

National Youth Service Corps Programme and the Quest for National Integration: Issues for Policy Consideration

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Abstract

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi religious nation and sadly all these diversities have impacted adversely on her socio-political existence. The events of 1966–1970 call to question the unity and continued existence of Nigeria as an ethnically segmented nation. The Federal Military Government led by General Yakubu Gowon (rtd.) established the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme as a means of achieving national integration in the face of mutual suspicion and hostility. Adopting the descriptive analytical method, this paper identifies insecurity, general discontent among parents, inadequate facilities, poor funding, and rejection of corps members among others as challenges confronting the programme. The paper therefore recommends improved funding of the programme, greater and sincere fight against insecurity, ethical re-orientation and religious tolerance as panacea to the challenges being faced by NYSC.

Introduction

Development is central to government planning and activities. However development cannot thrive especially in heterogeneous nations if there is no peace or national integration. In Nigeria, the need for unity and curbing of all centrifugal forces immediately after the civil war led to the introduction of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) through Decree No. 24 of 22nd May, 1973. Therefore, the NYSC scheme was established as an instrument for national reconstruction, reconciliation and rebuilding, after the 30th month Nigerian civil war (Adedayo, 2010). The unfortunate antecedents in the nation's history necessitated the establishment of the NYSC which made it crystal clear that the scheme was established "with a view to the proper encouragement and development of common ties among the youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity" (NYSC, 2017). The heterogeneous character of Nigeria and the events preceding the introduction of NYSC have elicited an avalanche of arguments for and against the continued existence of the scheme (Asuka & Igwesi, 2012). With a plethora of ethnic, religious and political crises that currently pervade the nation, reservations have been

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expressed on the effectiveness of the NYSC in facilitating the much needed integration as envisaged in the establishing Decree and the Act.

The NYSC has remained on the headlines of national dailies in Nigeria. The Northern part of Nigeria has gradually slipped into structural anarchy on account of Boko Haram and related terrorist upheavals; while in the South militancy and kidnapping hold sway (Amuta, 2012). The question has arisen as to whether the NYSC can operate in these zones of undeclared and unsolicited wars.

Instructively, most Nigerians are hesitant and indeed opposed to having young graduates deployed to these increasingly dangerous places for the NYSC scheme for differing reasons. However, of huge importance to analysts is that Youth Corps members have become guinea pigs while the NYSC scheme has regrettably become a veritable barometer for measuring the degree of security in different parts of the country. If corps members successfully complete their service year in their states of primary assignment, then the nation is at peace.

Nearly 40 years after its establishment, protests occasioned by security challenges are threatening the existence of the NYSC scheme. Protests by corps members posted to such states that their lives would be in danger due to the Boko Haram insurgency have resulted in fears that the NYSC scheme might have outlived its relevance (Banji, 2012). Indeed, the relevance of this all important programme was called to question with the pronouncement by the House of Representatives on Tuesday, July 3, 2012, barring the NYSC secretariat from posting corps members to volatile states in the northern parts of the country. Therefore, this paper seeks to examine the impact of NYSC programme in Nigeria, the challenges being faced by the programme and implications for national integration. It will adopt the descriptive and content analytical framework. In other words, this study is aimed at examining the extent to which NYSC programme has helped in fostering national integration. It also seeks to ascertain the impediments to NYSC serving as veritable instrument of national integration and proffer legal, institutional and policy interventions towards strengthening the programme to achieve the major objectives of the scheme. In meeting these objectives, the following research questions have been raised: To what extent has the NYSC programme helped in fostering national integration? Are there any impediments to NYSC serving as veritable instrument of national integration? What legal, institutional and policy interventions can be introduced to strengthen the programme to achieve its major objectives?

Conceptualizing National Integration in the Context of Functionalism Perspective

Nigeria is bedeviled by a myriad of problems which, despite its oil riches, inhibit its development and even threaten its continued existence as a sovereign state. The country is a conglomeration of diverse nationalities, ethnic and

linguistic entities “under a single territorial and institutional framework” (Ekanola, 2006). According to Shona (2010), national integration is the consciousness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. This means that though people belong to different castes, religions and regions and speak different languages they take cognizance of the fact that they are one. The significance of this consciousness in building a strong and prosperous nation cannot be overemphasized (Ekanola, 2006).

National integration and unity in a country is different from the kind of oneness that comes from racial and cultural similarity. However, it depicts unity in diversity. National integration mechanisms in Nigeria include, among others, Federal unity schools, the federal character principle, relocation of the federal capital territory to Abuja considered to be the center of the country, revenue sharing formula/fiscal federalism and the NYSC programme.

