

# BEYOND RHETORIC

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND  
POLITICAL VOICE  
IN NIGERIA

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



Baywood Foundation was set up to support populations and communities living in poverty, unemployment, poor healthcare access, literacy, marginalization and exclusion. It was founded in 2009 but was incorporated by the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) in 2014. The foundation is also incorporated by the State of Florida, USA and our 501(c)3 status.

The thematic areas of Baywood Foundation are: education and economic empowerment. Consistently over the past eleven (11) years about 60,000 illigent community people largely in southeast Nigeria have been supported by the foundation with 100 power generators, 100000 pharmaceuticals, medical and follow up services. A minimum of 100 (100) community health care teams from these comprehensive and holistic medical outreach.

The foundation has successfully carried out several interventions in various communities. These include:

- (a) Free multi-day health camps
- (b) Community health workers training
- (c) Provision of free health services
- (d) Support in payment of school fees for orphans, widows and vulnerable children
- (e) Empowerment of youth and women with skills acquisition, training and financial support to individual and businesses
- (f) Continuation of research of current empowerment projects and
- (g) Equipping of Primary Health Centres (PHCs) communities with basic working tools

No less than two thousand youths have also been trained from the foundation for training and other youth empowerment support services, as part of its youth empowerment efforts. Baywood Foundation pushes for the emergence of youth-friendly governments and policies in Africa. The annual positive emergence of this youth is expected to be the massive progress the African youth through a pathway that leads to self-discovery, self-actualization, economic independence.

The foundation is a continuously growing organization that quickly adapts to new and innovative approaches in ensuring efficient, effective and sustainable impact on all its projects and programmes.

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## **Beyond Rhetoric**

### **Youth Empowerment and Political Voice in Nigeria**



## About Baywood Foundation

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The thematic areas of Baywood Foundation are healthcare, education and economic empowerment. Consequently, over the past eleven (11) years, about 60,000 indigent community people largely in southeast, Nigeria have been supported by the Foundation with 100 percent free diagnostic, consultative, pharmaceutical, referral and follow-up services. A minimum of four (4) communities benefit each year from these comprehensive and free medical outreaches.

The Foundation has also successfully carried out several interventions in various communities. These comprise:

- (a) Free multi-disciplinary medical outreaches
- (b) Construction of new and renovation of existing school building structures
- (c) Provision of scholarships to intelligent children from indigent families
- (d) Support in payment of primary school teachers' salaries in local communities
- (e) Empowerment of youths and women with skill acquisition trainings
- (f) Financial supports to individuals' existing businesses
- (g) Coordination & financing of community empowerment projects, and
- (h) Equipping of Primary Health Facilities in local communities with basic working tools.

No fewer than two thousand youths have also benefitted from the Foundations free training and other youth empowerment support. In general, as part of its youth empowerment efforts, Baywood Foundation pushes for the emergence of youth-friendly governments and policies in Africa. The eventual positive consequence of this push is expected to be the massive 'regeneration' of the African youth through a pathway that leads to self-discovery, actualization and economic independence.

The Foundation is a continuously learning organization that quickly adapts to new and innovative approaches in ensuring efficient, effective and sustainable impact on all its projects and programmes.

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*Edited by*

**Isaac Olawale Albert**

**Martin Ike-Muonso N.**

**M. Ozonnia Ojielo**



**Baywood**  
**FOUNDATION**  
Innovation, Sustainability, Impact

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# Preface

The older generation, no doubt, currently dominates political decision making in Africa. Impliedly, they substantially exclude the younger ones in contributing to the shaping of their today and their future. They deprive them – the younger ones – of their voice in what considerably concerns them and which defines the quality of their survival. Marginalisation of African youths in political power sharing is a poignant reality that demands urgent correction. Whereas, the combination of those innate attributes of power, energy, new orientation and change, as well as other qualities which characterise the youth, do not guarantee better leadership than the old, the inclusion of youth voice in political decision-making makes power sharing more equitable. It also improves the likelihood of substantial injection of those qualities associated with the youth in overall decision-making and implementation process. Nevertheless, it is only equitable that youths have as much opportunity as older age groups to contribute to making decisions that form their current and prospective destinies. Fairness and equity in this context will imply the involvement and representation of all critical stakeholders in power sharing across geography, age and gender where they are obviously applicable.

However, such equitable arrangement rarely comes through without a fight. Women suffered from similar political marginalisation for several centuries and have only started experiencing some level of correction through affirmative action; strong persuasion of countries to encourage the participation of women at strategic positions in political and economic decision-making. While women fought a gender-based battle in which they sought independence from a dominant patriarchal system, the youth are faced with an age-focused war of independence to have right of opinion and own voices in matters of governance and policy. Consistent with that position, young people appear to have also put up a fight in various climes with varying degrees of success. In Nigeria, the Not-Too-Young-To-Run bill recently signed into law is one such breakthrough. However, whether that is adequate to afford the youths the opportunity to participate at political decision-making positions in the absence of clear affirmative action on youth participation is considerably debatable. Whereas, the Not-Too-Young-To-Run bill may therefore be a necessary condition, an affirmative action that further defines the minimum quantum of space allowed for the youths in the power-sharing equation may be a satisfying desideratum.

“Article 12 of The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children and young people have a right to have their views listened to, and taken into account on decisions that affect them”.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, there seems to be an unfounded fear that the

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1 YIPA (xxxx). “Amplifying Youth Voice in Today’s Political Climate” <https://yipa.org/youth-voice-todays-political-climate/> browsed on 12/07/2018.



inclusion of the youths in political governance will result in the political capitulation of the old brigade, as the former are greater in number and obviously possess superior dynamism. This fear is consequently managed by the older brigades' seeming tactical blockage of the youth from the acquisition of power in spite of the latter being unarguably today's key constituency in the global power sharing equation outside spatial and ethnic considerations. Again, that also partially seems to explain why the youths have not been as successful as women have. The youths rarely stand for elections and rarely massively mobilise to vote in the same magnitude as women do.

