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## **The African Youth Charter and Youth Development: A Reflection on Challenges of Implementation in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Youth Development in Africa is a must undertaking; it is a sine-qua-non of the continent's development. Therefore, in view of the importance of youth to the socio-economic development of the present and future generations of the African continent, the African Youth Charter (AYC) was set in motion in 2006, as a template for the advancement of the rights and freedoms of young people. In principles, African states have ratified the Charter and vowed to implement it in their own countries for a common approach to salvaging the indignities of the youth in the continent from excessive neglect, disregard and violations of their rights and general disempowerment. The paper relied on secondary sources of data collection and documentary analysis as its methodology using content analysis. In the context of Nigeria, the paper argues that the state should promote laudable policies that are aimed at hitting the nail on the head rather than the usual sloganeering programmes that are meant to raise concerns rather than solving them. On their part, the youth should pursue career development through education, training and re-training in order to empower them to fight for their rights and freedoms. For rights are 'taken'; not 'given', through constant struggles.

**Keywords:** Charter, Development, Empower, Youth, Youth Development

### **Introduction**

The greatest tangible asset of a nation is its youth. In all parts of the world, youth are the hope of the future generation because human progress and development, including scientific and industrial, is influenced by the vibrant youth who dedicate their energies and direct their potentials towards various aspects of development. In most industrial nations the youth are protected by numerous legal frameworks

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that accelerate their tortuous process of transformation into adulthood. Unfortunately, in developing societies, particularly in Asia Africa and Latin American countries the youth are invariably becoming a social bondage characterise by all sorts of social deviance.

The burden of youth development, which ideally meant to be shouldered by the youth, is often left in the hands of poor vulnerable parents whose social condition is hardly supportive of innovations and change and, or the state whose incapacity in the social provisioning is quite disgusting. The vulnerabilities of the family institution and the state in providing for the youth have over the years been compounded by the absence of statutory legal framework that would guide the youth, the state and the family in expanding the frontiers of the former to develop themselves and participate in decision making for a sustainable process of national development. In the context of Africa, the first legal framework that departed from the past and is specially tailored in favor of youth development is the African Youth Charter.

The African Youth Charter (AYC) is a 31 article Charter on the rights and freedoms of young people in Africa. It was adopted by the seventh ordinary session of the Assembly of African Heads of State and Governments held in Banjul, the capital of Gambia on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2006. The Charter is guided by the Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU) and it is premised on the need to protect, promote and empower the fundamental rights and freedoms of the youth by involving them in the process of national development through their active participation in decision making process.

Through their participation in decision making, it is expected that the youth would be empowered to contribute meaningfully to their development and that of the African states. The Charter is also guided by various continental and international Covenants that promote the inherent dignity and inalienable rights afforded to all members of the human family such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (1976) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976), and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1986).

Specifically, the AYC is a holistic guiding framework for the signatory member countries of the AU. It addresses the fundamental flaws that negate or deny young people in the continent the right to participate in the political, economic and social development processes. The Charter is therefore, drafted based on the conviction of the parties involved that "Africa's greatest resource is its youthful population and that through their active and full participation; Africans can surmount the difficulties that lie ahead" (African Charter, Preamble, 2006: 2).

Therefore, it is apt to say that the focal point of the Charter is to create every opportunity for the African youth to contribute to the process of development in his/her country and, collectively facilitate the transformation of the African continent to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and compete with other comity of nations in the area of global transformation through science and technology. Nigeria's

population has tremendously increased over time, it is estimated that the population by 2023 it will hit 236 million and by 2050 it will reach 410 million leaping it from its current position of the 7th most populous state to 3rd place after China and India (BusinessDay, 2022).

Corruption and poor governance that is inherent in the country as a result bad governance by the ruling class has resulted in the burgeoning rate of joblessness and redundancy resulting into crimes related with armed robbery and armed conflicts, abduction, economic stagnation, mass murder and segregation among the populace coupled with other socio-cultural and religious factors such as early marriages result into colossal increase in child bearing, fraud and poverty (Manu, 2023). This paper is a contribution to knowledge on the Nigerian youth and AYC with specific focus on the question of the development imperatives of Nigeria.