The Federal Character Principle initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria as a policy framework to achieve fair and effective representation of the different federating units of the country in positions of power, status and influence (Onifade, 2013; Ugoh & Ukpere, 2012). The principle was given the legal back up as it was enshrined in 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with the goal to accommodate the diverse ethno-religious and geographical shades in the decision-making, socio-political and economic apparatuses of the state (Onifade, 2013). The rationale behind the policy was to foster peace, unity, equity in the distribution of the common wealth of the nation and ensure even development by adequately integrating less advantaged states in the affairs of the country. However, the application of this policy has been called to question by the activities of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and other public institutions on issues of recruitment, promotion etc (Ayoade, 1998). Some Nigerians are of the view that this policy engenders mutual mistrust and tend to breed instability as people continuously cry of marginalization. It also brings about ‘square pegs in round holes’ as it does not encourage merit (Adeosun, 2011).

An important historical programme through which this unity has been pursued is the National Youth Service Programme (NYSC). Nigeria is a very vast country both in population and landmass, and indeed the most populous black nation in the world, with an exceptionally large land mass. The religious, social and cultural diversities that define the Nigerian nation have constituted a huge challenge to the country’s search for unity. General Yakubu Gowon during the formal inauguration of NYSC on June 4, 1973 stated that;

If Nigeria is to make rapid progress on all fronts internally, and if she is to make her marks on the continent of Africa, and indeed, in the comity of nations, her youths must be fully mobilized and be prepared to offer willingly and without asking for rewards in return,

their best in the service of their nation at all times
(<http://nysclagos.com.ng/about2.php>).

The argument that no meaningful development can be achieved in a state of rancour and acrimony is the rationale behind the National Youth Service programme. By 2013, an estimated total of 2,000 Nigerian young graduates drawn from across the states of the federation were deployed to the FCT. This suggests that virtually all the tribes in the country are properly represented in the FCT. These young men and women lived among the FCT indigenes learning their way of life, eating their local food, adopting their dress code, inter-marrying with them etc. Marriage between corps members and indigenes fashions out great bond/cord of relationship that spans ages, thereby limiting chances of hostility among Nigerians.

The elimination of every form of racial, ethnic or religious impediments and barriers to the free and unbridled interaction among Nigerians has remained a huge task in this country. Often people have very strong feelings for their own religion and language and oppose those of others. Such primordial feelings culminate in strife/clash between different sects, religions, tribes etc. This state of affairs affects adversely national unity and hinders even development. The colonial rulers had fanned the ambers of division because a gap between Christians and Muslims (North and South) made it easier for them to control the diverse groups in Nigeria. Regrettably however, in spite of the passage of time these feelings have persisted. More than five decades after independence, mistrust still exist and riots easily break out today in many parts of the country. This is a consequence of narrow-mindedness, prejudices and lack of knowledge of other religions. Attaching much importance to religious considerations rather than unity and continued existence of Nigeria portends great danger for its national unity and development. Therefore, tolerance, mutual love and understanding for other religions and tribes is important in order to destroy all the centrifugal forces. Interestingly, this is one of the cardinal objectives of the National Youth Service Corps.

Integration entails a process of structural connection between two or more parts of a system or systems (Onwuka, 1982). The significance of integration in a society is better understood from the functionalist perspective where the society is seen as comprising sub-systems that are interdependent. In his argument, Anele (1999) posits that functionalism:

...sees human society as a social system comprising sub-units or interdependent parts. These sub-units are interdependent on each other and are functionally interrelated. What this means is that every phenomenon found in the society performs useful functions towards the survival of the entire system or society. It equally means that the sub-units of the society otherwise referred to as social institutions – the family, religion, polity, economy, education, technology are integrated and

interdependent and all perform useful functions towards the survival and stability of the society (Anele, 1999).

From the above it can be that in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria, every section of part needs the other parts for survival. Therefore, the different ethnic nationalities are interrelated and interdependent sub-units that must function in unity for the good of all (Ibaba, 2009). Integration can be social, cultural, economic or political in nature. At the national level, integration is always political in nature. In other words, it is the political integration that keeps a country united first before other forms of integration. Integration starts from the individual consciousness of mutual respect for national unity. It is achieved when political actors of the various ethnic nationalities in a country jettison or abandon primordial ethnic loyalties, and embrace national identity (Ibaba, 2009; Alapiki, 2000). Therefore, national integration is a process that seeks to erode the manifestation of micro-nationalities in place of a spirit of nationhood (Alapiki, 2000).

