious and recent evidences suggest that children, youth and women are the most vulnerable to development policy frameworks.⁶ In a study centering on youth in Africa, the findings indicated that vulnerability of young people is anchored on the twain factors of socio-economic impediments on the one hand and social exclusion on the other.⁷ Socio-economic impediments are due to issues relating to unemployment, non-functional education, and poverty while youth exclusion can be tied to shunting the political space for youth engagement and participation in national issues and even the ones affecting them. This is evidenced in an average Nigerian political party where the youth leaders are rarely youth. Research evidence of this nature, youth restiveness, Arab Spring, and the recent Libyan slave trade and migration crisis, continue to sound the death knell for governments and other stakeholders to renew attention on youth empowerment.⁸

Research evidence shows that contemporary initiative in youth development seems to challenge unspoken assumptions.⁹ Notable among these assumptions is the belief that youthful stage of development is turbulent and full of storm and exuberance. This viewpoint has bedeviled youth development commitment.¹⁰ Recently, a notable political leader drew the ire of the youth when, in a *Freudian Slip*, he asserted that youths are lazy and as

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- 5 A. Cornwall (2010). Introductory overview – buzzwords and fuzzwords: deconstructing development discourse, in Cornwall, A. and Eade, D. (eds.) *Deconstructing Development Discourse: Buzzwords and Fuzzwords*, pp. 1-18. Warwickshire: Oxfam.
 - 6 O. Ismail and A. Alao (2007): Youths in the Interface of development and peace, *Conflict, Security and Development*, vol. 7(1): p. 3-25.
 - 7 Ismail, W., Olonisakin, F., Picciotto, B. and Wybrow, D. (2009). Youth Vulnerability and Exclusion (YOVEL) in West Africa: Synthesis Report, Conflict, Security and Development
 - 8 M.P. Tadaro and S.C. Smith (2012). *Economic Development*, 11th Edition, Boston: Addison-Wesley.
 - 9 D.J.H. Lintelo (2012). Young People in African (Agricultural) Policy Processes? What National Policies can tell us, *IDS Bulletin*, 43(6): 90-110.
 - 10 R.M. Lerner, J.V. Lerner, J.B. Almerigi, C. Theorkas, E. Pleps, S. Gestsdottir, S. Naudeau, H. Jelcic, A. Alberts, M.L. Smith, D.L. Bobek, D. Richman-Raphael, I. Simpson, E.D. Christainsen, A. von Eye (2005): Positive Youth Development, Participation in Community Development Programmes, and Community Contributions of fifth-grade Adolescents: Findings from the first wave of the 4-H study of Positive Youth Development, *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 25(1): 7-71.

such relying on the government to do everything for them. Political leaders who hold this notion can hardly engage in sincere drive to developing young people based on the warped idea that they are lazy and overly dependent on the government to do everything for them. These challenge notwithstanding, evidence suggest that contend that positive youth development (PYD) framework which became popular in the 1990s, as well as the contemporary mandate of the global youth development agenda strive to propagate the notion that youth inputs are key to national development in relation to planning and policy making.¹¹

There has therefore being growing global advocacy for increased investment in youth development as a tool to realising national developmental goals.¹² This is moreso in Sub Saharan Africa countries which is in dire need of development.¹³ The region can translate the abilities of its young people to fast-tracking development. This is especially the case in Nigeria where a leading authority has warned that development might remain a wild goose chase if the negative identity constructions for the youth are not corrected.¹⁴ Correcting this wrong notion will in no little way reinforce youth empowerment and development drives. Empowering and deploying the Nigerian youths as agents of development is further necessitated by the fact that youth constitute close to 70 percent of the Nigeria population.¹⁵ Researchers believe that until the youths are empowered and engaged in attaining developmental goals, Nigeria's quest for development might remain a mirage.¹⁶ Evidence also abound that in the Nigerian context, the youths are limited by low economic opportunities,

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- 11 UNESCO (2004). Empowering youth through national policies. Paris: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization.
 - 12 P. Perezniето and J.H. Harding (2013). Youth and International Development Policy: the case for Investing in Young People, *Overseas Development Institute Project Briefing*, No. 80. London: Overseas Development Institute.
 - 13 UNECA (2012). Unleashing Africa's Potential as a Pole of Global Growth, *Proceedings from the Meeting of the Committee of Experts of the 5th Joint Annual Meetings of the AU Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance and ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic*, Issues Paper. Addis Ababa: UNECA.
 - 14 O.O. Akanji (2011): 'The Problem of Belonging': the identity question and the dilemma of nation-building in Nigeria, *African Identities*, 9(2): p.112-132.
 - 15 NBS (2011). 2011 Annual Socio-Economic Report. Abuja: National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria.
 - 16 W. Adebaniwi and E. Obadare (2010). Introducing Nigeria at Fifty: The Nation in Narration, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 28(4): 379-405.

