

## YOUTHS AS AGENTS OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*The task of national development poses a great challenge to all Nigerians, particularly in this fast-changing world. The usual clarion call towards realizing profound national greatness for Nigeria has been that all hands must be on deck. In spite of this call, however, the adult population as a group has since independence in October 1960 dominated the national development arena to the near exclusion of the input of the Nigerian youths notwithstanding their immense natural dynamism, zeal and population strength, among other endowments. This paper, therefore, examines the role of, and challenges facing the Nigerian youths in the concerted efforts at achieving national development in the country, with special focus on the South-East zone of Nigeria. The methodology adopted by the paper is the narrative textual case study (NTCs). After some meaningful exploration of the role and tasks facing the said youths, the paper proffers a number of recommendations on how best the Nigerian youth could participate effectively in the concerted task of achieving greater national development in the country.*

**Key words:** *Youths, national development, National youth policy, challenges.*

### INTRODUCTION

Youths of a nation serve as the building blocks that link the past with the present. The youths represent the future and the hope of every society. This has been more apt in Nigeria especially if taken in the context of the country's 50 years of nationhood. According to Kempe (1979:74), a renowned authority on developmental science, any country that is serious and desirous of a holistic and absolute process of national development must target the youths because they are the foundation of the past, the pillars of the present, and the very basis and destination of the future. In a nation like Nigeria, where the demography is almost 69 percent youth, a youth agenda as the basis for national development is not only imperative, but sacrosanct. However, as far as efforts at national development are concerned, the Nigeria youths are today at the crossroads.

One of the most fundamental questions vexing the Nigerian youth has to do with the possibility of success of the Nigerian project. This question arises mainly from the fears and despairs the youth face daily as they try to make sense of their existence as Nigerian citizens in a world that has become a global village. This question has to do with the level of confidence that they have in terms of the relative opportunity to realize their potential within the Nigerian political and economic milieu. This question takes on particular pungency when the youth try to make sense of the paradox of penury and hunger in a nation so richly endowed with natural and human resources. It is also brought to the fore when Nigeria is compared with countries like Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore and Indonesia that are not as rich in natural resources and were in the same situation as Nigeria in the 1960s but which have experienced marked industrialization. This is coupled with improved quality of life for the vast majority of their population since the 1990s when Nigeria cannot confidently say it is on the path to industrial growth.

There is a moral dilemma that arises from the failures of the promises of independence. One of which is the responsibility of the youth to a country that holds so much promise but carries very limited hope of their fulfillment for a vast majority of its population. What are those core areas of human endeavour that the youths of the South-East Nigeria are best fitted in the concerted effort at national development in Nigeria? What accounts for the failures of development in Nigeria? Has it got anything to do with the values that are given prominence in the way things are done in the country? If it has to do with negative values, how can we ensure that these are transformed for the future reversal of developmental failures? What are these values? How have they come to dominate the values of our society? What measures can be taken to re-orientate our youths who are victims of the failures of today but are destined to be leaders of tomorrow. These constitute the questions that this paper seeks to answer.

This paper begins by establishing the cardinal conceptual frameworks based on the cardinal variables of the topic under discussion, namely, development or rather national development, youth, and core values. It also examines the place of the values in the development process, especially as they relate to youth in the development arena. It then explores the challenges facing Nigeria. It argues that there is indeed a crisis of values arising from the general breakdown of values in the Nigerian society. It then goes on to map a strategy for dealing with this situation in order that Nigeria achieves positive leadership in the nearest future. At the core of the reorientation of values among the youth is the socialization processes, especially the educational system both formal and non-formal.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Development/National Development**