It is clear that individuals are the units of integration, and members of a nation are integrated as they share a common identity. Thus, the term national integration is not applicable to a single nation, but involves two or more nations. A state is a political entity that is in many cases made of more than one nationality group. Thus, for example Nigeria constitutes of over 250 ethnic groups (Enegwea & Umoden, 1993; Ibaba, 2009).

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC): A Policy Analysis

The rationale behind NYSC scheme was clearly stated by the establishing decree – to reconstruct, reconcile and rebuild the country from the ruins of the civil war. Faced with the post-civil war challenges, the government of General Yakubu Gowon established the scheme to foster unity among the factionalised ethnic groups in the country. The decree had stated that the “NYSC is being established with a view to the proper encouragement and development of common ties among the youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity” (<http://nysclagos.com.ng/about2.php>).

As a young and developing country, Nigeria was further plagued by a number of challenges of underdevelopment, namely poverty, mass illiteracy, acute shortage of high skilled manpower (coupled with most uneven distribution of the skilled people that are available), dearth of adequate socioeconomic infrastructural facilities, housing, water and sewage facilities, road, healthcare services and effective communication system. Bedeviled with these near intractable developmental problems, which were further complicated by the burden of reconstruction after the protracted civil war, there were yearnings for a positive change. The Nigerian government set for the country fresh national goals and objectives targeted at re-establishing Nigeria as:

- i. A united, strong and self-reliant nation,
- ii. A great and dynamic economy,
- iii. A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens and
- iv. A free and democratic society.

The objectives of the National Youth Service Corps Scheme are clearly spelt out in Decree No. 51 of 16th June 1993 as follows:

- (1) Inculcating discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work, and of patriotic and loyal service to Nigeria in any situation they may find themselves.
- (2) Raising the moral tone of the Nigerian youths by creating avenues for them to learn about higher ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement.
- (3) Developing in the Nigerian youths the attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training. This will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest.
- (4) Enabling Nigerian youths develop the spirit of self-reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self-employment.
- (5) Contributing to the accelerated growth of the national economy.
- (6) Developing common ties among the Nigerian youths and promote national unity and integration.
- (7) To remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups.
- (8) To develop a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of Nigeria.
- (9) In order to achieve the objectives in subsection (3) of the establishing decree, the service corps shall:
 - (a) Ensure the equitable distribution of members of the service corps and the effective utilization of their skills in area of national needs.
 - (b) Ensure that youths are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin.
 - (c) Safeguard that such group of youths assigned to work together represents our national spread.
 - (d) Provide that the Nigerian youths are exposed to the cultures and tradition the people in different parts of Nigeria.
 - (e) Encourage Nigerian youths to eschew religious intolerance by accommodating religious differences.
 - (f) Encourage corps members to seek at the end of their one year national service, career employment all over Nigeria, thus promoting the free movement of labour.
 - (g) Ensure that employers are induced partly through their experience with members of the service corps to employ more readily and on a permanent basis, qualified Nigerians, irrespective of their States of origin (Babalola, 2011).

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme established in Nigeria 39 years ago could have been a father if it were a man. The scheme no doubt has recorded many successes but like every other policy has series of challenges. Decades after the decree enabling its establishment was promulgated, a large and diverse segment of the Nigerian population as well as notable people around the world, have commended its establishment and eulogized its operation and achievements, especially its momentous role in promoting national unity, integration and rapid economic development of Nigeria (Daily Media, 2013).

Methodology

Survey Design

Sequel to the fact that NYSC scheme is peculiar to educated Nigerians, questionnaire was used as the instrument of data collection and was administered to Corps members during their “passing-out parade” ceremony in the NYSC orientation camp, in Kubwa Abuja, and in public institutions in Danube Street, Maitama-Abuja.

The questions were designed to determine the socio-demographics of NYSC postings and redeployment, experiences of corps members during and after their service year (rational choice, cultural, institutional) as well as perception of corps members on measures that should be put in place to change their experiences. Questions were also designed to distinguish symbolic integration from substantive integration.

Sampling and Data Collection

Field data collection took place between 16th and 21st October, 2015 across various sites in Abuja using simple random sampling while discretely paying specific attention to diversity of sample composition along year of service, gender and geo-political lines. Three clusters are involved in the study. The first cluster comprises respondents who served in 1980-1989 when the country was in mask in the euphoria of the establishment of the scheme. These are people in the formal sector of the economy (senior civil/public servants) in public institutions within Danube Street, Abuja.

The second cluster comprises those that served in 1990-1999 and enjoyed relative peace and security during their service year. They include professionals like bureaucrats, researchers, lawyers and administrators. The data sites are Danube and River Niger Streets, Maitama (where administrative offices are concentrated). Given their sound education, self-administered open-ended questionnaire was used as instruments of data collection.