large scale unemployment, non-functional education and poor institutional capacity and mechanism to jumpstart and sustain meaningful and responsive youth development.¹⁷ Research evidence shows that the Nigerian youths are highly disadvantaged. Using descriptive analysis drawn majorly from secondary data, research has established that widespread unemployment and poverty in Nigeria has not only induced youth disempowerment, but also created conditions that predisposes the youth to deviant behaviours which hinder economic growth, political stability, harmonious social cohesion, and overall national development.¹⁸ The study concluded that if Nigeria is to attain its developmental aspirations, the potentials of the Nigerian youth as the locomotive of national development must be properly harnessed and utilised by eliminating the obstacles that hinder people from transforming their physical, biological and socio-economic environment for their individual fulfillment and for the benefit of society at large. It is however important to note that young people in Nigeria have little or no power and contribution in determining their future. This has serious implications for mental health status of young people in Nigeria.

A recent study investigated influence of mental health on physical violence among young people in Ogun State Nigeria.¹⁹ The study was a descriptive survey involving questionnaire as instrument for data collection. The result of the study indicated that mental health is a significant factor in physical violence. This thus implies that security challenges facing Nigeria can be addressed if the youth that are at the centre of these security challenges have sound mental health which buffers against violence. Research evidence has also shown that politically and socially deprived youth have poor mental health status. Another study investigated the impact of social exclusion on mental health among vulnerable populations in the United Kingdom.²⁰ The

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- 17 H. I. Igbo and I. Ikpa (2013). Causes, Effects and Ways of Curbing Youth Restiveness in Nigeria: Implications for Counselling. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 4(6):132-137.
- 18 A.M Isa and J.T. Vambe (2013). Youth Empowerment and National Development In Nigeria. *International Journal of Business and Management Invention* 2(10):82-88.
- 19 I.I. Adeosun (2017). Mental Health Problems among Adolescents Engaged in Physical Fight. *Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science* 22(4): 1-7.
20. A.Y. Lau and M. Ridge (2011). Addressing the impact of social exclusion on mental health in Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities. *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, 15(3): 129-137.

authors drew on mental health and social work perspectives to review key areas in which social exclusion impacts on the life chances of respondents. The findings showed that feeling of social exclusion significantly influenced mental health of the respondents.

The North-Central region of Nigeria that has become a theatre of war in recent times makes it difficult to pursue and sustain youth empowerment and development. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) which seems to be the most enduring youth development platform has suffered setbacks in this region. Beyond attaining socio-cultural integration, the NYSC can become an effective platform for youth development as well as national development. It can serve as a means through which fresh graduates from the nation's tertiary institution can be exposed to entrepreneurial trainings and leadership trainings. In the same vein, these young people can garner useful working and leadership experience from their places of national assignments while still playing strategic roles in these establishments. Unfortunately, the polarising security concern in the North Central region has significantly dwarfed realisations of youth empowerment drive in this region. This is because the major focus of government and the citizenry is security. Although youth empowerment can and has been advocated as a strategy for attaining security goals, the minimum level of peace and security required for this initiative to be pursued is as good as non-existent. Security concerns has forced many young Nigerian deployed to the north generally to either redeploy or out rightly stay away from that service year.

Youth corps members on ground find it difficult to fully discharge their roles just as they have their opportunities for personal growth and development significantly limited by the security challenges they face. The bleak socio-economic outlook and limited opportunities for personal development breeds hopelessness, anxiety and psychological distress. This poor mental health status further complicates Nigerian security challenges as the hopelessness that young people feel predispose them to destructive tendencies that further reinforces security challenges in the country. An average youth corps member is faced with great distress in relation to what life holds after service. Even many that proceed to pursue a postgraduate education; do so out of the fear of being idle after the service year. This thus leads to a situation where significant proportion of students pursuing masters degree education are ill-motivated for educational success. The vicious circle of non-functional education and ill-prepared graduates who are not equipped to take up job

roles is reinforced by this social reality. Understanding the social stress occasioned by the low level of human development for Nigerian young people and its influence on mental health can deepen research evidence to spur interventions and initiatives to take human developmental efforts beyond lip service. It is against this background that the present study investigated the influence of Nigeria's social realities on mental health of corps members in North Central zone of Nigeria.