Development is a contested concept. From its earliest concept to the 1960s as modernization, there have been competing meanings of development. When the modernization paradigm held sway, development was viewed as total transformation of a traditional or pre-modern society into the types of technology and associated social organizations that characterize the 'advanced' economically prosperous and politically stable nations of the western world (Moore,1963:89; Rowstow,1955). This wise, the future of the developing world was already in existence and was seen in the form of the advanced western societies of the United States and Europe. This view was later challenged by several schools of thought not in terms of the goal of development but in terms of whether it was achievable as envisaged by the modernization school. For the modernization school, development was achievable by the application of rational management techniques and planning. The dependency school forcefully maintained that the global economic structures make development unachievable by the periphery. In the last two decades also saw the shift from the view of the state as the central agency of development to a view that perceived the market and the private sector as the engine of development. At the centre of this debate is the generation of prosperity and the spread of this prosperity to a majority of the population of a country, the role of the state in the process, the cost of the social and environmental transformation that it entails, as well as the distribution of the burden among the various strata of society.

Generally, development relates to the human capacity to improve the quality of life by transforming the way production and other human activities are carried out in order to eradicate poverty, unemployment and social inequalities. Seers (1972) defines economic development as the progressive elimination of poverty, unemployment and inequality, while Sen (1999) places emphasis on the concepts of capacities and entitlements (or social rights). In general, development has six components according to Goulet (1992). These are:

- An economic component dealing with the creation of wealth and improved conditions of material life, equitably distributed;
- A social ingredient measured as well-being in health, education, housing and employment;
- A political dimension including such values as human rights, political freedom, enfranchisement, and some form of democracy;
- A cultural dimension in recognition of the fact that cultures confer identity and self-worth on people;
- A full-life paradigm, which refers to meanings, systems, symbols and beliefs concerning the ultimate meaning of life and history; and

- A commitment to ecologically sound and sustainable development so that the present generation does not undermine the position of future generations.

Conceived in this manner, development is a comprehensive process that is underlined by values both in terms of its goals, process and sustenance. Indeed, at the centre of development is human agency with both individual and social dimensions. Broadly speaking, national development, therefore, refers to all the concerted efforts being made by all strata of a given nation including adults and youths to achieve meaningful economic development for the life substance, self-esteem and freedom for the vast majority of the population of that nation (Obasanjo and Mabogunje, 1989: 3; Todaro, 1977 : 12).

### **Youths**

The Nigerian National Youths Policy defines the youth as all young persons of ages 18-35 years.

The youth population, according to the 2006, is almost a hundred million. This means that they constitute more than two thirds of the country's population of 140 million. They are the backbone of the development of the country. Indeed, if Nigeria is to be sustained as a viable entity, there must be a very good plan to tap the energy and resourcefulness of the youth population to fast-track national development. As earlier on pointed out, the youth has a crucial role to play in the efforts at achieving national development anywhere in the world. The place and importance of the youth in the development process is aptly described by the National Youth Policy in this way:

*“Youth are one of the greatest asset that any nation can have. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the future leaders, they are potentially and actually the greatest investment for a country’s development. They serve as a good measure of the extent to which a country can reproduce as well as sustain itself. The extent of their vitality, responsible conduct, and roles in society is positively correlated with the development of their country” (FGN, 2001).*

### **Values**

Values are things or ideas we hold in high esteem or that we regard very highly.

As a concept, values are beliefs or ideals which individuals, groups or societies hold dear and acceptable. It is these ideas, beliefs or understandings of members of the society that guide and are reflected in members’ behaviour. These ideals or beliefs are the basis of standards in public life. They may be derived from tradition, experience, and religion. They inform the morality of society and drive the design of institutions and their enforceability. In the Nigeria of today, personal riches are valued above character and national success. Money is worshipped as the greatest thing in life regardless of how it is acquired. Embezzlement of public funds and other forms of corruption reign supreme. There is palpable need to take the advice of Mahatma Ghandi which he put before his Indian people very seriously, namely,

*"the need to re-orientate the society against 'wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, science without humanity, politics without principle, commerce without morality, and worship without sacrifice.*

Attempt must be made to institute Nigeria's national values which are clearly articulated in the constitution but neglected in everyday life to become real guiding principles in public life. These values include, discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self- reliance and patriotism.