The strategy of disempowerment appears to be the most widely used blockage techniques. It is without debate that the capacity to acquire political voice is much more potent if there are corresponding economic power. However, a saddening puzzle appears to be the contrary where the popular forms of economic empowerment of the youth considerably muffles the voice of the youth. For instance, many of the so-called youth economic empowerment programmes of governments end up of as some forms of political disempowerment schemes. The underlying structure for the disempowerment is the falsely created perception of the youth as social liabilities that must be contained where one of such containment strategies include economic inducements. This tactical containment strategy of inducement is in many instances regarded as economic empowerment. Many supposed empowerment programmes completely lack the ingredients of authentic empowerment of the young and are mere tools of management of potential social-liability capacity of the young.

One of the implications of this containment strategy is that the received 'empowerment' – which can rarely pull the youth out of their extant poor economic condition – end up creating a sense of indebtedness in the minds of the recipient youths. By extension, they remain continuously vulnerable, as they are not actually economically empowered; they also remain psychologically bound by a sense of indebtedness to the providers of the inducement. The result is that they are pressured into needless loyalty where they merely 'accept and re-echo the voice of the pay master' in order to continue receiving the supposed economic empowerment. In effect, the supposed economic empowerment becomes equivalent to the purchase of the voice of the youth in exchange of the 'empowerment'. The youths who receive these inducements (false economic empowerments) eventually lose their own freedom of opinion and political voice.

This contradicts the true discovery of the youth, which recognises the youth more as assets, which they are as opposed to liabilities, which they rarely are. When properly nurtured as powerful economic assets the youth generate tremendous current and future values for all to enjoy.

There are myriads of other forms of conscious economic disempowerment of the youth. One of such also appears to be the poor funding of education by the older generation who predominantly occupy political offices. The effects of 'illiteracy' and 'half-baked education' on the intellectual quality and mental preparedness of the youth for political



participation and the quest for voice are easy to understand. The more governments (which are products of political processes) do not get involved to ensure that the young receive good quality education, the more the youth are poorly prepared to have a voice. This disempowerment strategy is also at the very heart of the 'unemployability' concerns around today's youth. Poor quality education will always result in unemployability. An unemployable youth is unarguably vulnerable and at the mercy of the paymasters. Faced with slim chances of economic freedom, they become victims of some of these political-voice muffling programmes called 'economic empowerment'.

Take a close look at the age and gender composition of office holding in most political parties and you will discover that the youths have less than 2 percent representation across board. This is even regrettably true when we consider the age of those occupying the position of Youth Leader in these parties. Over 80 percent of youth leaders in many political parties are actually persons whose age fall outside the youth bracket because political parties in Nigeria do not request for evidence of age in appointing or allowing interested persons to stand for election as youth leaders. Political parties in Nigeria do not consider the youths exclusively occupying positions that will give them right of opinion and voice in matters concerning them as important. In all, there appears to be an unwritten albeit strong conspiracy against the young's participation in political processes.

Many of today's leaders in their youth took advantage of the dearth of well-educated Africans and the obvious vacancies it created and launched themselves into the political space. As they mature in power and advance in age, they erroneously associate their political successes with other factors of which age is rarely considered. Given that calculation – where youthful age is not a key success factor in political success – they reason that giving the youth any significant consideration to participate in political processes at scale may not create positive marginal impacts. Additionally and predicated on the same reasoning, it is therefore not strategically important to invest in and empower the youth to also effectively participate in and share political power. Yet it is true that the youth's exercise of their rights, freedom and choice in political matters are critical for the economic development and empowerment of the society. It is true also, that when allowed to participate in the political process; when given a voice, young people bring uniquely contemporary perspectives, energy, and innovation to public policy.

In all however, what lessons should the youth learn from the women who also went through this route? It is important to recall women's empowerment advocacy and the massive successes they recorded. Women contended for roles in centuries old patriarchal political system and made massive successes of it. Youths also contend with a system where the old dominate and control the political and decision-making machinery. The question the youth need to ask is: "what accounted for the successes achieved by the women?" Why are the youth ever nearly as successful? The position of Baywood Foundation which is neither fully reflective of or consistent with the views of all the scholars who have contributed to this book is that the quest for youth empowerment by



the youth should take a new dimension in the form of an affirmative action.

It is in consideration of all of these that we at Baywood Foundation launched the "Africa Youth Regeneration®" project (AYR-project) in 2016. The AYR-project was not designed as an effort to bring back an era where the educated youth of that time dominated the political space because of the paucity of well-educated leaders. However, whereas it might and can still be possible to have a return of an era similar to when Matthew Mbu was minister for Foreign Affairs at 24, Gowon was president at 32 and Strasser was president of Sierra Leone at 26, it is most unlikely that it can happen at that scale in our lifetime. AYR-project nevertheless advocates for the restoration of the overwhelming spirit of that era when there was widespread inclusion and participation of the youth in political processes; an era when the youths had strong political voice. It advocates for the African Union affirmative action that will give stronger impetus to member countries to include the youths in policy making and implementation positions in governments. In general, the AYR-project pushes for the emergence of youth-friendly governments and policies in Africa. The eventual positive consequence of this push is the massive 'regeneration' of the African youth through a pathway that leads to self-discovery, actualisation and economic independence. Consequently, the AYR-project asks the question: given the peculiarities of today's landscape where there are lots of highly qualified youths and with limited political vacancies how do we orchestrate more inclusion and participation of the youth in political processes?

