THE ROLE OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the critical role of youth in peace building in Nigeria, emphasizing the contrast between their potential contributions and prevailing realities. It discusses historical contexts of youth engagement in nation-building, the impact of socio-political dynamics on youth participation in peace initiatives, and the challenges faced due to marginalization and political violence. Around the globe, especially in Nigeria, boundary and territorial disputes, genocide, resourcesbase conflicts, youth destabilization, religious and political crises among the youths took overall parts of the country thereby causing havoc and unresting nightmare, poverty, crime anddemonstration that result violently to all citizens of Nigeria which calls for the title of this book "The Role Of Youth in Promoting Peace and Diplomacy in Nigeria" Despite these challenges, the youth in Nigeria have distinguished themselves as agents of peace and conflict resolution. On this part, this article examines youth as ambassadors of peace and diplomats in Nigeria. The paper adopts a systematic approach within a qualitative framework and relies on secondary data from briefs, newspapers, conference papers, government reports, and peer reviewed journal articles. Therefore, let's parley our experience of the past into our knowledge of our present, for the service of our society and nation at large. Keywords: Role, Youth, Peace and Peaceful Coexistence, Insurgency. he paper concludes by offering strategies for enhancing youth empowerment through policy recommendations, community partnerships, and educational programs. Ultimately, investing in youth empowerment is vital for achieving sustainable peace and development in Nigeria. This paper explores the critical role of youth empowerment in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Nigeria, a nation characterized by diverse ethnic and religious tensions. Given that youth constitute a significant portion of Nigeria's population, their active involvement is essential for fostering a peaceful society. The study concludes by highlighting the evolving landscape of youth-led peace initiatives amid ongoing conflicts and the need for enhanced engagement in democratic processes.

Introduction

Peace and peaceful coexistence is not new to this society, especially the Kanem Borno Empire,which was declared as DARASSALAM (land of peace) by Arab scholars, travelers and merchants' over one thousand years ago. The Empire, lies heavily in North East, Nigeria, but historically, it reign through Chad, Niger Republic to Libya and some parts of Cameroon as seen in figure 1. Ever since Kanem Borno Empire maintained the philosophy of governance based on Islamic perspectives, purposeful, dynamic and time tested. The caliphate succeeded because it had a strong cohesive, honest, result oriented leadership, which perused a policy of integration, unity, peace and harmony, a multi-racial,multi-ethnic rooted in a common environment. This gathering is therefore, unique and important, because it is a North-East students' forum which is also an opportunity for our students' to meet, some for the first-time, in an atmosphere of cordiality, unity, brotherhood and sense of belonging, to share with each other, the spirit of togetherness and experiences of life, for the benefit of peace and peaceful coexistence in our society. Youth constitute the backbone of every society, whether it is medieval or modern, pre-industrial or industrial, developed or underdeveloped, rural or urban, metropolitan or suburb, simple or complex. Whether in the past, present or future, the vast resources of the youth are considered the greatest treasure of societal transformation. Therefore, it is no wonder to note that it was in recognition of the dual role of the youth as perpetrators and crack menders that on December 17, 1999, in its resolution 54/120, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the recommendation made at the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth in Lisbon held frm 8-12 August that 1Z August of every year be declared International Youth Day. The global call was amplified with the adoption of Security Council Resolution in 2015 that, due to the growing recognition of the youth as agents of change, they should be included in the wider security agenda of the global community. Another Security Council Resolution, which considered the youth as key agents in both peacekeeping and peace building, reaffirmed the role of young people in that regard. However, this potential remains largely untapped, with limited platforms for youth participation in peacebuilding Oputa, (2024). As former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan aptly stated, "The future of peace rests on the shoulders of youth" (UN Women, 2015). Understanding and empowering this demographic is essential, not just to mitigate immediate conflicts but to cultivate long-term stability and harmony in Nigeria. By examining youth-led movements, digital platforms, and educational programs, this study sheds light on how young Nigerians are actively engaging in peace and diplomacy initiatives, and how their involvement can lay the foundation for a more stable and unified society.