### **Imaging the Nigerian Youths Of Yesterday And Today**

In the past, youths were perceived as heroes of the nationalist movement. As students, they were the militant wing of the anti-colonial struggle. As founders of the Nigeria Youth Movement, the Zikist Movement, the West African Students' Union, (WASU) etc, they popularized the anti-imperialist consciousness theorized by the elder nationalists (Onoge, 2004). They were thrown out of school, often detained and jailed by the colonizers, who regarded them as dangerous nuisance; but they persisted. As workers in the coal mines of Iva Valley, Enugu, some of them were murdered by the colonial police; yet they persisted. They even fought the slightest manifestation of colour bar, thereby arresting the introduction of any racialist schemes. It was a youth, Anthony Enahoro, who first moved the motion for self-government.

On the morning of Independence, Nigerian students from the University of Ibadan and Yaba Polytechnic demonstrated fidelity to the legacy of militant anti-colonialism, by physically disrupting parliamentary sessions in Lagos to block ratification of an Anglo-Nigerian Defense Pact, secretly

imposed by the British government as conditionality for conceding independence. The public read the behaviour as patriotic, and the Judge who tried their leaders reflected this public mood and dismissed the demonstration as an instance of harmless "youthful exuberance" (Onoge, 2004). The famous Political Bureau Report of 1986 also affirmed linkages of youth and national destinies without recourse to philistine, pejorative slander. The Report devoted chapter IX to 'special groups in Nigerian Politics and Society', such as traditional rulers, the military, women, youth and students. From the subsection on youth and students, the report explains thus:

*In the context of Nigeria's historical experience, youth and students have rendered valuable contributions to the struggle for liberation and national development. They can constitute a reservoir of energy and dynamism for any national struggle or campaign if they are correctly guided, mobilized, and fully integrated into the social fabrics of the nation. They may also constitute a threat to national survival and stability if they are allowed to drift, are unemployed, undisciplined and morally bankrupt. No nation aspiring to major national greatness can afford to ignore the youths and allow them to constitute a major social problem. They are a vital source of manpower and do possess leadership potentials, can acquire knowledge, and are full of future promises. Once these innate potentials in them are fully exploited and properly channeled, their contributions to national development can be immense.*

The report classified the youth as persons between 6-30 years and noted that this age bracket constituted about 59% of the nation's population, with those between 15-30 years representing 47% of the productive population of the nation. The report further noted that the students segment of the youth has sustained its "militant wing" heritage of the anti-colonial movement by its current political activism: They are the most committed group in the organization of voluntary social work or community development projects in their various localities. As students, they are always in the forefront in the struggle against injustice, oppression and exploitation. They, therefore, constitute a militant force in any political system. Many of these activities have been recognized and acknowledged in Nigeria. Unfortunately, however, their positive contributions have tended to be drowned by rather frequent and sometimes violent protest actions. These protest actions are promptly suppressed by authorities and, sometimes, by ruthless means (p. 163).

So far, the report upholds that the youth remain one of the greatest assets that any community can possess. Potentially, they are the greatest investments for a society's sustainable development and future. This is why it is universally acknowledged that positive fundamental and meaningful changes across cultural settings are usually engineered, fostered and/or shaped by the generation of youths in the society. Therefore any culture or community, whether macro or micro that allows a good percentage of her youth to be misdirected, risks her future viability and survival.

The imaging of Nigerian youth by state officials and the general public recently is largely negative. Youth is now perceived as a social problem. No week passes without some media report of disparaging comments about youth and their alleged defilement of traditional "core values" such as respect for elders and authority, family honour, good manners, work ethic, self-discipline and the like. In Nigeria, economic problems have provided the needed veneer for expression of violence and conflict, be it political, ethnic or religious (Alabi, 2004: 81). Most significant of such conflict is the crisis in the Niger Delta which at the onset was economic but has become a hydra-headed monster that threatens the political and economic security of the nation.