The search for answers to the question gave birth to the four critical mandates of the Africa Youth Regeneration Project called the F<sup>2</sup>IH. These are:

- (1) To facilitate rigorous research, advocacy, conversations, dialogues and debates on the challenges faced by the African Youth in The Struggle for political voice.
- (2) To foster the inclusion of the African youth in governance through dialogues and other appropriate influencing techniques.
- (3) To influence policy development in favour of sound youth education, youth employment, youth participation in political processes (political voice) and other socio-economic desiderata for youth self-discovery.
- (4) To help foster appropriate environments for and legal frameworks to institutionalise the Africa Youth Affirmative Action objective.

This book and many others in the pipeline is consistent with and a response to the first mandate. The quality of contributions and the robust interrogation of the subject matter along several spatial and thematic dimensions eloquently testify to the rigour in trying to understand the issues of youth empowerment and political voice within Nigeria. To us, this book is just our initial modest contribution to this emerging debate.

Finally, it is imperative that we in Nigeria become part of the governance train that has shifted to a more horizontal process that embraces all stakeholders in public decision-making: It is consistent with the spirit of citizen engagement, which creates opportunity

to all to play active roles in decisions that directly or indirectly affect their lives. Unfortunately, many African young people are socioeconomically disempowered, politically ignorant and poorly prepared to own the political voices that determine their continued survival and successes. An African Union affirmative action on political voice for the youth may be the fastest and most enduring route to the reversal of this trend. Happy reading!

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## **CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

### **Youth Empowerment and Political Voice in North Central Nigeria**

#### **Introduction**

The geo-political region of Nigeria known as North Central consists of six states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The states are Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Niger, and Plateau. It is called the North Central (NC) because it is in the middle belt region of the country. The region is rich in fascinating geographical features such as green sceneries, mountains, rivers (most especially Rivers Benue and Niger), and natural resources. It is also home to several historical and colonial relics. The FCT, most especially the city of Abuja, is the capital of Nigeria. It has ten districts (consisting of the Central district, Garki district, Wuse district, Maitama district, Asokoro district, and Gwarinpa district). Benue state prides itself as the “food basket of Nigeria”; Niger state is popularly known as the “confluence state”; Kwara is the “state of harmony”; and Nassarawa is the “home of solid minerals”. Given the number of Nigerian leaders it produced, Niger State is known as the “power state” and based on its antecedents Plateau is known as the “home of peace and tourism”.

North Central Nigeria is the most ethnically diverse region in Nigeria. It consists of more than one fourth of Nigeria ethnic groups. The region is also the meeting point of the Christian and Islamic faiths in Nigeria. The attempts to take the religion to the southern parts of Nigeria were largely frustrated from this region. On the other hand, the efforts at Islamising Northern Nigeria were halted in the region. Hence, up to the present this region is a hotbed of both religious and ethnic crises in Nigeria. This results largely from the inability of the political elite in the region to weld the diverse groups into a complex whole. The problem of the region is compounded by the fact that it has the highest number of retired military officers in Nigeria. All of these factors

stoke the ethnic and religious crises in the region with the youth serving as the foot soldiers of the bloody eruptions in all the states.



Figure 1: Map of the North Central

The crises in the region are kept alive by partisan politics. People campaign in the region based on ethnic and religious issues. Even after elections have been conducted and won, people still continue to work against one another by manipulating the ethnic and religion fault lines. This makes the region to be perpetually in crisis to the extent that the most needed skills by the leaders of the state is today conflict management.

The region shares borders with the North East and North West – two core zones of violent extremism in Nigeria. The North East is bedeviled by the Boko Haram crisis while the North West is the hotbed of banditry and cattle rustling in Nigeria. The North Central bears the multiplier effects of the crisis in these two other regions. Hence the problems in the geo-political region include violent competition for agricultural land, most especially between Fulani herdsmen (often wrongly assumed to be Muslims) and the local population (often Christians). It also faces the problems of cattle rustling. These problems are most evident in Benue, Plateau and Nasarawa states. The ongoing problems in Benue and Plateau states present the worst-case scenarios. The youth are the cannon fodders of these violent conflicts.



## Youth Empowerment

The goal of this paper is to discuss the state of youth empowerment and political voice in North Central Nigeria. The approach adopted borrowed significantly from the lessons of the peer review course organised on this book project at the Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies, University of Ibadan on 6 and 7 June 2018. As the six regional papers were delivered, it was observed that all the states of the federation has what could be described as “youth empowerment programmes”. They focused on skills-acquisition, getting financially supported to start small-scale businesses, getting scholarship, etc. There was no state where deliberate schemes exist to get the youth politically empowered and given the right political constructive voice.

The North Central is not an exception to this nationwide method of empowering Nigerian youth. A few of the empowerment projects are reflected in the appendix to this paper as a reference. The consensus at the Ibadan workshop was that the small size of these empowerment projects makes them difficult to make any impact in the life of the beneficiaries. Rather, the projects make the beneficiaries to be perpetually dependent on the “donors”. In the process of this client/patron relationship, the Nigerian youth are indirectly made to lose their political voice and they are helpless in reversing the situation given the treacherous triangle of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment in which they are trapped.<sup>1</sup> This kind of captured youth are usually available to be used and misused by their principals. This partly explains the rising culture of criminal and political violence in Nigeria.

This chapter's point of departure is the argument that it is not totally right that the youth in Nigeria are not politically empowered or given political voice. They are empowered by politicians but not as constructively as one would expect. They are empowered not for positive but violent political actions. Some cases from Kwara, Benue, and Kogi states are considered to illustrate the nature of this problem. The nature of youth protests in the FCT, Benue and Plateau States are also considered.

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1 S.O. Uhunmwuango and E. Oghator, “Youth in political participation and development: relevance, challenges and expectation in the 21st century, *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 15(2), 2013, p. 246.