The main objective of the paper is to reiterate the clarion call for engaging the youth in productive activities that will promote their self-actualization and challenge them as stakeholders in the wider national project of unity, peace and development. This paper explores the critical role of youth empowerment in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Nigeria, a nation characterized by diverse ethnic and religious tensions. Given that youth constitute a significant portion of Nigeria's population, their active involvement is essential for fostering a peaceful society. The paper defines youth empowerment and highlights its key components, including education, economic opportunities, and civic engagement. It examines how empowered youth can address the root causes of conflict, promote peaceful coexistence, and participate in community decision-making processes. The caliphate also served as a terminus and commercial center of the Trans-Sahara trade route, which existed since the sixth (6th) century. The road was

described by scholars and historians as the most peaceful, secured and heavily travelled. This has not only contributed to the patronage, fame, commercial activities, but also to peace and peaceful coexistence among the society Nseobot, & Oputa, (2024). The culture which is maintained, uphold and cherished by the society. As a result, the whole people of the region were rated as the most tolerant, peaceful, united and harmonious society in the country, before the unfortunate outbreak of the Boko Haram insurgency.

Literature Review

This literature review examines the existing research on the role of youth in peacebuilding and diplomacy, particularly in Nigeria, by analyzing key concepts, theoretical frameworks, and case studies that explore the contributions, challenges, and potential of young people in fostering peace and conflict resolution. The "Double-Edged Sword" Theory: Literature frequently cites that Nigeria's large youth population (over 60% under age 30) can drive either instability or development depending on the level of investment in their education and employment.Socio-Economic Efficacy: Studies like those by Sokoga (2025) and Ojewale (2025) argue that while entrepreneurship and vocational training (e.g., N-Power and Renewed Hope GEEP) reduce crime, they are only effective if they provide sustainable income.

Political Inclusion: The "Not Too Young To Run" Act is cited as a pivotal development, showing that lowering barriers to governance reduces the disillusionment that often leads to political thuggery and civil unrest. In Nigeria, literature as of 2026 characterizes youth empowerment as a critical mechanism for shifting young people from being potential "instruments of violence" to becoming "agents of peace". Current research emphasizes that empowerment must go beyond temporary skill acquisition to include political inclusion and sustainable economic opportunities to effectively prevent conflict.

Discussions on youth development programs and conflict resolution strategies are not new because there have been a growing number of scholarly work on the approaches, processes and principles on the constructs. In particular, the problems facing youth development initiatives that empower youth with the knowledge and skills to become successful and productive adults (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996; Community, 2002; Pittman et al., 2002; Teipel, 2002) have made this study much more compelling. However, "positive youth development," which is the focus of this article, is a policy viewpoint that emphasizes providing social support and economic opportunities to the youth to enable them develop "a sense of competence, usefulness and belonging and empowerment" has equally attracted the attention of scholars and analysts (Positive Youth Development and Policy: "What is Youth Development; see htt://cyd.aed.org/whatishtml). Although individual programs can provide youth development activities, „the youth development approach" works better when an entire community, including the youth, is involved in developing the programs (Community, 2002). This approach helps to create a range of services and opportunities that the youth need to become happy and "healthy adults" (Positive Youth Development, 2001). Research by the writers of this paper concur with scholars that have argued that for these components to be effective, youth development programs must include practices that embrace supportive environment and responsive and meaningful challenge and practices, which focus on improving their conditions. That means that the programs must have „built-in opportunities for skill-building, including opportunities to learn physical, intellectual and psychological skills, emotional, social and communication skills, good

habits of the mind as well as preparation for adult employment and opportunities to develop social and cultural capital" (Leffert et al., 1996; NRCCPPYD, 2002). Successful and „positive youth development" will depend, among other things, upon the quality and competencies of the staff implementing and directing the programs. In other words, the individuals and organizations/institutions that work with the youth should seriously be engaged in youth development with evidence that they are providing genuine strategic social supports and economic opportunities to enable them become successful in life. The „supports" and „opportunities" provided should give the youth the chance to experiment with ideas, behaviors and different roles. Above all, "the services must be of good quality in the areas of education, health, employment, and juvenile justice" (Center for Youth Development and Policy, n.d).