### **The Nigerian Youth, Underdevelopment and the Epistemic Crisis of Values In Nigeria**

The socio-economic and political environment in Nigeria poses a great challenge to the youth. Economic and social statistics present a somber picture that leaves much to be desired. Almost half a century after independence, the economy continues to be dominated by the primary sector - agriculture, oil and minerals. This is partly because the country has not been able to create an environment for high value-added economic activities. There is low domestic capital formation and declining direct foreign investment, with the exemption of the oil and gas sectors, until recently very heavy indebtedness, high unemployment and the informalisation of the economy where the majority of its people live in poverty. Nigeria performs very poorly in terms of global economic competitiveness. The country lacks basic social and physical infrastructure. As a result, most people in the country have no access to basic services such as potable water, electricity, good sanitation, roads and health care. All this is coupled

with a high illiteracy rate, especially among women. The lack of access to basic medical care occurs against a backdrop of ravaging diseases; a situation which has become exacerbated with the advent of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The country's underdevelopment has been reinforced by authoritarianism, political instability, ethnic and religious conflicts in the last decade. Even almost a decade after the return to democratic rule, palpable mis-governance is marked by exclusion of the people from governance, non-accountability of public officials, lack of transparency in decision-making, electoral fraud and the colonization and personalization of the state and national resources by the political elite. This situation presents particular challenges for the Nigerian youth. The crisis of values and attitudes affecting the youth can be traced to the general breakdown of values within the larger society. To expatiate on this, we draw from the sociological studies on social norms. The fundamental theory is the theory of anomie propounded by Robert Merton. Merton tried to explain why widespread breakdown in norms of society do occur. According to him, the widespread breakdown of society's norms occur when the values of society extol the pursuit of a goal but provides access to legitimate means of attaining that goal to a limited number of persons within that society. Those who are foreclosed from achieving that goal through legitimate means (by their social strata or class, for example) try to relieve their sense of deprivation by adopting ways that conflict with societal norms. Some simply lose interest in societal goals and drift along while others resort to some form of escape in drugs or religious fundamentalism (Merton, 1968).

For the Nigerian youth, this situation is made more complex by the contradiction between the values and goals that the youth are expected to uphold and their interests as individuals, who want to move ahead in both economic and social terms within such a society. The anomie theory enables us to trace the origin of the crisis of values among the youth to the 1970s and 1980s, when the country underwent critical changes in social relations and societal norms. The contradiction enables us to see why the crisis has become protracted and widespread. As it is well known, the Nigerian society is a post-colonial society. The colonial educational system was the basis of social and economic advancement until independence. The major source of absorbing the product from the educational system was the public bureaucracy and the multinational corporations. The educational system was dominated by religious norms with a claim to universal validity. The struggle for independence challenged the social and political foundations of these values and the very goals of the educational system were re-defined in the post-independence era. Worse still, there was a political challenge to the received process of political succession by the prevalence of military rule and the associated morality of power. At this time, there was a marked change in the status of education as the important determinant of social advance. Education was important but it was no longer enough. Secondly, in place of the rigorous and institutionalised processes of educational attainment, it was clear that such rules and processes can be circumvented and that if successfully done, the end justifies the means. Efforts by the various unions, associations and respected educationists like Tai Solarin to draw attention to this dangerous trend were met by coercion. All these became aggravated by the economic recession that gripped the country from the early 1980s and the ways individuals have tried to cope with the resultant economic and social hardships, especially at the individual level.

Coups, military rule and authoritarianism have led to the devaluation of values and disregard for institutionalized processes of advancement in the country. The 1980s and 1990s that marked the deterioration of the value system also witnessed the entrenchment of predatory rule. The manner of military take-over and the use to which political power was put made mockery of many values that the society held in high esteem, values that the educational system was designed to promote. Military authoritarian rule enthroned a culture of might, arrogance of power, human right abuses, and disrespect for the courts of law, indiscipline, aggrandisement and arrogance within society. The lifestyles of the military officers in government and their civilian allies showed to the young that hardwork was a waste of time. It showed to them how faster and easier it is to become wealthy through extra-legal means.