The final cluster comprises young graduates who served Nigeria from 2000-2015 in the face of security challenges confronting the country. They also

include lawyers, professionals, civil servants and corps members who just had their final “passing-out parade” in 2015. Data sites were the NYSC Orientation Camp, Kubwa, Bwari Area Council, FCT Abuja and Danube & River Niger Street, Maitama Abuja. Self-administered open-ended questionnaire was also used as instrument of data collection.

Findings and Discussion

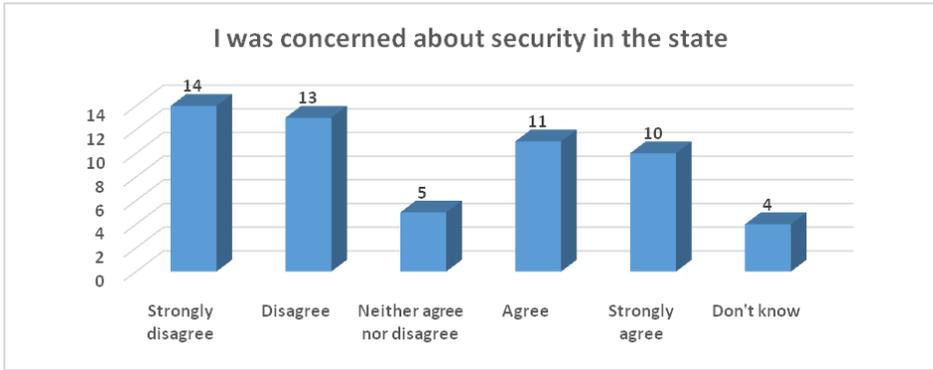
This section deals with the analysis of data collected through the questionnaire and complemented by the secondary data. The findings are also discussed.

Factors Affecting the National Youth Service (NYSC) Programme

The scheme is faced with a handful of challenges and problems emanating from diverse sources. These challenges include:

Insecurity: The continued existence of NYSC scheme has been called to question in recent years due mainly to insecurity and volatility in some parts of the country. With the declaration of April 16 presidential election result in favour of the sitting President Jonathan, violent crisis erupted in Northern Nigeria and rubbed off on Christians and serving corps members. About 11 corps members were killed and several Christians too. Properties worth millions of naira were destroyed in gale of violence that pervaded Northern Nigeria. With 11 persons officially confirmed dead in Bauchi, analysts believe that the actual figure could not have been less than 25 with the same number of casualty or more in other states such as Kaduna, Kano, Adamawa, Nasarawa, Benue, Gombe, Sokoto, Plateau, Niger, Katsina among others (*This Day* Editorial, July 9, 2012). However, the government deliberately kept mute on the actual number of youth corps members killed in the violence across Northern states. The Bauchi State police commissioner said the victims met their untimely death when an unspecified number of female corps members were also raped, and assaulted by irate youths in parts of the state.

Boko Haram insurgency in the North and militancy, kidnappings ravaging the south have posed serious security threat to the programme. Drawing from the experiences of some of the respondents, the fear of insecurity was cited as one of the challenges faced during their service year. This also accounted for a number of corps members who sought redeployments during their service years.

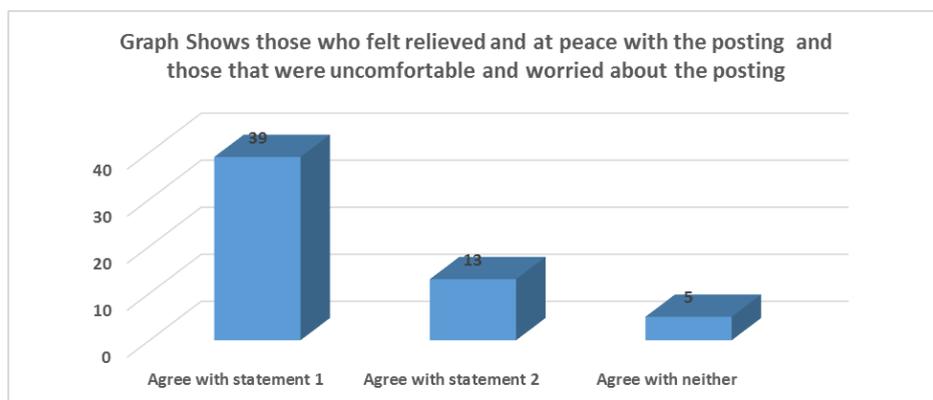


Findings as captured in figure 1 suggest that contrary to the general perception that insecurity constitutes a major impediment to the NYSC programme, 14% percent of respondents strongly disagree compared to 10% who strongly agree with this notion. This difference in opinion is as a result of the inclusion of large population of corps members in Abuja where security threat is relatively minimal. People who served in less secured areas are more likely to cite insecurity as a problem. For example one respondent stated that “Adequate security could have been provided. We were threatened by local boys in Ngongo LGA in Kano 2006”.