## Malignant Empowerment

All of the economic empowerment projects in the North Central as observable in the appendix target economic issues. In most cases, they are meant to reward those who supported the electoral victory of the politicians in the states. The study of this problem in Kwara state by Saka suggests that many of the empowered youth participated are connected with various cases of electoral violence. At various times, some of these young people engage in some other criminal acts that soon implicated the politicians they worked. This is probably what is happening now in Kwara state where some political thugs engaged in robbery attacks are claiming to have relationships with Governor Abdulfatah Ahmed and the Senate President, Dr. Bukola Saraki.

On 5 April, 2018 a robbery operation took place in Offa in Kwara state leading to the death of over 33 innocent Nigerians, including 9 policemen. The robbers attacked six (6) banks (i) First Bank Offa (ii) Guarantee Trust Bank Offa (iii) ECO Bank Offa (iv) Zenith Bank Offa (v) Union Bank Offa (vi) Ibolu Micro Finance Bank Offa and (vii) the Divisional Police Headquarters, Offa. Some of the alleged perpetrators were arrested and they owned up to participation in the robbery. Probably for easing the case against them five of the suspects started to drop the names of the State Governor of Kwara State, Abdulfatah Ahmed and the Senate President, Dr. Bukola Saraki. They claimed to be their political thugs; they operated as a group known as "Youth Liberation Movement" alias "the Good boys". They were used in the past to rig elections and benefitted from some past economic empowerment projects of the Kwara state government. The leader of the gang, Ayoade Akinnibosun, a holder of a B.Ed. degree in Guidance and Counselling from Ekiti state University said:

I am the Chairman of Liberation Youth Movement, Kwara South. We are the Senate President's boys. We work for him at Kwara South. We are the ones that hold Kwara South for him. We have three senatorial districts in Kwara State; there are some people in Kwara North and Central but we control the South . . . We have been working for him since when he was the governor of Kwara State. When he was in PDP . . . We mobilise for him and we are the ones that do political arrangements for him. For example, where we cannot win, we mobilise people and make 'dabaru' arrangement there. We scatter elections if we don't win.<sup>2</sup>

2 Faith Yahaya, "Suspects: Our roles in the Offa robbery, connection with Saraki", *The Nation*, 3 June 2018, <http://thenationonline.net/suspects-our-roles-in-the-offa-robbery-connection-with-saraki/>



This case came up at a moment when the Senate President was having frosty relationship with the Senate President. The Inspector General of Political was severally invited by the Senate to explain some lapses in how the Police was managing Nigeria's national security issues. He refused to honour the invitations. The created tension in the National Assembly and some Senators started calling for the removal of the IG from office. The Offa robbery case now provided the IG to also invite Saraki for questioning and this was how the issue became politicised. The opposition party in Kwara State, PDP, also capitalised on this for demonising Saraki and the APC government in their state. In this context, the Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, in Kwara State, Chief Iyiola Oyedepo said:

... the state government and Saraki have bought vehicles for the boys and I have had cause to raise the alarm on a radio programme to condemn the action in the immediate past... The vehicles in possession of the boys are without registered numbers. They were driving them around with customised number plates which have Saraki's name inscribed on them... The fact that the boys were (allegedly) on the payroll of the state government was enough to dismiss insinuations that Saraki and Ahmed are being unnecessarily victimised by the police. So, it is better for them to go and clear the grey areas before creating an impression that they are being persecuted. I don't believe that they are suffering any form of persecution... I have witnessed some of the activities of the boys before and I was even a victim of their acts of thuggery in the past... They are used to disturbing the electorate and electoral process in Kwara State. I do not want people to mix the Offa robbery up with the violent activities of the thugs. I am not saying that Saraki participated in the robbery. I cannot even claim that he sent them to go and rob... No! But he emboldened them to live a life of crime. The boys relied on the authority of the number three citizen in Nigeria, fully armed with guns and all other instruments of violence, to do anything because they also enjoy the legitimate cover of government... It is a known fact that Saraki and Ahmed are making use of those boys to perpetrate violence against perceived enemies during elections. When they are short of funds, they take to robbery.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Saraki tried as much as he could to disabuse the minds of Nigerians of the allegation. The attempt to implicate him in the robbery was the most humiliating moment in his entire life and political career. In his response to

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3- John Owen Nwachukwu, "Offa robbery: What Saraki did for robbery suspects – Oyedepo alleges", Daily Post, June 12 2018, <http://dailypost.ng/2018/06/10/offa-robbery-saraki-robbery-suspects-oyedepo-alleges/>



the issue Saraki said through his spokesperson:

Let it be known that there is no way I could have been associated with armed robbery against my people . . . When the Offa robbery incident happened, I was the first top public official to pay a visit to the place and right there in the palace of the traditional ruler, I put a call through to this same Mr. Ibrahim Idris, the IGP, requesting him to make certain specific security arrangements as demanded by the people . . . Members of the public will remember that on May 16, 2018, I alerted the Senate about the information passed on to me by my State Governor, Dr. Abdulfatai Ahmed, over a plot by the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Ibrahim Idris, to frame me up by getting some suspected cultists arrested in Ilorin to implicate me. It is believed that the timely leakage of the plot in that case aborted the use of the suspected cultists to implicate me. Now, it is the Offa bank robbery suspects that are about to be used . . . This plot is concocted to embarrass me and, in the mind of the IGP, it is his own response after his refusal to honour the invitation by the National Assembly, headed me, for him to come and offer explanations on the rampant killings and violence across the country.<sup>4</sup>

It is most unlikely that Saraki (given his economic status and office) would be involved in a robbery case or support anybody involved in such a heinous crime. It was clear to many Nigerians that what the police was trying to do was to “give a dog a bad name in order to hang it”. However, two things are clear about the case and these are of deep interest to the present paper. They are:

- (i) that the boys worked with Saraki and the Governor of Kwara state during the past elections in Kwara state. It is difficult to see any influential Nigerian politicians not having the history of working with with political thugs whether now or in the past
- (ii) the government of Kwara state and probably Saraki had different economic empowerment programmes for the youth in Kwara. Some of the arrested criminals benefitted from these projects.