As the public service, especially the educational system, and its values come to clash with the authoritarian regimes, the later rode roughshod over the later. With the government interference in the routine procedures of the public sector, especially through sacks and unilateral appointments, sporadic setting of targets and rules, arrest and detention of union officials, forceful eviction of academics from their living quarters, etc. the system began to experience institutional atrophy. Currently, one of the

baleful symptoms of this crisis is the growing intolerance of others' views and actions by political, religious and social groups within the system (Omoluabi, 1999; Ademiluka, 1999). Another is the increase in violent behaviour among students which Asobie (1999) ascribes to militarism on the campuses. Economic recession in the 1980s and 1990s did not help matters. Salaries of civil servants, teachers and academics were the most hit during the early days of recession. Salaries of teachers, especially primary and secondary school teachers were left unpaid for several months in many states in the early 1980s. When Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was implemented in the late 1980s, the wages of public sector employees were frozen (Olukoshi, 1991, 1993, 1993a). Some civil servants and other workers in the public sector sought employment in the private sector while some left the country. Those who had nowhere to go stayed within the system employing a variety of means to augment their income. As the employment market contracted, new in-takes merely took up public sector paid jobs as stepping stones to better opportunities. Commitment to professional and moral values eroded. Loyalty to the governance structure and norms of the work organisation became weak and so was socialisation processes. As a result, the capacity of institutions to shape behaviour in the workplace weakened. The incapacity of the professional associations to protect the welfare of their members in spite of strikes undermined their power over their members (Klitzgaard, 1989; Bangura, 1994). Society eventually descended into a state of anomie characterised by a crude struggle for economic survival and accumulation. Thus, the contemporary youth is a product of such anomie situation. The implication of the foregoing is that the value crisis amongst the Nigerian youth population is a fundamental one. It touches the very foundation of social values and social relations within the Nigerian society and economy. As such, it can only be resolved by taking it along with other political, economic and social reforms.

#### **Public Policy and the Nigerian Youth**

For a very long time, there was no comprehensive youth policy in Nigeria. The existing policy before 1999 which was formulated several decades ago, failed to reckon with current challenges facing the youth today. In many respect, it fails to meet the hopes and aspirations of Nigeria. In spite of this, many of the youth have made a successful transition from childhood to adulthood. However, they did not achieve this transition without assistance from families, societal institutions, communities and friends. They benefited from the opportunities and events that guided and structured their behaviours and encouraged them towards positive growth and development. The period 1960 to 1980 witnessed a very robust enlargement of opportunities for the Nigerian youth. In those periods when the economy flourished, education was expanded, universities multiplied and blossomed and school enrolment exploded at all levels. However, with the worldwide economic recession in the early 1980s, Nigeria fell into economic difficulties, leading to a cut in social spending in the effort to arrest economic recession and return the country to the path of growth and development by successive governments.

Over the years, significant proportions of Nigerian youths have become demoralised and confused. Thus, we have experienced high levels of youth deviance, manifesting in the form of violence and thuggery, rising levels of financial and economic crimes. Violence, cultism, fraud and other corrupt practices marked school culture in public and private schools. Many of the youths of today are not being equipped to sustain themselves economically and to contribute to the maintenance of family cohesiveness. Neither are they empowered to participate meaningfully in the community and social life.

Nigeria expressed recognition for the need to deal directly and systematically with these challenges when it prepared a National Youth Policy in 2001. This was followed by a National Youth Agenda. The National Youth Policy identified the problems confronting the youth in Nigeria to include:

- (a) Inadequate parental care
- (b) Non-availability of suitable sports and recreational facilities
- (c) Moral decadence in the society
- (d) Lack of appropriate role models
- (e) Religious fanaticism
- (f) Cult activities
- (g) Political manipulation of youth organizations
- (h) Unemployment and underemployment
- (i) Poor education
- (j) Breakdown of family values; and

**(k) Indiscipline**

Apart from these identified problems, the youth in Nigeria grapple with moral and health problems such as examination malpractices, and sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. According to the youth agenda, the government recognises that youth development requires the concerted efforts of government, non-governmental agencies, communities and the family. There are three components of the National Youth Agenda. The first is sustainable livelihood. This involves enterprise development and business support, educational counselling and support, and access to credit and loans.