The paper is divided into five sections. Section One is the introduction. Section Two operationalises the concept of youth, development and the term ‘youth development’ in order to set the tone of our analysis. Section Three discusses the AYC with special focus on its key provisions on youth development and how these affect the process of youth development in Nigeria. In Section Four the paper discusses the challenges of the Charter in redefining the framework of young persons in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Section Five concludes the paper.

### **Conceptual Discourse**

The concept of ‘youth’ can be used in relative and contextual terms because there is no common usage that is universally accepted. Moreover, other than to say that on the average the youth are ambitious, psychologically zealous and exhibit youthful exuberance, a youthful age is neither so much about someone’s physical features or personal appearance nor necessarily a behavioral pattern that is universally identifiable Therefore, most scholars, institutions and policy documents adopt the criteria of age bracket as ‘convincing’ definition of the youth, particularly in contradistinction with people of old age.

Hence, the United Nations posits that a person whose age ranges from 15-24 years is a youth. This definition is in sharp contrast to a definition put forth by other societies where a range of 15-30 or 18-40 years is provided as the baseline definition of who the youth are. Even the African Youth Charter has a different age bracket in its classification of who the youth is. The Charter says that the “youth or young people shall refer to every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years” (AYC, 2006: 3). In Nigeria, the National Youth Policy Documents (2019-2023) defined youth as persons of ages 15-29 years. In short, for the purposes of this paper the Nigerian perspective of the definition of the youth is adopted in order to analyse the AYC contextually. The definition provides that a youth is persons of ages 18-35, who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

On the other hand, the concept of development is even more problematic to define, not only because it is in both theory and practice, a relative concept but essentially because it has been subjected to various ideological interpretation, and thus a value-laden concept. In this paper, the concept of development is viewed from two major perspectives. The first conception is about national development which is defined as a process of transformation in all its various ramifications for the productive activities of a society.

From this viewpoint, development is a process of change which involves the reorganisation and reorientation of the entire economic, social and political aspects of a society for the improvement of the standard of living of the people and macro-economic variables such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), income, savings, and investment, among other variables.

Central to this form of development is the improvement of human capital, basic needs and standard of living. The second conception of development is oriented towards improving the capacity of the youth to engage in productive activities and internalise values that can promote a social change. This type of development is defined as a predetermined process of redirecting the energies of the youth to meet the challenges of scientific age for the transformation of their societies. The central goal of youth development from this perspective is their role as promoters of social change and as active participants in the definition of their agenda in the process of national development.

Thus, the concept of youth development adopted in this presentation is that which centers on the utilisation of the energies of the young people as stakeholders in national development and as those who participate in determining their destinies in that process. In other words, youth development is participatory because it provides for their participation in decision making. It is also instrumental because it is expected to provide positive changes in the youth culture, expectations, and *weltanschauung* (world view) for their development and that of the society in which they live.

It is in view of the importance of youth participation in development that the theme of the 2007 United Nations Youth Day was tagged: *Be Seen, Be Heard: Youth Participation in Development*. Thus, it is in the context of this type of youth development that we conceive the framework or guiding principles, values and ethics of what is expected of the African youth and this in turn has necessitated the need for the adoption of the AYC by the AU in 2006.

### **African Youth Charter and Youth Development Praxis in the Context of Nigeria's Youth Socio-Political and Economic Milieu**

Looking at the various provisions of the AYC, one is not left in doubt as to the grassroots or rather bottom-up model of development it is intended to provide. Specifically, the Charter has clearly disposed its approach to development on a pattern that can instill the culture of self reliance and autonomous process of youth development. The Charter is thus all inclusive, comprehensive and highly youth-focused

in the area of science and technology, engagement of youth in agricultural development, political participation, stoppage of drug abuse and counter moral practices, promotion of peace and information technology in the era of globalisation, among other relevant provisions.