In his public statement denying involvement in the Offa robbery case, Governor Ahmed was more forthcoming on the relationship with the arrested

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4 Global Village Extra, “Offa Robbery: Is Senate President Saraki Guilty As Alleged? Read This Statement”. Global Village Extra, 3 June, 2018, <http://globalvillageextra.com/en/index.php/2018/06/03/offa-robbery-is-senate-president-saraki-guilty-as-alleged-read-this-statement/>



criminals than Saraki. In a statement issued by his Senior Special Assistant on Media and Communication, Dr. Muyideen Akorede, the Governor described the allegations as false and rejected his alleged indictment. The public statement says:

Kwara State Governor, Alhaji Abdulfatah Ahmed denies the allegations of supporting political thuggery or any other acts of criminality as alleged by the Nigeria Police or the suspects allegedly arrested in connection with the tragic Offa robbery. Neither has he at any time funded or provided arms to any individual or group in the state or anywhere in the country.

To set the records straight, the Kwara State Government has a well known empowerment scheme under the Small And Medium Enterprises platform which is used to move women and youths groups into entrepreneurship. Consequently, several youth and women groups have benefitted from the scheme to date. However, at no point did the Kwara State government directly provide funds to any group known as Good Boys for any purpose.

Similarly, if any of the beneficiaries chose to use the SME credit secured from the government to purchase a vehicle which was then alleged to have been used for an act of criminality, the Kwara State Governor and indeed the state government cannot be held liable for such actions since neither had prior knowledge of such intentions on beneficiaries' part.<sup>5</sup>

Alhaji Abdulfatah Ahmed also rejected the police allegation of arming and funding the suspects for political thuggery or for any other activity as false and unfounded as thuggery or any other form of criminality is neither encouraged nor supported by the state government or its agents.

The history of Benue state is also replete with gale of accusations of politicians empowering the youth for violence. In Benue State, the Police also accused some state officials of "empowering the youth for violence". The present Governor of the State, Samuel Ortom, accuses his predecessor Dr. Gabriel Suswan of arming the youth for violence against his opponents during his tenure. Ortom claimed to have recovered over 600 assorted weapons from over 800 violent youth said to have been armed by his predecessor. The weapons were said to have been surrendered under the Benue State Amnesty

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5 The Eagle Online, "Gov. Ahmed: I Have Nothing To Do With Offa Robbery", 3 June, 2018 <https://theeagleonline.com.ng/gov-ahmed-i-have-nothing-to-do-with-offa-robbery/>



Programme. In a public statement on 2 June, 2006 Suswan denied the allegation against him.<sup>6</sup> He said inter alia:

My attention has been drawn to a statement credited to the Benue State Governor, Samuel Ortom, and published in some national dailies, where he alleged that I had “equipped” the youths in the state with arms to perpetrate violence during my tenure in office as governor of the state . . . I like to state here clearly that nothing could be further from the truth than these unfortunate remarks from Ortom, which clearly bear the stamp of his well-known trade mark of leveling all manner of allegations against me, since his assumption of office, no matter how bizarre, absurd and preposterous such allegations might be . . . Is it really true that as Governor of Benue State, I, Gabriel Suswan, did arm youths in the state with dangerous weapons and encouraged them to perpetrate violence and commit crimes, as Ortom is accusing me? It is on record that I am not a violent person and I abhor violence in whatever guise . . . On assumption of office as governor in 2007, I had moved decisively to turn around the state of insecurity, which pervaded the state as a fallout from politically motivated violence, which wreaked havoc on some parts of the state, particularly in Kwande, Tarka and Gwer-East Local Government areas, resulting from failed local council elections in those areas, where an indeterminate number of persons were killed and many others maimed for life . . . In co-operation with the Nigeria Police and the Army, rapid response security units were set up in the state, such as ‘Operation Zenda’ and the ‘Red Scarf’ which my administration funded properly with the attendant result that throughout the eight years of my reign as governor, Benue State enjoyed the status of the most peaceful and secured state within the much troubled North-Central region of the country, a ‘peace and safety haven’ which witnessed rapid influx of people fleeing violence and unrest from other states in the country. . . I also initiated the setting up of cross-border security outfits with neighboring states to curb the menace of inter-state criminal elements, particularly Nasarawa state, which though was under the rule of a governor from a different political party (CPC), co-operated with me to achieve results, which till date, no security operation in any part of the country has equaled the positive results from that exercise . . . Regrettably, now that both Nasarawa and Benue States are in one political party – the ruling APC – such co-operation is not there. I will not be surprised if today, Ortom blames me for the present lack of co-operation and attendant poor result . . . It should also be noted that when Fulani herdsmen and their militia descended on parts of the state visiting death and destruction on whole

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6 See Administrator, “SUSWAM: I didn’t equip Benue youths with arms”, Nigerian Concord, June 25, 2016, <http://www.nigerianconcord.com.ng/?p=9259>



villages and communities, with a carefully thought out framework and strategy, my administration was able to curb the menace and the peace and security status of the state and its socio-economic stability and equilibrium were not adversely affected . . . As governor, I did my best possible within the limits of resources available to me to ensure the security of the lives and property of citizens of Benue State, and to guarantee for them, an atmosphere of peace within which to pursue their endeavours. I did not arm any individual or groups with weapons of any sort neither did I encourage violence or criminality in any form, both in my private and official capacity.<sup>7</sup>

It is interesting to observe that Governor Ortom who accused Suswan of arming the youth is today facing a similar kind of allegation by his political opponents. The peace of his regime is taken away by the constant invasion of Benue state by herdsmen who kill the people from one community to the other. As the Governor battles the herdsmen, will very little timely response from the federal government and its security apparatuses, Ortom is accused of arming the youth to defend the communities and himself. His administration is particularly accused to have established working relationship with a militant leader known as Terwase Agwaza alias "Gana" before the relationship became and Gana has to do into hiding. The latter is known by the people of Benue state to be a serial killer. In the process of the youth violence in Benue state, the Governor lost two of his personal assistants. The first was the Governor's Principal Special Adviser on Knowledge Economy and Investments, Dr. Tavershima Adyorough. The second to be killed was Ortom's Senior Special Assistant on Special Security, Daneen Igbana, a retired police officer. He was killed by the militia led by Gana.<sup>8</sup> As Governor battles with the herdsmen invasion of his state, he struggles to extricate himself from the allegations against him arming militant youths. In other words, he has more to bother about on this issue than Suswan.