Conceptualizing Youth and Peacebuilding Justification for Youth Role in Peacebuilding Process

The concept of 'youth' has been subjected to different interpretation, depending on ountries and a particular age bracket its user adopts. Therefore, the concept can be used in relative and contextual terms because there is no common usage that is universally accepted. Despite difficulties in the exactness of definition of youth, the social group has some commonly identifiable characteristics. On the average, the youth are ambitious, psychologically zealous and exhibit youthful exuberance. But still even more complex in defining youth is the fact that a youthful age is neither so much about someone's physical features or personal appearance nor necessarily a behavioral pattern that is universally identifiable. It is therefore safe to adopt a universally conceived notion of youth which thought out its definition from the age bracket point of departure and the conception of the Nigeria's National Youth Policy (2001). This is more plausible because most scholars, institutions and policy documents adopt the criteria of age bracket as a 'convincing' definition of the youth, particularly in contradistinction with people of old age, while also noting that different definitions around the world use different age brackets. Youth is the way society regards, youth, because it vary across time and space, as well as within societies. Youth has an important gender dimension: Boys and Girls, youth also is define as a process of transition from childhood to adulthood. According to United Nations, (UN) youth is the age between 15 and 24 while the convention on right of the child (CRC) defines a child as everyone under the age of 18. Similarly the African charter on right and welfare of the child (ACRWC) defines a child as every human being under the age of 18 The importance of youth in peacebuilding efforts is widely recognized in global and local contexts. According to the United Nations (UN), youth are often seen as both perpetrators and victims of conflict, but they also hold significant potential to act as agents of peace. UN Security Council's Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security (2015) emphasizes the need for young people to be involved in peace processes at all levels. It highlights how youth can contribute to conflict prevention, mediation, and post-conflict recovery efforts through their innovative approaches, energy, and commitment to change. In the Nigerian context, youth comprise more than 60% of the population, making them crucial stakeholders in any peacebuilding initiative Looking at this definition, one is tempted to ask whether or not the youth have anything to do with peacebuilding because it seems to be a broad based process that can instantly be mistaken as an exclusive preserve of the state and international actors, mainly supranational organizations. This is absolutely not the case. The youth are stakeholders not only for the simple fact that they have their share of the impact of violence, but also because globally today, almost half of the world's population, to be precise

48%, is under the ages of 24. Out of these, over one billion are defined as youth, within the age bracket of 15-24 (UNOYPeace-builders, 2015). More importantly, but disturbingly though, while on the one hand, the youth in Africa, as in Nigeria, do not create conditions of violence, nevertheless, they stand out as executers of most violence. Accordingly, 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).

Literally, one can understand the concept of peacebuilding by first defining the concept of 'peace'. The latter is a state of being in which order, tranquility, freedom and dignity of man are restored, mankind is unmolested by any real or imaginary violence, and is physically and innately expressing happiness, psychologically controlling his environment and emotionally as well as physiologically, not depressed by any external stimuli. Therefore, peace is an opposite of war, violence, poverty, threat, confrontation, instability and indeed any other related phenomenon that could cause displeasure and unstable mind. It involves, as Mohammed aptly notes, " a sustainable process of calmness (without friction), stability without bickering) and tranquility without (heart wobbling)" (2017:10). In the light of this definition, one defines peace building as a condition of restoring peace after its "opposites", as exemplified above, happened. Thus, according to John Galtung (cited in Alliance for Peace building, 2013) "peace building is a process that facilitates the restoration of durable peace and tries to prevent the reoccurrence of violence". The major flank of peacebuilding, as Galtung further opines, is that it tries to address the root causes and effects of conflict "through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation".