This is to say that by providing that the “State parties shall encourage youth organisations to lead youth programmes and ensure the exercise of the right to development” (Article 10), the Charter has set a full agenda for the youth to actively engage in productive undertakings that would transform their societies. This explains why in the Charter is very emphatic about youth participation through the creation of platforms for youth participation in decision making at local, national, regional, and continental levels of governance (Article 11(b2)).

The Charter does not stop at this, it also calls for access to information such that the young people concerned become aware of their rights, enjoy these rights and ensure that their knowledge of the prevailing condition of the society has a strong bearing in decision making, to which they are a party to as stakeholders. It should be noted that it the AYC that prompts its State Parties to establish yet another legal framework for the youth called the National Youth Policy (NYP) in order to address youth challenges within the national development framework of the country (Article 12).

Although the Nigerian youth policy has predated the AYC Charter, the latter gives it a moral booster through update of information. The NYP for Nigeria was drafted in 2001 and revised in 2009. It is the vision of this policy to provide “a positive future role of the youth in national socio-economic development” (NYP, 2001:12). Another aspect of the Charter that is quite relevant to youth competitiveness in the era of global transformation is Article 13 (j) which stresses the importance of the use of modern information and communication technology such that the youth are better informed about and prepared for the world of work.

This provision is predicated on the need to make use of highly skilled, competitive and innovative in the area of human capital development. Although most of the youth do not have access to computers or training in modern computer software and programming, it is appropriate to say that some youth organisations and centers are gradually exposing their members to this new technology. It is, however, sad to say that while in the developed countries basic training on the information technology starts at primary schools, some of our youth in the tertiary and university levels do not have the resources to possess a computer. The importance of this technology to the development of the youth has been clearly stated in article 20 (2d) which calls for the State parties to help young people to “promote new cultural forms that link the past to the future”.

However, in order to facilitate learning, the idea provided in article 20 (1f) is strongly appreciated. It states that there should be an introduction and intensification of teaching in African languages ‘in all forms of education as a means to accelerating economic, social, political and cultural development’. In

plural societies like Nigeria the issue of African language as a lingua franca is an old debate which has been seriously politicised. It is very difficult to settle the question of which language among the dominant or minority languages the country can adopt. This decision has for long time taken in countries like Malaysia, China, and Japan, among other nations, and this action has accelerated development in the area of science and technology. It is long over due to reexamine the question of African language in the continent's development agenda.

Realising the importance of active participation in productive activities that would stimulate economic development, the AYC strongly emphasises the need for the youth to engage in agriculture and other related lucrative ventures. This is quite very important because in Nigeria studies have shown that revenue from the sale of crude oil has invariably affected the rate of growth in the agricultural activities leading to the neglect of the sector since the 1970s.

Thus, in a monocultural economy like Nigeria and in a region where soil fertility is high and conducive for agricultural development like in Northern Nigeria, Article 14 of the Charter which spelt out the measures to be used for poverty eradication and socio-economic integration of the youth is worth emphasising. For example, article 14 (2b) states that: "Train young people to take up agricultural, mineral, commercial and industrial production using contemporary systems and promote the benefits of modern information and information technology to gain access to existing and new markets".

It should be noted that while this provision intends to achieve the establishment of forward and backward linkages to initiate a meaningful venturing into poultry, fishing and animal husbandry or small and medium scale farming, the Nigerian state is limited in its capacity to provide the take-off capital for the youth. Similarly, the indolence of the youth who seek to white collar jobs in the public and private sector institutions has not been helping matters on the need to foster the participation of youth in agricultural activities in Nigeria.