The second component is the building of bridges for responsible adulthood. It involves mentoring, leadership development and coaching. The third component is the provision of an enabling environment for self-expression. This aims to unleash the spirit of enterprise and innovativeness of the youth. The role of government in this regard is to provide the appropriate policy framework, and support, harnessing the private sector experience and resources and engagement with civil society by government in youth development and promotion activities. A national Youth Development Fund was also established as a micro-credit scheme to support productive aspirations and entrepreneurship among the youth. The fund provides credit and loans to enable disadvantaged young people to start a new enterprise or expand old ones. It was also to enable others to pursue their education with this credit facility. But these are tokens put forward to show government concern. The real issues of mis-governance, underlined by an ethics of predation need to be addressed. Until governance is reformed such that it becomes driven by discipline, hard work, patriotism, national pride and economic competitiveness, the journey to development is yet to commence.

**Recommendations and Conclusion**

All over the world, it is recognized that people are the real wealth of a nation. However, in our knowledge-driven world, the quality of a people is marked by the skills and knowledge that they bear. A well educated citizenry is a mark of a huge human capital. Such a citizenry are not likely to be merely beneficiaries of economic and social progress. They are more likely to be the agents and driving force of economic and social progress. It is the period of youth that coincide more strongly with the period of skill acquisition in a country's life. Thus, if the people are the real wealth of a nation, the size and quality of its youth population determine whether the wealth potential of the country will be realised and sustained. Hence if we want to invest in our future, the best thing to do is to invest in the youth. The essence of these is to create an environment that is free from fear and poverty, and ensures that the future generation is able to fulfill their lives through productive, creative work and through love, affection, solidarity and co-operation.

The Nigerian youth is both the greatest assets of the country as well as its daunting challenge. The youth represent the great potential that Nigeria is while equally presenting the depth of the challenge of breaking through the confines of underdevelopment. Accounting for almost 50% of the population, it brims over with energy and creativity. But a significant proportion of the Nigerian youth is misguided, demoralised and confused. Some of them have become involved in criminal activities. Yet the youth is what enables us to dream of a better tomorrow, to work very hard to build a virile and dynamic system that our generation and the future generation would be proud of. It is important to note that however hard we work if the youth of today, who are the leaders of tomorrow, are not properly equipped and empowered to sustain and improve upon the legacy we are bequeathing to them, our efforts will be in vain. It is for this reason that the youth must be central to any programme of national development. Given the above condition of the Nigerian youth, value reorientation has to be done to inculcate national values of hard work, patriotism among the youth. Efforts must be made to ensure that no Nigerian child of school going age is out of the school system. Then national values must be entrenched at every level of the educational system.

Two concepts are important in redressing the problem of values. These are values education and character education. These two concepts are particularly important because they take us to the values of society as prescriptions and as practices. They also point to the fact that reordering values and character in education can only occur over several years and within a number of environments. Value education is the process of providing opportunities for the continuous development in all students of the knowledge, skills and attitudes related to certain values which lead to behaviour exhibiting those values. Character education is the process by which positive personality traits are developed, encouraged and reinforced through example, study (history and biography of the great and good) and

practice (emulation of what has been observed and learned). Nigeria must take values education very seriously. The government must support organisations that try to promote values education within the system (Schaps, Watson and Lewis, 1996).

There is a need for the reordering of the values of the Nigerian society by its leadership. This will involve making efforts to infuse upbringing of children from the cradle with these positive values at every level of socialization. For this purpose, every stakeholder in the educational system has a role to play. The school, the home and the community, including religious institutions, should be used as venues to practice value/character traits. The family is extremely important to a child's character and values development. The individual comes in contact first with family members and their influence continues to be important in the pre-schools and early school years. As students progress through the formal school system, their education should provide instructional opportunities, explicit and implicit that help them develop their beliefs about what is right and good. Students in all grade levels should have opportunities to practice values and character traits that range from role-playing and decision-making exercises to actual community service. Also, the various voluntary associations in the educational sector: parents/teachers association, professional associations, old students and alumni, unions and other social movement organisations have an important role to play. Non governmental organisations are especially useful in the area of reproductive health.