Challenges Facing Youth Participation in Peace and Diplomacy

Despite the recognition of their potential, Nigerian youth face multiple barriers in actively contributing to peace and diplomacy. Adebayo (2018) notes that youth in Nigeria often face socio-political marginalization, as they are excluded from key decision-making processes at local, regional, and national levels. This is compounded by high unemployment rates, poor access to education, and limited opportunities for skills development, which create frustration and disenfranchisement among the youth population. Cultural factors further exacerbate these barriers. Uzochukwu (2020) highlights the cultural expectation in many African societies that decision-making is the purview of elders. This perspective often undermines trust in younger generations, restricting their involvement in formal peace initiatives. Additionally, economic constraints, corruption, and lack of institutional support continue to stifle youth-led peace efforts, as noted by Ukeje (2019). More recent reports, such as Oluwole's (2024) study, underscore that despite improved access to technology, limited funding for youth peace initiatives still poses a challenge to the sustainability of their projects.

Insurgency in general terms, especially in the North East sub-region has changed the politicosocio-economic and Educational landscape of the region, which gave the term peace and peaceful coexistence a new prominence, due to the existence of mutual fear, distrust, violation of rule of law, religious crises, tribal sentiments, political conflict, marginalization, high population growth rates, poverty, bad government policies etc. manifested themselves in violence and conflicts of various magnitude in the society Borno/Yobe, Adamawa, Bauchi etc. the North East in particular and the nation at large.

Post insurgency is described as a society which was affected by aftermath of conflict or war situation, such society bedeviled by distraction, in the spheres of human endeavor left with devastated economy, shattered political and educational system, disunited and fragmented society. The North East insurgency has unleashed great fear and suffering upon individuals, displaced great number of people causing an enormous economic Barden upon the society and total destruction of educational system where students were been killed and schools were destroyed. Generally, most of the communities directly affected by the insurgency suffered serious humanitarian crisis ranging from mutual fear, violations of rules of law, tribal sentiments, distrust, violence and conflicts of various magnitudes, destructions of lives and properties.

The Role of Youth in Peace Building

Youth restiveness could be seen as their refusal to be controlled due to an unsatisfied stance to the unfavorable condition of the state. Especially negligence in planning for youth empowerment or unemployment when they have the basic qualification, ability and capability, unequal treatment, lack of basic education, etc. may lead to an upsurge in violence and conflicts like the cases of Boko Haram insurgency which led to killings of several people and destruction of properties. Generally it has been accepted all over the world that the position of youth has been acknowledged as the agents of change. That's why there is always a wisdom in making young growing youth to participate in development efforts in all facets of life including education, peace, security and our common future in our dear nation and globalized world. Peace building therefore focus on fostering sustainable development, the eradication of poverty and inequalities transparent and accountable governance, the promotion of democracy, respect for human rights and rule of law and the promotion of a culture of peace. UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's report 1992, on "An Agenda for Peace", defines peace building as "action to identify and support structures which tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict". That is why (UNESCO, 2013) indicated that peace can be maintained and sustained through the inspiring culture of social interaction, values, attitude, behaviors, based on the principles of freedom, justice, democracy etc. all human rights, tolerance and solidarity that reject violence and endeavor to prevent conflicts by tackling the root causes to solve problems. The role of youth in peace building a never ending one, however, the following are seen as core roles.

Peace building is a complex task, all stakeholders ranging from the Ulama and religious leaders who were not only naturally involve in preaching peace or settlement of conflicts in the society, but spiritually pray for peace to reign. The traditional rulers, their institutions are known for keeping The role of youth in peace building, youth is the driving force for any national development for the youth to be used as tool for the nations development, they must be planned for by their parents on one hand the society and government on the other hand. Parents are expected to give their children adequate training, while government is expected to provide on enabling environment for the youth to earn their living. This is because; youth could be the most volatile when their energies are misdirected or misapplied. Youth as leaders of tomorrow, the United Nations General Assembly of 17th December, 1999 endorsed the recommendation made by the world conference of ministers responsible for youth, declared youth as the agents of change. This is because the role of the youth is critical to the attainment of peace and peaceful societies, promotion of peaceful and sustainable development for building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The role of youth in peace building is very important as

rightly observed by UN secretary general Ban Ki-Moon in 2015 "youth are untapped resources, waiting for empowerment to offer their contributions towards nations". All nations and international community have now realized, that, there is connection among youth, peace and security, there by inclusion of youth in to institutions and mechanism for conflict prevention, resolutions as well as for building sustainable peace.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis: The quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize key trends and patterns. Frequency distributions, percentages, and cross-tabulations will be used to explore the demographic and geographic variations in youth participation in peace and diplomacy. Inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests, will be conducted to examine the relationships between variables (e.g., education level, region, and youth involvement in peace initiatives).