In another perspective, the Charter has called for the youth and the community, through their various organisations to raise awareness among the youth on the dangers of drug abuse (Article, 16 (2k). However, it has been clearly observed that the causes of drug abuse in the Nigerian society are multidimensional. There is a problem of parental upbringing, peer group influence, decadence of moral values of our society and the influence of sub-cultures, mostly foreign, on our youth. In a bizarre expression of decline in the moral values of a society, politicians also serve to reinforce drug abuse on youth. Therefore, the need to mainstream the youth in positive sensitisation program can only succeed when NGOs whose mandates are to create awareness on drug abuse are very active. The National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) disclosed that a humongous number of youths in Kano State are engaged in the abuse of drugs, in learning institutions as well as at homes. The abuse of drugs pervasiveness is 16%; depicting that in every six persons, one is a drug addict among persons within the

ages of 15-64 years with almost 2 million drug abusers taking tramadol, codeine and some cough syrups, instead of cannabis (*Premium Times*, 2021a).

The government must come to the aid of the youth organisations to campaign for the stoppage of the drug abuse syndrome. One of the falls out of the drug abuse among the youth in Kano happened in September 15, 2010, when a 23-year-old man killed his father, mother, sister and two younger brothers at Kundila Housing Estate of Gandun Albasa Quarters (*Vanguard*, 2014).

For any development to take place there must be peace. Insecurity is a permanent enemy of development. It is sad to note that in Africa and indeed Nigeria, conditions of violence are not created by the youth, but they are recruited to be the executors of most violence. For example, it has been pointed out that over 70 % of the direct perpetrators of the widespread violence which erupted in Kenya in 2007 following the disputed re-election of President Moi Kibaki were youth (Mercy Corps, 2011), while 90 to 95% of violent conflict in Nigeria was prosecuted by the youth (Omeje 2007, cited in Omeiza, 2010). The issue of peace and security is addressed in Article 17.

The importance of dialogue and cooperation in the settlement of dispute is emphasised by instituting:

... mechanisms to promote a culture of peace and tolerance amongst young people that discourages their participation in acts of violence, terrorism, xenophobia, racial discrimination, gender-based discrimination, foreign occupation and trafficking in arms and drugs (Article, 17 b).

Thus, if peace is to be promoted, the youth have to be sensitised, offered employment and encouraged to internalising the values of harmonious social relations in our society. Those that exploit the energies of the youth, particularly the politicians should not be spared by the law. It is in this way that peace can be promoted and the culture of tolerance provided.

It is important to note that while the Charter has come along way in setting the agenda for the youth to participate in all aspect's development, it also redirects their attention to their basic responsibilities, which it states as follows:

- a. Become the custodians of their own development;
- b. Protect and work for family life and cohesion;
- c. Have full respect for parents and elders and assist them anytime in cases of need in the context of positive African values;
- d. Partake fully in citizenship duties including voting, decision making and governance
- e. Engage in peer-to-peer education to promote youth development in areas such as literacy, use of information and communication technology, HIV/AIDS prevention, violence prevention and peace building;
- f. Contribute to the promotion of the economic development of states Parties and Africa by placing their physical and intellectual abilities at its service;
- g. Espouse an honest work ethics and reject and expose corruption;
- h. Work towards a society free from substance abuse, violence, coercion, crime, degradation, exploitation and intimidations;

- i. Promote tolerance, understanding, dialogue, consultation and respect for others regardless of age, race, ethnicity, color, gender, ability, religion, status or political affiliation;
- j. Defend democracy, the rule of law and all human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- k. Encourage a culture of voluntarism and human rights protection as well as participation in civil society relations;
- l. Promote patriotism towards and unity and cohesion of Africa;
- m. Promote, preserve and respect African traditions and Cultural heritage and pass on this legacy to future generations;
- n. Become the vanguard of re-presenting cultural heritage in languages and in forms to which youth are able to relate;
- o. Protect the environment and conserve nature (Article, 26, p.19-20).

Clearly, it can be safely concluded that the AYC is a comprehensive agenda for the African youth. However, there are social, religious, cultural, economic, environmental, attitudinal, political, and administrative that are inimical to the realisation of the Charter's instrumental provisions on development.