Materials and Methods

The Study Area

The North-Central geo-political zone of Nigeria, also known as the Middle Belt, because of its strategic location at the middle of Northern and Southern Nigeria comprises six states. These states include Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger and Plateau states. The nation's capital territory, the Federal Capital Territory is also located in this zone. The Middle Belt geographically span from the west, around the confluence of the River Niger and the River Benue. The region has a large endowment of natural relief and solid minerals just as it has many features of tourist interests including many historical and colonial relics. Due to the peculiarities of Benue and Plateau states as regards security challenges, they were purposively selected for this study.

Benue State has a population of about 4,256, 641 based on the 2006 population census figure. The state was carved out from the former Benue-Plateau State in 1976 and named after the River Benue. The capital city is Markurdi and its main ethnic groups are Tiv, Idoma, Igede, Etulo and Abakwa. Benue State shares boundaries with Nasarawa State to the north, Taraba State to the east, Cross River State to the south, Enugu to the south-west and Kogi to the west. Due to the geographical location, Benue is often thought of as the 'food basket of the nation', as it has a rich agricultural region. Some of the crops grown in the State are: potatoes, cassava, soya bean, guinea corn, flax, yam, sesame rice and groundnuts. The state has three universities: Federal University of Agriculture, Benue State University and University of Mkar. It has two polytechnics: Benue State Polytechnic and Fidel Polytechnic.

Plateau State known as the 'Home of Peace and Tourism' is considered to be the twelfth largest state in Nigeria, with its administrative headquarters in Jos. Unfortunately, protracted security challenges in the state has made its slogan the direct opposite of its reality. The name 'Plateau' was gotten from the picturesque of Jos Plateau, which is a mountainous area in the northern

part of the state with a captivating rock formation. The altitude of Plateau State is about 1,200 meters, with the region bordered by Bauchi to the north-east, Kaduna to the north-west, Nasarawa to the south-west and Taraba to the south-east. The population of the state is estimated at 4,178,712 million based on the 2006 census. The main occupation of the people is agriculture and mining.

Study Design

The descriptive survey design of the cross-sectional type was employed in the study. The design entails collection of data within a short period of time with a view to analysing and gaining insight of the variables of interests and their relationships. This approach has the advantage of enabling a researcher to collect data from a large sample within a short period and to understudy the population from which the sample was collected with a view to establishing new knowledge or verifying assumptions.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of 800 respondents was selected from the two states, with each state contributing 400 to the total sample. As earlier mentioned, Benue and Plateau states were purposively selected because of the peculiarities of security challenges. Respondents were randomly selected from local government areas in the states during the monthly clearance service. Ten local government areas were selected for data collection. Five local government areas were surveyed in each of the states and 80 corps members were sampled randomly in each LGA to make 800 in all. Analysis was however based on the 739 instruments successfully retrieved which indicate 93.4 percent of retrieval success.

Instruments, Procedure for Data Collection and Analysis

Self-developed and adapted research instrument was used for data collection. Self-developed instrument with 10 items was used to measure the social realities of Nigerian youth as regards empowerment, political participation and social exclusion. The instrument is designed along the modified four point Likert rating from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questionnaire is negatively worded so that the high score indicates negative social realities evidence in limited opportunities for development, social exclusion and

limited space for political participation. The Mental health was measured using the General Health Questionnaire with twelve items developed by the WHO. The questionnaire is also scaled along four point scale so that high score represents high mental health and low score represents low mental health. On the spot questionnaire administration technique was used for data collection by trained research assistants and supervised by the principal investigator. The generated data were analysed using inferential statistics of regression model at 0.05 alpha level.

Findings and Discussions

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
Below 20 years	7	0.94
20-24 years	288	38.9
25-29 years	426	57.6
30 years and above	18	2.4
Sex		
Male	321	43.4
Female	418	56.6

Respondents within the age bracket of 25-29 years accounted for the largest proportion of the respondents at 57.6 percent while those that are below 20 years accounted for the least proportion at 0.94 percent with respondents within the age bracket of 20-24 years accounting for 38.9 percent of the respondents while respondents that are 30 years and above made up 2.4 percent of the total respondents. As regards sex, female respondents accounted for 56.6 percent of the respondents with their male counterparts making up the remaining 43.4 percent.