Qualitative Data Analysis: The qualitative data from interviews and focus groups will be transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher will identify recurring themes and patterns related to the barriers, challenges, and successes of youth participation in peace and diplomacy. Key themes will include youth empowerment, institutional barriers, and the effectiveness of youth-led peace efforts. NVivo software may be used to help organize and code qualitative data.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical approval will be sought from the appropriate institutional review board before the commencement of the study. Participants in this study will receive full information about its purpose and will provide informed consent prior to participation, with the right to withdraw at any time. Their privacy will be safeguarded, with personal information kept confidential and anonymity maintained through the use of codes or pseudonyms. In line with the principle of non-maleficence, the study will prioritize participants' well-being, ensuring that discussions, particularly on sensitive topics of conflict and violence, are conducted respectfully to prevent any emotional or psychological harm.

Limitations of the Study : This study will focus on youth within Nigeria, so findings may not apply to Nigerian youth in the diaspora who might engage differently in peace and diplomacy. Response bias could arise, as some participants may give socially acceptable answers on sensitive issues; however, anonymity and clear instructions will help mitigate this. Additionally, time constraints may limit data collection from all regions, particularly in conflict-prone areas with restricted access. Through a mixed-methods approach of surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions, the study aims to offer an in-depth view of Nigerian youth's involvement in peacebuilding, showcasing both their challenges and their potential to foster sustainable peace in Nigeria.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on exploring the role of youth in promoting peace and diplomacy in Nigeria,specifically examining their involvement in peacebuilding initiatives, conflict resolution, and diplomatic processes. The scope of the study includes.

Geographical Scope:

The study will primarily focus on Nigeria, with attention to youth participation in peace anddiplomacy across various regions of the country, including areas affected by ethnic, religious, and political conflicts. It will consider both urban and rural contexts to capture a broad range of youth experiences and challenges.

Demographic Scope:

The research will concentrate on Nigerian youth, typically defined as individuals between the ages of 15 and 35, in line with Nigeria's National Youth Policy. The study will consider diverse groups of young people, including those from different ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the youth's role in peace and diplomacy.

Conclusion

In conclusion youth must be seriously and effectively engaged, encouraged supported and allowed to be involved, participate in peace policy decision making of government at all levels and actively involved in peace education, culture of peace building maintenance, sustenance for national peace, cohesion and integration. The conclusion will integrate the anticipated data outcomes, providing insights without drawing final conclusions at this preliminary stage. Expected results suggest that youth-led peace initiatives, especially in conflict areas like the Niger Delta and Middle Belt, are likely to have a positive impact on conflict resolution, highlighting the benefits of empowering young people in peacebuilding efforts. Deliberate measures in confidence building for young individuals and youth organizations, local economic development, and promotion of youth entrepreneurship, establishment of youth volunteer center, with broad base programmes, ranging from peace radio programmes, focusing on peace building efforts, human right and social affairs, empowerment of internally displaced young women, through informal training, women right leadership and entrepreneurship. Anticipated findings also include evidence of significant sociopolitical, economic, and cultural barriers that limit youth participation, shedding light on the challenges of youth marginalization, economic constraints, and cultural resistance. The study expects to uncover effective strategies for youth empowerment, such as leadership development and conflict resolution programs, which could lead to policy recommendations for formal youth engagement platforms like advisory councils and peace ambassadorships. Additionally, anticipated data may link increased youth involvement in peace processes to long-term national stability, supporting the view that youth engagement is crucial for sustainable peace and development in Nigeria.

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