### **Limitations in the Implementation of AYC on Youth Development**

The provisions of the AYC cut across several issues dealing with the rights, freedoms and expectations of the youth in the process of development. These issues range from non-discrimination, freedom of movement, expression, association, thought, conscience and religion to other issues such as rights to property, protection of the family, development, sustainable livelihood and health, among other major issues. However, there are some cultural, economic and political constraints in the realisation of these noble goals. Most of these limitations arise from the powers of the state which overshadow the rights of individual in a society.

Article 5 provides for freedom of association thus "Every young person shall have the right to free association and freedom of peaceful assembly in conformity with the law". In the context of Nigeria this provision is deceptive because security agents often prevent youth from enjoying their freedom of association and peaceful assembly by denying them security permit to undertake a legitimate peaceful assembly on the pretext that such undertaking could lead to the breach of peace, law and order. It can be said that one of the best practices of democratic participation is the enabling condition for people to actively express themselves on critical issues that affect national development. Where this condition is not created by the state, concerns over marginalisation would engender dissent and political apathy that could make political legitimacy questionable.

It is important to note that the African Youth Charter has made a provision on the protection of private and family life. While these provisions are contained in Article 7 and 8, their implementation is limited



by cultural norms and traditional values of the different parts of the Nigerian society. More importantly, religious factors are also some of the hindrances to the realisation of such principles. For example, article 8(1) of the Charter states that “Young men and women of full age who enter into marriage shall do so based on their free consent and shall enjoy equal rights and responsibilities”.

Two issues need to be well understood on this provision. First, in some African traditional value system and religious provisions it is the responsibility of parents to determine who a young girl should marry. The consent of the parent is automatically the consent of the girl and her freedom of determining who to marry is constrained. This action often turns out to create difficulties for the girl and the parent.

In April 2014, a 14-year-old girl in Gaya Local Government Area of Kano State killed her husband and three of his friends by poisoning the food she served her husband because she wanted her freedom after seventeen days into her forced marriage. In her words “I have never enjoyed the opportunity of going to Islamic school or acquiring Western education. My father forced me into this mess by stubbornly forcing me into a relationship I was not prepared to live in” (*Vanguard*, 2014).

Second, the determination of a ‘full age’ of marriage provided in the constitution or the Child’s Rights Act (2003) defines ‘full age’ of marriage as 18 years. Section 29 (4a) of the 1999 Constitution states that “full age” means the age of eighteen years and above; 29 (4b) any woman who is married shall be deemed to be of full age”. However, religious and cultural positions on the age limit for marriage differs sharply from these provisions. This is another dilemma in the implementation of the African Youth Charter. Article 15 (1) states that “Every young person shall have the right to gainful employment”. Nigeria is the second in terms of the topmost figures of jobless youths globally with 53% of them unemployed after South Africa, with 61% youths without a job (The Spectator Index, 2023). One can say that most of the unemployed persons in Nigeria today are the youth. In deed, it has been stated that six out of every ten Nigerians are under 25 years of age (NYP, 2001:3). The March 2014 National Immigration Service recruitment exercise is a case in point of illustrating the extent of unemployment ravaging the Nigerian youth. Over 56,000 applicants turned out at various recruitment centers throughout the country for 4,556 available job opportunity, leading to a stampede that killed more at least 18 applicants (*Nigerian Mirror*, 2014).

Worse still, where the work exists, equal access to employment leaves much to be desired, despite the existence of institutions and policy framework that are designed to ensure fairness in the recruitment policies of various agencies and institutions. Article 15 (a) explicitly states that: “Ensure equal access to employment and equal pay for equal work or equal value of work and offer protection against

discrimination regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, disability, religion, political, social, cultural or economic background”.

The right of the youth is limited by “indigene/non-indigene” divide, ethnic considerations, and other primordial factors that contradict the implementation of this provision. The Charter provides for the development of macroeconomic policies that focus on job creation like the National Poverty Alleviation Policy and its corollary policy on youth employment such as Mandatory Attachment Program (MAP), and Capacity Acquisition Program (CAP). These policies had suffered from politicisation and policy continuity which often serve as a major hurdle to their successful implementation.