Youth violence is not peculiar to Kwara, Benue and Kogi States or the North Central as presented above. All over Nigeria, politicians have political thugs around them, which they use to harass their political opponents. Many

7 See Administrator, "SUSWAM: I didn't equip Benue youths with arms", Nigerian Concord, 25 June, 2016, <http://www.nigerianconcord.com.ng/?p=9259>

8 Peter Duru, "Assassinations: Again Benue govt caught off guard", Vanguard, August 26, 2017; Ameh Comrade Godwin, "Benue govt denies arming militia group against herdsmen", *Daily Post*, 9 January, 2018.



of these armed youth are often left to their devices after elections. They stoke criminal and political violence around the country as witnessed in the three states considered here.

### **Nigeria's Youngest Governor**

Those seeking to get the youth to take over the governance of Nigeria need to study Governor of Kogi State, Yahaya Bello. He is believed to be the youngest Governor in Nigeria today. He is 42 years old and considered to be a youth. How is he too fairing in Nigerian politics? Can he be taken as a model of the kind of youth leadership that Nigerians are looking forward to? So far, Governor Bello has not been able to show any capacity to raise the bar on democratic governance. He has nothing new to show Nigerians in political governance; he is a typical Nigerian politician. He is unable to pay the workers in the state. He is criticised for not investing in infrastructural development of Kogi state. So condemnable is the regime in the administration that Babatunde Otiotoju, a Kogi-born leading public commentator on TVC Nigeria's "Journalists Hangout" now disclaims his membership of the state. He refers to Kogi as "my former state". Is this the kind of leadership that the youth would provide when power is given to them?

On the other hand, Yahaya Bello is better noted for the unending conflict he has with the Senator representing for Kogi West Senatorial District, Dino Melaye. The Yahaya Bello vs Dino Melaye conflict is so intense that it today threatens public safety in the state. Several people have been killed as a result of the regular clashes between the two. Commenting on the embarrassing nature of this conflict, the Political Editor of the Vanguard Newspaper, Emmanuel Aziken observed that: "They represent the young generation in Kogi State. Governor Yahaya Bello, 41, and Senator Dino Melaye, 43, should have forged a relationship to underpin a guaranteed future for the youths of Kogi. However, political brickbats now and then between the two men have become an almost daily episode in the chronicles of the political developments of Kogi State".<sup>9</sup>

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9 Emmanuel Aziken, "Conflict at the Confluence: The trouble between Gov Bello and Sen Melaye", 17 June, 2017, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/06/conflict-confluence-trouble-gov-bello-sen-melaye/>





Figure 2: Pictures of Bello and Melaye (left to right)

Both men were committed foot soldiers of the Muhammadu Buhari presidential campaign before the 2015 presidential election. While Melaye worked for Buhari at the national level, Bello coordinated the campaign efforts in Kogi. The disagreement between them started with the formation of the cabinet in Kogi State shortly after Governor Yahaya Bello was sworn in. Melaye claimed not to have been reckoned with in the administration of Kogi State. The political rhetoric of the Governor does not present him as a person willing to work with Melaye. A key issue in the conflict was insistence of Governor Bello appointing his local government coordinator for Ijumu Local Government Area, Taofiq Isah as the chairman of the local government caretaker committee, the same local government where Melaye comes from. Melaye was not happy that he was not honoured to decide who should be in charge of his immediate community.

The administration of Governor Yahaya Bello tried to engineer the recall of Melaye from the National Assembly but it failed, as the constitutional conditions could not be met when the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) followed the petition up. Meanwhile, Dino Melaye constantly alleges that there are plots to kill him. As witnessed in Kwara state, the Police arrested some violent youth who claimed to have been armed by Melaye. The Senator was subsequently arrested and taken to court in Lokoja for gun running. As Bello and Melaye competed for recognition in

Kogi politics, the latter jumped the fence by dumping his membership of the ruling party, APC. He is now a member of the opposition party, PDP. The gun running case against him continues in the court of law.

### Youth Protests and Campaigns in FCT

Staging public protest is a legitimate method of expressing political voice in a democratic society. As a process of indirect persuasion it has to do with coming to a public place as an individual or group to speak out about a social, economic, environmental, political or security problem.<sup>10</sup> It easily attract attention because it is usually done in the public: on the streets, in public parks, market places, stadia and shopping mall. The target audience usually determines the venue of the protest and where they can be easily identified.

Nigerian youth express their political voice easily through protests. In the process the Nigerian state hears them. The North Central is replete with different cases of public protests organised by the youth in support of one political cause or the other. The protests take place at local, state and FCT levels. This paper focuses only on the FCT manifestation of the social action. There is no space for covering the happenings in all the states. Whereas the ones organised in Abuja most likely addressed issues of global concerns, those organised in the states often address local issues. Youth empowerment and political voice is more of a global issue.

Our consideration of the protests in Abuja focuses on three key protest types:

- (i) BringBackOurGirls campaign,
- (ii) protests organised by members of the Islamic Organisation of Nigeria and
- (iii) the NotTooYoungToRun campaigns.