Relationship Between Social Realities and Mental Health of Respondents

Table 2: Relationship between Social Realities and Mental Health

Variables	Mean	SD	R	r ²	p
Social Realities	30.8782	3.31070			
Mental Health	27.0663	5.45935	-0.825	0.681	0.000

The result findings showed that there is a high, negative and significant relationship between social realities and mental health of respondents. The correlation coefficient at -0.825 indicates a negative relationship between the two variables. This thus implies that respondents with higher perception of social exclusion reported lower mental health status. This finding is further investigated in the regression table and its implication discussed in subsequent section.

Perception of Social Realities Among Respondents

Table 3: Feelings of Social Exclusion Among Respondents

Items	SA	A	D	SD
Nigeria as a country does not place a high premium on its youth	412 (55.6%)	286 (38.7%)	41 (5.5%)	
Nigerian youths are alienated from the Nigerian project	257 (34.8%)	393 (53.2%)	64 (8.7%)	25 (3.4%)
There is no appreciable opportunity for youth development through NYSC	222 (30.0%)	372 (50.3%)	97 (13.1%)	48 (6.5%)
Youth corps members are not meaningfully engaged in human development efforts to attain self-realization after service	291 (39.4%)	364 (49.3%)	52 (7.0%)	32 (4.3%)
The youth of Nigeria have limited opportunities for self-development	380 (51.4%)	245 (33.2%)	101 (13.7%)	13 (1.8%)
Security challenges make self-enterprises difficult in Nigeria	406 (54.9%)	183 (24.8%)	121 (16.4%)	29 (3.9%)

204 Beyond Rhetoric: Youth Empowerment and Political Voice in Nigeria

Nigerian government does not partner with the youths as development agents	293 (39.6%)	342 (46.3%)	91 (12.3%)	13 (1.8%)
The Nigerian youths are only important to politicians during election campaigns	511 (69.1%)	119 (16.1%)	88 (11.9%)	21 (2.8%)
The Nigerian youths are not given opportunities for full participation in the political space	482 (65.2%)	162 (21.9%)	48 (6.5%)	47 (6.4%)
Nigerian youths are not actively engaged in decision making process	507 (68.6%)	141 (19.1%)	53 (7.2%)	38 (5.1%)

The findings of the study as shown in the table above revealed the perception of Nigerian youth on the social realities and challenges they face as youths. Only 5.5 percent of the respondents disagreed that Nigeria does not place a high premium on its youth. This is thus indicative of the fact that about 95 percent of the respondents noted that Nigeria does not place value on its youth. The largest proportion of the respondents (87.9%) also disclosed that Nigerian youths are alienated from the Nigerian projects. When related to the NYSC, 80.4 percent of the respondents noted that there is no appreciable opportunity for youth development through the NYSC. Similarly, 88.7 percent of the respondents stated that youth corps members are not meaningfully engaged in human development efforts that can be translated to self-reliance after service. 84.6 percent of the respondents disclosed that Nigerian youths have limited opportunities for self-development. The place of the security challenges in Nigeria was also identified as a challenge to human development among the youths as 79.7 percent of the respondents agreed that security challenges make self-enterprise in Nigeria difficult. The result of the study also showed that 85.9 percent of the respondents also reported that the youths are not seen as developmental agents. 85.2 percent of the respondents noted that the Nigerian youths are only important to politicians during election campaigns with 87.1 percent disclosing that the space for political participation by the youth is highly constrained 87.7 percent noting that the youths are not actively involved in decision making.

Influence of Nigerian Social Realities on Mental Health of Respondents

Table 4: Regression Table Showing Influence of Social Realities on Mental Health

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.825	.681	.680	3.08706		
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14972.203	1	14972.203	1571.074	.000
	Residual	7023.548	737	9.530		
	Total	21995.751	738			

a. Dependent Variable: MENTAL HEALTH

b. Predictors: (Constant), SOCIAL REALITIES

The result of the study as shown in the table showed that social realities perception significantly influenced mental health of respondents. The R value at 0.825 showed that there is a high degree and positive relationship between social realities and mental health of respondents. The R square value at 0.681 indicates that 68.1 percent of the variance observed in mental health is attributable to social realities as perceived by the respondents. Moreover, the p value at $0.000 < 0.05$ further confirms that the influence of social realities as perceived by the respondents significantly influence their mental health status. This finding has serious implication for security and development as discussed in the section below.