There is also a provision in Article 15 (2) which states that: “Every young person shall have the right to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing work that is likely to be hazardous to or interfere with the young person’s education, or to be harmful to the young person’s health or holistic development”. The question to ask is how many young people of school age are roaming about the street without education? The system of modern *Almajirici* is not helping matters.

Children are exploited by various social groups, including even those in the know of the harmful phenomenon of begging on the streets or housemaid by young girls. In recent times, the neglect and deprivation of the youth accounted for the calamitous insecurity bedeviling the country with many of them conscripted and radicalised. Recognising the importance of state parties to the Charter, the document’s starting point of departure is the obligation of the state parties (Article 1).

This is quite very important given the inherent tendency of most African states to overlook their basic expectations for mundane priorities of national development. In reality, there is no legal mechanism to enforce compliance. Even the so-called AU’s African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is essentially focusing on political and economic issues that are profoundly national, rather than on specific challenges of the youth. Therefore, the question of violating the rights of the youth to development by many African states has not been addressed. This explains why child soldiers, drug abuse, child slavery and trafficking etc are on the increase in the continent.

On the whole, it can be said that the Charter has three main tendencies. First, it is well conceived but poorly or not well implemented. Second, it is well conceived but not implemented to the letter due to political, economic and social factors at play. Third, some of the provisions of the Charter are carefully drafted and encouraged, while others do not take care of Africa’s environmental, ecological, political, and administrative differences. Still others are rarely realisable due lack of adequate supply of the basic requirements for their introduction and implementation.

However, these limitations in the implementation of AYC on youth development in Nigeria are not without some negative implications on sustainable development, growth and national stability. The neglect of the youth in the area of governance and their political alienation by the governing class have

rendered the youths vulnerable and susceptible to manipulations and subsequent radicalisation by armed groups as witnessed in the activities of *Boko Haram* insurgents, Niger-Delta militants and so on.

Majority of the population in the country are constituted by the youthful population. For instance, the age distribution among Nigerians indicates that there exist 87,838,000 young persons below the ages of 15 totaling 44,896,360 males in addition to 42,943,785 females. 120,034,037 are within the age bracket of 15-64 with 61,235,769 males and 58,800,414 females. 6,696,690 are above 64 years with 3,235,696 males however 3,458,848 are females (Countrymeters, 2022). The above statistics portrays the existence of a youth bulge in Nigeria.

Youth bulge is a double edge sword that has the potentials of propelling development and stability as witnessed Russia, China and Indonesia and so on. On the one hand, it can be a source of insecurity and destabilisation as witnessed in Nigeria, Congo, and other Less Developed Countries that failed to take advantage of their blossoming youth population. The isolation of the youth in Nigeria has resulted in high unemployment rate witnessed in the country hence, worsening the level of human security in several parts of the country.

This development partly explains the surge in the prevalence of rural banditry and general level of insecurity that is bedeviling the Nigerian state (Manu, 2023). The rate of criminality and insecurity committed by the youths is likened to the direct impact of poverty and unemployment that the youths suffer from. Thus, further deteriorating economic, social, and political sectors of Nigeria's economy. For instance, International Organisation for Peace Building and Social Justice (PSJ) revealed that 70% of Nigeria's youth below the ages of 35 years are involved in different forms of criminalities across the country are doing so because of their inability to inaccessibility to economic prospects inherent in the country (*Leadership*, 2023a).

This condition compelled many of them to take up arms and continue to challenge the legitimacy of the Nigerian state and her law-abiding populace, which often results into violent confrontation against the state and undermining the security in the country as witnessed in the #ENDSARS dissent, brazen theft of the properties of citizens, hostage taking, prostitution, rural-urban drift and other forms of threats like internet scams, in addition to a dwindling national productivity (Nwokike, 2022).