All of these protests were deliberately organised in Abuja for effectiveness and the immediate attention of the international community. The BringBackOurGirls campaign, championed by the former Nigerian Minister of Education Obiageli Ezekwesili, was aimed at putting the federal government under pressure to secure the release of the Chibok girls that were abducted by the Boko Haram movement during the night of 14 April, 2014.

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10 Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social movements: An introduction*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002, pp. 167-170.





The campaign went round the major cities in Nigeria and the world at large. But Abuja has been its main base. It afforded the campaigners, dominated by the youth, to freely express themselves on the need to free the girls. It contributed significantly to the freeing of some of the girls.

The second iconic protests in Abuja to be included in this paper is the ongoing ones by members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (otherwise known as "Nigerian Shiites"). It happens regularly in Abuja. The following picture illustrates a typical scenario:



The protest called “FreeZakzaky” was against the government’s continued detention of Shiekh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, leader of the Islamic movement of Nigeria (IMN) who had been in detention since December 2015 charged with murder. That month his group clashed with a convoy of Nigeria’s army chief, Tukur Buratai leading to several hundreds of deaths. On several occasions, El-Zakzaky was granted bail by courts of competent jurisdiction. However, the government refused to release him. He is said to be in “protective custody”. The government claims he is held in a “protective custody”, but his supporters have in the last two weeks intensified protests demanding his freedom. This kind of youth-led protest would continue so long as the federal government refuses to get the Shiite leader released.

### **Not-Too-Young-To-Run Protest**

For us in this paper, the most iconic protests organised in Abuja in recent years was that of the ‘Not-Too-Young-To-Run Movement’. It was championed by 54 youth organisations across the country with Samson Itodo, the Executive Director of the Youth Initiative for Advocacy Growth and Advancement (YIAGA-Africa) serving as the convener. The series of protests started in March 2018 were meant to put the federal government under pressure to sign a bill passed by the National Assembly reducing the age for contesting for political office in Nigeria. The bill reduced the qualifying age of president candidates from 40 to 35, while the age for governors and senate was retained at 35, among others.







The protesters took their campaign round the city of Abuja, including the National Assembly. It did not stop until President Muhammadu Buhari signed the bill on May 30 2018. This opened a new page in the history of youth empowerment and political voice in Nigeria.



## Conclusion

This paper moved beyond a consideration of the economic empowerment projects in the North Central to giving due attention to some salient issues in the geo-political region. The core argument in the paper is that indeed the politicians in the region have a close working relationship with the youth but this is not the kind of political empowerment that we should be talking about. The youth are empowered to engage in different forms of criminal and political violence. The paper also shows how the youth can increase their political voice level by staging public protests. Nigeria is expected to be a better place once the youth are given the power to rule the country. Our paper examines how the Governor of Kogi State, Yahaya Bello, is fairing in power and it was concluded that there is nothing innovative about his administration. He ranks among the Governors that are not performing too well in the country. Hence, it is hereby concluded that making Nigeria a better place is not necessarily a simplistic matter of transferring political power to the youth but having the identification of individuals and groups sufficiently altruistic to better the lot of the people.



## Appendix: Youth Empowerment Projects in North Central Nigeria

S/N	State	Year	Donor organization	Beneficiaries	Project information
1	FCT, Abuja	2015	IITA Youth Agripreneurs (IYA) Abuja  EU-Nigeria Business Forum which was held between 5-6 October in Lagos		IYA signed an agreement with NYSC to provide training support and inputs for the serving youth corps members in exchange for a piece of land to carry out their activities.
2	Kwara State		Kwara state government in collaboration with the Tony Elemelu Foundation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One-day sensitisation workshop on empowerment in Ilorin.</li> <li>- Provision of land for youth farming and also set aside substantial revolving loan scheme for the youths to access for various kinds of farming ranging from poultry, fishing, animal husbandry, etc.</li> <li>- Establishment of the International Training and Entrepreneurship College (ITEC) in Ajase-Ipo, to provide vocational training for youths.</li> </ul>
3	Nasarawa State	2013	Governor Tanko Umaru Al-Makura in collaboration with Industrial Training Fund (ITF)	Lafia, Wamba and Nasarawa local government areas	About 1,000 youths were trained in various skills in a training programme that kicked off on Monday September 16 at the three senatorial zones of the state.

	2018	Nigerian Peace Corps (NPC)		Spent N5.5 million to register and train 200 youths in Nasarawa State on online businesses to enable them earn a living. The training was part of the corps social responsibility aimed at training the youths on how to make use of the social media to transact online business. 1,500 youths were employed under the Nasarawa State Youth Empowerment Scheme (NAYES) part of efforts to minimise youth restiveness in the state.
	2016	Nassarawa State Government		The State Government procured 200 tricycles to be distributed to youths at subsidised rate as part of its empowerment programme. The state governor, Al-Makura said the tricycles would be given out at half the price to beneficiaries, adding that the gesture would go a long way to check youth restiveness.
	2013			Youth Employment Social Support Operation (Yesso) Trained 1047 youths in various skills such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT, clothing and textiles, building and POP, agriculture and cosmetology.
4	Niger State	2018	The World Bank, through the FADAMA III Additional Financing (AFII) Programme	(Niger, State, Benue State and Kogi State) Minna
			The National Directorate of Employment (NDE)	150 youths were trained in Tailoring, 70 in welding and fabrication and 80 in plumbing and pipe-fitting.
			Industrial Training fund (ITF)	



5	Plateau State	State Government	Sponsored two (2) youths from the state to Burkina Faso for the first UNESCO African Youth Forum.
			Sponsored three (3) youths to represent the state as parliamentarians National Youth Parliament (2008).
			Sponsored seven (7) youths to participate in the unemployment workshop in farm produce, processing and management in Ogun State in 2008
			Sponsored twenty (20) youths to take part in Youth Empowerment Programme in Agricultural Production (fishing and animal rearing) in Keffi, Nassarawa State in 2008.
			Organised a workshop for 120 youth leaders of voluntary/tribal organisation at the NDLEA Regional Academy, Jos from 12th – 17th October, 2009.
			Organised a four (4) Leadership programme for 50 students of some selected secondary schools within the state at the Citizenship and Leadership Training Center, Shere Hills, Jos (August, 2009).