Discussions of Findings

The study findings showed that notwithstanding that the government has noble policy documents like the National Youth Policy, the Nigerian youths are alienated from the scheme of things as regards socio-economic empowerment and political participation. The result of the study presented in the table above captures the perception and experience of Nigerian youths on the social realities in the country. Beyond education, whose functionality is even in doubt, there is no conscious efforts aimed at empowering the Nigerian youths to take up entrepreneurship and leadership tasks in the country. Nigeria's unemployment level reveals the situation in which the largest proportion of Nigerian youth depend on non-existing or very few jobs instead of building and growing their own enterprise. The NYSC scheme that could be used as a veritable platform to realising youth development objectives has

become a means to an end in itself. Education, especially tertiary education which should be an end in itself has become a means to an end – getting white collar jobs. Unfortunately, the NYSC has also become an additional means to realising this end. The level of crime and criminality in Nigeria and other destructive behaviours that Nigerian young people engage in further reveal the level of frustration and hopelessness that young Nigerians have been predisposed to by their social realities.

Mental and social health play protective role in that individuals with sound mental health will rarely engage in acts that can threaten peace and security, Significant proportion of young Nigerians that have been arrested for ritual killings, kidnappings, armed robbery, advanced fee fraud and other destructive behaviours have cited unemployment as the trigger for such behaviour. While it is not debatable that some of these youth engage in these acts out of greed and avarice, it is also not impossible that the frustration they face can compel them in these acts. The frustration-aggression theory for instance, well captures the social realities of youth militancy in the Niger-Delta region. When young people live in the hope that their efforts towards national development is anticipated, will be solicited and supported, the extent to which they will want to live up to this hope is increased. On the other hand, when youths perceive that they are seen as destructive agents, lazy, docile and of little or no value, they may be predisposed to venting their spleen on the society that hangs such identity on it. The opulence due to abuse of office among the political class continues to reinforce destructive behaviour in young people. Hopelessness, anxiety and psychological distress become the aftermath of neglect that Nigerian youth are exposed to. The social exclusion Nigerian young people face significantly impacts on their mental health status thus making them vulnerable to destructive behaviours and criminality. The findings of the study that reveal the social exclusion, limited opportunities for development and participation in the political space support the findings of other researchers who have reported similar findings among Nigerian populations.²¹ The result that reveals significant influence of social realities on mental health supports findings of previous researchers

21 A.M. Isa and J.T. Vambe (2013). Youth Empowerment and National Development In Nigeria. *International Journal of Business and Management Invention* 2(10):82-88

that have attributed poor mental health status like hopelessness, anxiety and psychological distress to social stress being face by young people.²² These findings have important implications for attaining security and developmental objectives as there cannot be security without development just as there cannot be development without peace.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is concluded, based on the findings of the study that the social realities of Nigerian youth significantly impinge on their mental health status. This has serious implications for youth and national development just as it equally has direct implication for security. This is because, based on aggression-frustration theory, youth with little or no hope for a secure future can and do engage in destructive behaviours inimical to attaining national security and developmental goals. Consequently, the followings are recommended:

- (1) Beyond lip service, government must take the issue of youth development serious as no nation can advance beyond the capacities of its young populace.
- (2) The recently “Not too young to run” Bill should not be seen as end in itself but a means to an end towards opening up the political space for younger people to acquire and hone leadership skills.
- (3) The NYSC scheme must be repositioned, re-focused and retooled to meet the challenges of the present times. Beyond attaining national integration, the NYSC could be used a veritable platform for youth empowerment and development.
- (4) Addressing issues of social exclusion and deprivation among the youth must be adopted as an effective means of tackling insecurity in Nigeria. Engaging young people in meaningful ventures reduced idle hands that destructive forces can engage in threatening national security.

22 A.Y. Lau and M. Ridge (2011). Addressing the impact of social exclusion on mental health in Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities. *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, 15(3): 129-137.

- (5) Responsive and functional and mental health education can be incorporated to the orientation course of NYSC as a means to helping the youth gain buffer against social stressors that can impinge on their mental health status.
6. Devising innovative ways to addressing the issue of unemployment and over reliance on government for jobs must be ensured by government in effective collaborations with international development partners.

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