We cannot achieve development without investing in the moral development of our youth. This must be part of the effort to make them self-sufficient, and able to cultivate positive and responsible family and social relationship, thereby minimising their vulnerability to abusive, violent and criminal or other anti-social behaviours. Since the problems of the youth in Nigeria revolve around poverty, bad governance, insincerity, underdevelopment, among others, ameliorating it would have to entail capacity building for the youth. This will include implementation of community oriented developmental projects and participatory approach in resolving issues and problems among stakeholders in South-East Nigeria.

The Federal Government needs to go beyond putting in place palliative measures and constituting agencies or commissions. The development needs of the region can be met through planned intervention policies, programmes and projects which are true reflections of the desires and needs of the people. Particularly, the restive youth should be empowered to make a decent living from their environment. Our development as a nation does in deed lie in our ability to develop our human capital. Development of human capital represents a sustainable strategy for transforming Nigeria into a viable economy. Without education, Nigeria would not attain global relevance, neither would we be able to create a good society with informed citizens. Government should consider education as a social service which it must provide to all Nigerians.

Dignity of labour with which the Nigerian was known has been replaced by the craze for easy money. At the same time, Nigerians have lost their sense of freedom and the symbol of achievement has become defined by the extent of thievery that an individual exhibits. Despite the seeming gloom, we can take another chance to make right the colossal mistakes of the past. This can only be done through an understanding of the many growth opportunities that stare at us daily. Global economy trends present significant opportunities for Nigeria to grow out of the mono-culture economy that has arrested the development of the nation. To strategically take advantage of these growth opportunities, we must begin to look beyond natural resources as the major drivers of growth. Nigeria's ability to emerge as a global economic force lies in its capacity to take advantage of the growth opportunities in such areas as business enterprises, services, entertainment, leadership, entrepreneurship, management, sports, economics, finance, tourism and brand exports. However, these areas of growth opportunities are driven by *knowledge, ideas and innovation*. Our possession of natural capital must, therefore, be seen as important to the extent that it catalyzes the development of the human capital necessary to take advantage of these opportunities.

In addition to the foregoing, youths in the South-East of Nigeria can explore the following areas in the efforts to contribute their quota to the efforts at national development in the country:

- Engaging in aggressive self-employment drive in place of the present over-reliance on white collar jobs and partisan politics.
- Aggressive participation in sports both as a hobby and a source of employment. Here, both the government and the private sector investors should begin to regard sports as a source of

employment generation for the youths and a lucrative investment destination that needs huge financial investment for growth. Sports, no doubt, has offered employment to many Nigerian youths and has brought much honour and glory to Nigeria as a sovereign nation.

- Taking to modern agriculture as a profession i.e value chain agriculture that in addition to mere crop production emphasizes establishment of other ancillary agro-based micro-industries in a cluster form .
- Establishment of small-scale and micro enterprises (SMEs) as means of employment generation.
- Taking to provision of entertainment such as film-making, music, dancing etc both as hobbies and sources of employment. Here, government and private sector investors should begin to regard the Nigerian Nollywood as an investment haven that deserves huge financial investment and an employment spinner for the Nigerian youths.
- Engaging in critical national vigilance and non-violent acts of civil disobedience to resist or protest against acts of high profile corruption, misrule, irresponsible and insensitive leadership, authoritarianism, election rigging among other forms of injustice against the Nigerian masses.
- To effectively play their role as agents of national development, youths in the South East of Nigeria should always shun such social vices as cultism, kidnapping, prostitution, drug abuse, alcoholism, armed robbery, get-rich-quick mania, cyber crimes among other unwholesome acts.

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