Sponsored ten (10) youths for a Nine (9) day National Youth Camp Adventure/Journey. Programme organised by the Nigeria National Youth Award Scheme at the NYSC Camp, Kano.

Sponsored twenty-two (22) youths to attend a ten (10) day National Youth Empowerment in Agriculture and Leatherworks for North East and North Central zones in Gombe State.

Sponsored twelve (12) youths for an ICT training and entrepreneurship scheme held at Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil, Kano State.

Sponsored ten (10) unskilled youths to attend Subsidy Re-Investment programme launched by Mr. President on 13th February, 2012.

Sponsored a state delegation to Abuja to attend the 2012 President's NYSC Honours Award Winners/Assistance to the two (2) Honours Award Recipients in January, 2012



Sponsored three (3) youths to attend the Review of the Constitution of the National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN) Plateau State Chapter in Makurdi, Benue State

Sponsored five (5) youths to attend National Congress of the National Youth Council of Nigeria in Lokoja, Kogi State in March, 2012.

Sponsored twenty-five (25) youth leaders of various organisations in Jos-North and Jos-South Local Government Areas to attend the Train-the-Trainers Workshop on Health and Family life Education with particular reference to HIV/AIDS in collaboration with PLACCA in May, 2012.

Provision of soft loan for participants in the training on skills like farming, catering, soap and detergent production, photography, video production, new media and e-business. Each participant is entitled to a loan ranging from N100,000 to N1,000,000 to start his or her business, in a bid to reduce the rate of unemployment in the country.

		2017	Federal Government of Nigeria through Special Adviser to President Muhammadu Buhari on Youths and students Affairs	
6	Kogi State	2014		YAD4KOGI (Youth Advancement and Development Programme for Kogi State) included agricultural as well as other noble programmes targeted at the Youths. The project sorted to build the self esteem, self – reliance and dignity of labour towards the integration of the economic development of the state, especially at the grass root level. The beneficiaries of this programme are primary school and secondary school leavers as well as school drop outs that were trained to carry out environmental sanitation activities in their various local government areas, and involved in the cleaning of roads, gutters and other public works. They were placed on a monthly stipend of ₦7,000 per month.

IBADAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY



2017	The World Bank, through the FADAMA III Additional Financing (AFII) Programme	Lokoja Local Government Area	437 unemployed youths in Kogi State were trained under the Skills Acquisition programme of the World Bank in collaboration with the federal government to make them self-reliant and marketable for job creation.
2018	Public Workfare programme of the Kogi State Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (KGYESSO) being supported by the World Bank.		About 12,984 unemployed youths from the 21 local government areas of Kogi State reportedly benefitted from the initiative. The project was supported by a large 90 per cent support of the World Bank with 10 per cent counterpart contributions by the state government. It aimed to engage youths in public works such as construction and rehabilitation of community feeder roads; refuse collection and waste disposal, reforestation/forest guard among others.
2018	Kogi State Government in partnership with Coolink Integrated Services Ltd		2,500 unemployed youths of the state were empowered through a Basic Skill Acquisition and Vocational Training Programme. Coolink Integrated Services Ltd promised secure loans for all certified participants to start up their businesses.

	2016-2017	Global Institute for Advance and Professional Studies (GIFAPS)	Education and skills Acquisition Programmes championed by Comrade Arome Gabriel Adoji. The project provided 150 scholarships to students across the 3 senatorial districts through the Ministry of Youth Development and Sports in Kogi State.
	2016-2017	Young African Leader Initiative (YALI)	Provision of tools, training, and technology to promote leadership. This is an International collaboration scheme that aimed to provide 500,000 jobs opportunities and a National Service Centre.
7	Benue State	2015 Ministry of Youth and Sports Development and Sir Ahmadu Bello Foundation Kaduna	Training of 350 youth/women on entrepreneurship and skills acquisition programme in July, they were trained in areas such as poultry production, confectioners, fishery, tie and dye of textiles.
		Ministry of Youth and Sports Development	Sponsorship of National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN) Benue chapter on several programmes across the nation.



Sponsorship of the first session of Benue State Youth parliament in October, 2016 in creating a platform for developing and empowering the youths to fully realise their potentials to compete favourably with youths in other democratic countries and nations of the world, His Excellency inaugurated the First Benue Youth Parliament at the Benue State House of Assembly complex with 30 youths representing their various constituencies in the state.

HIV/AIDS counseling and testing for out of school youth in Otukpo, Gboko and Makurdi.

2017 Ministry of Youth and Sports Development and Coolink Limited, a Nigeria company with international affiliates

Skill acquisition and youth empowerment programmes tagged basic skill acquisition and vocational training, over 2000 youths were trained in various skills. These vocational trainings include: e-business, website and block designs, photography/video production, soap, detergent, liquid hand wash, make-up and beauty therapy presentation of 500

International  
Fund for  
Agricultural  
Development,  
Value Chain  
Development  
Programme,  
IFAD-VCDP

start-up kits procured by the state government to youths who graduated in five trade areas under the National Industrial Skills Development Program of the Industrial Training Fund.

About 4,000 Benue youths were empowered to improve the cultivation of cassava and rice, which has helped the state attain 5.5 metric tonnes per hectare as against 1.5 metric tonnes before the intervention.

About 4,000 Benue youths have been empowered by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Value Chain Development Programme, IFAD-VCDP, to improve the cultivation of cassava and rice, which has helped the state attain 5.5 metric tonnes per hectare as against 1.5 metric tonnes before the intervention.

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