Similarly, the resistance against the Nigerian state in the restive Niger-Delta region is a pointer in that regard. The region is among the most riches in the country and accounting for a sizable chunk of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings. Over the years the region became a cesspool of violence with far-reaching implications on the inhabitants of the region as well as the economy of the country at large. The inability of the Nigerian state as well as Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) in addition to leadership deficit have coalesced to compound the woes of the people in the area.

The neglect of the people in the region has forced the youth to resort to militancy through hostage taking of expatriates, pipeline vandalism, oil bunkering, oil theft and piracy among others in order to push home their demands. The activities of the restive youths in the region have aided in the proliferation of arms among non-state actors in the region as well as the country as a whole that were utilised in the destabilisation of numerous parts of the country as over 6 million illicit arms are circulating among non-state actors (*Premium Times*, 2021b).

It is the possession of these lethal weapons among mostly the youths that are utilised in perpetrating heinous acts like communal clashes, cultism and gang rape, farm theft, banditry and insurgency and so forth. Related to the above is crude oil theft, piracy, pipeline vandalism associated with the youth restiveness due to militancy in the Niger-Delta region and its negative impact on the people and the nation's economy. For instance, crude oil valued at 400,000 barrels equating to almost \$4 million are stolen on a daily basis in the country due to oil theft hence, hindering the country to produce its allocated quota of 2 million barrels per day by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Nigeria is only able to produce below 1.6 million barrels as a result of oil theft and vandalism of pipelines (Daramola, 2023).

This has had negative consequences on the livelihood condition of the people. Some of the consequences are loss of revenue needed to fund the country's budget and forcing the country to resort to borrowing to fill the budget deficit. About N1.29 trillion is lost yearly as a result of monumental level of oil theft (*The Guardian*, 2023). Moreover, is the environmental impact on the ecosystem. Pipeline vandalism and other unlawful insertion of pipes causes oil spillage that are accompanied with the destruction of farm land, aquatic animals as well as air pollution that have varying degrees of health-related hazards and so on.

Another implication of neglecting the youth on development and stability of Nigeria is the involvement of the youth in drug abuse. The menace of drug abuse is alarming in the country. Drug abuse even though a global affair constitutes a threat to the youthful group as well as Nigeria's national security, to be precise. Even though Nigeria was originally regarded as a drug-transit state, unfortunately, that outlook has recently shifted (Lanre, 2021). The NDLEA revealed that almost 14.3 million citizens are drug abusers within the ages of 15-64 years, noting that several females are also engaging in drug abuse (*Punch*, 2023b).

Adepeju & Osunwoye (2022) argued that the major causes of drug abuse among the Nigerian youth is as a result of frustration due to their inability to secure gainful employment after graduating from the university, disappointments meted to them from their loved ones, passing away of their breadwinners, ceaseless strike action embarked upon by lecturers in the tertiary institutions, disengagement from their

workplace, collusion and false indictment. More is also the morbid greed for materialism and get rich quick syndrome among the youths.

This development predisposes many of the youth to abuse drug substances. Drug abuse influences their behaviour and raises their tendencies to indulge in deviant acts. There is an intricate relationship between crime and drug abuse. One of the worse impacts of drug abuse is its impact on the socio-economic progress of persons, households, the community as well as the state (Kawugana & Faruna, 2018).

On the economic front its repercussion on the workforce needed in the country, lowering of output, in addition to creating an uncomplimentary atmosphere for investors which will definitely impact negatively on the Gross National Income and a drop in revenue generation with the government using large chunk of her resources on internal security management and catering for and the welfare and resettlement of Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs) created by insurgents due to drug abuse rather than utilising the resources toward uplifting the living standard of the people or upgrading critical infrastructure required for sustainable development. It further tarnishes Nigeria's image and promotes the looting of the commonwealth by the members of the political class so as to cause political instability (Kawugana & Faruna, 2018).

In a similar vein, the activities of *Boko Haram* violence in the North Eastern parts of Nigeria and most particularly the BAY states (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States have resulted in the death of several citizens in addition to the displacements of many locals with attendant humanitarian consequences on the people as a result of the carnage by the sect on the means of livelihood of the inhabitants. The dreaded sect over the years killed 50,000 persons and forced the dislodgment of more than 2.5 million individuals (Punch, 2024a). The group targeted schools and other critical infrastructure for constant attacks because of the sects believe that education is forbidden.

They as well resorted to abduction of school children hence, compounding the condition prevalent in the north that is already lagging behind in terms of education and development. Similarly, the activities of the sect coupled with banditry, farmer/herder's conflicts in several parts of the country in addition to climate change have further aggravated poverty and fueled food insecurity in the country resulting in rising prices of food stuffs in the country due to almost 78,000 farmers abandoning to their farmlands most particularly in states where food is harvested in commercial quantity thereby rendering over 8.4 million persons food insecure in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States while 2 million children under 5 years are challenged with malnutrition while 700,000 children are at risk of demise (Save the Children, 2024, BusinessDay, 2023). Currently, 31.5 million citizens are at risk of facing severe starvation between June-August 2024 in Nigeria (Leadership, 2024b). This surge in the number of people threatened by hunger is attributable to the general instability in the land, rising prices of fuel and cost of transportation, the devaluation of the naira, stagflation coupled with other challenges are attributable to the skyrocketing

prices of food items in the country. This challenges of unchecked will plunge the country into lawlessness.

Youth restiveness in the country have plunged many into poverty due to joblessness as a result of the shutdown of socio-economic activities due to attacks on schools, markets, hospitals, worship centers and so on further worsened the plight of the youths. The neglect of the youth as well as get rich quick syndrome among the overzealous ones have resulted in the daily surging in the number of cyber fraudsters popularly known as yahoo–boys. The activities of the yahoo-boys across several parts of the country led to the demise of many citizens and the swindling of many victims both locally and internally rendering Nigeria to be regarded as the capital of in Africa and the third in global ranking (Lawni & Osagie-Obazee, 2019).

It is estimated that the country loses almost N127 billion yearly to internet fraud, representing 0.08% of Nigeria's gross domestic product (Okhuevbie, 2021). This development has negative repercussions on the nation's development. For example, activities of the yahoo boys and 419 have earned Nigerians negative image as well as dissuading many investors from transacting business with Nigerians. On the security front, it has equally resulted in instability.

The end SARS protest is a classic case of instability that led into clash between the police and the youths in who alleged that the police extorted huge amount of money from them, while some of them are extra-judiciary killed and brutalised of the police. Though, the reasons adduced them to protest is the immediate cause of their protest, the long neglect and despair and frustration due to the neglect and their alienation by the ruling class in terms of participating in government policies and programmes, non-adherence to the rule of law, level of poverty in the country in addition to high energy costs aggravated the protest (BBC, 2020).

Youth is indeed a challenge to Nigeria and most developing nation-state. Besides, its implications on economic growth, it further breeds social disharmony and mistrust disconnect paving way for the proliferation of all kinds of criminality that slows economic production and industrialisation (Ojima & Ojudua, 2021). Youth empowerment is very important and vital aspects of life for building the human capital and human security which is paramount for nation building, sustainable peace and development. Youth empowerment is contiguous to national security since most of the able and energetic populations are constituted by the youths most especially in African states. They youths are mostly regarded as the cornerstone to national development. Most countries across the globe are empowering their youth by developing them, since they are regarded as the leaders of tomorrow.

## **Conclusion**

In general, it can be said that youth are the engine of national development. The destiny of the youth lies in their hands. Youth organisations have a role to play in ensuring that Nigeria implements some key

concerns of development as contained in the AYC. The road to achieving success in this regard is the development of a common solidarity with full commitment, patriotism and selfless service through mobilisation and sensitisation. The youth should pursue career development through education, training and re-training in order to empower them to fight for their rights and freedoms which are in most cases only pronounced by the state as a policy package, but in reality, not always implemented in principles. In deed, the struggles for the realisation of human rights are a continuous struggle and those rights and freedoms are never given like ‘manners have fallen from the Heaven’ but taken through continuous struggles.

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