General Discontent by Parents and Corps Members: It is noteworthy that the NYSC scheme, established after the civil war to promote national integration, seems to enjoy popular supports from Nigerians for removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance and confirming at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups. However, to argue that the scheme is now seriously challenged is to put the situation rather mildly. The first major blow came during the post-election violence in April 2011 when 11 corps members were killed in Bauchi State. Prior to the election, several other corps members employed as ad hoc staff by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) were also killed in Suleja, Niger State, as well as in Jos, Plateau State (*This Day* Editorial, July 9, 2012). This ugly state of affairs has led to a situation where parents, for the safety of their children do everything to see that they are not posted to volatile or crisis prone areas. This was followed by a media campaign mounted by parents and several stakeholders against posting corps members to states that were prone to serious security threats. Consequently, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Directorate in 2012 redeployed prospective corps members previously posted to “volatile states” in the North. By the directive, corps members, who were earlier posted to Bauchi, Gombe, Plateau, Kano and Kaduna States were directed to report to the NYSC headquarters in Abuja for redeployment. Though this was greeted with mixed

reactions, those posted to Yobe and Borno States carried out their orientation exercise at the NYSC camps in Nasarawa and Benue States respectively.

Sequel to the Boko Haram insurgency and the after-math of the 2011 post-presidential election crisis that claimed the lives of some NYSC corps members, parents are against posting their children to the affected states. However, most of these young graduates usually look forward to getting their call-up to serve in any part of the country. When asked how they felt on receiving their posting, 39 out of the 57 respondents stated that they felt relieved and at peace with the posting while 13 of the respondents said they were uncomfortable and worried about the posting. However, 5 respondents did not attend to this question.



As captured in figure 2, it is indicative that the corps members are still satisfied with the programme despite its inherent institutional weaknesses and associated human risks. For instance, in expressing their feeling about NYSC, some of the respondents admitted that the scheme is unique as the hosting communities usually cooperate and understand the corps members. This made some of them to stay back after their service year to settle down in their host communities. Some of the respondents also noted that they had made up their minds to go anywhere they are posted and are ready to learn and imbibe the culture of the host communities.

Inadequate Facilities/Rejection of Corps Members: The population explosion experienced generally in the country has rubbed off on the NYSC. With the rise in Nigeria's population, the number of graduates per year grew so rapidly that a single state now has up to 2,000 corps members to cater for. Considering the limited resources within the NYSC and lackadaisical attitude of state governments to the scheme, the corps members are inadequately cared for and poorly accommodated. How do we explain a situation where 40 corps members are quartered in a single hostel room with food items that can barely feed 10? The increase in corps population has contributed to the rejection of corps members by employers of labour and increased under-utilization of some

in their places of primary assignment. This situation has been compounded by the worsening economic climate, which has shrunk salaried job vacancies by way of embargo on recruitment of new staff or rationalization of the existing work force. In some establishments, corps members are assigned to tasks far below their training and qualifications, and in extreme cases, owing to lack of trust by their employers, some are well utilized. The consequence is that many corps members become idle and do not acquire the experience which the service year is supposed to afford them. Consequently, the scheme is unable to achieve substantially one of its key objectives of accelerating the socio-economic development of the country.

Cases of rejection of corps members were another factor listed by ex-corps members that impede the successful achievement of the noble objectives of the NYSC programme. Some of them stated that they were rejected because the organisations lack accommodation where they can put the corps members and are also not willing to provide the needs of the corps members. Therefore, the best option to them is to reject the corps members.

Inadequate Man-power: Another major problem facing the NYSC scheme is inadequate manpower and materials to supervise and monitor members of the service corps. The responsibility of monitoring and evaluating corps members' performances is vested in the Corps Inspectorate Department at the National Directorate Headquarters and the state offices. State offices, after posting the corps participants to their places of primary assignments, are to ensure that corps members actually report at their duty posts, to their various tasks and that the tasks are executed to the satisfaction of both their employers and the NYSC authorities. But unfortunately, the rapid growth of the scheme has not been matched with the commensurate staff strength to monitor corps members and evaluate their performances in the field. Most of the state offices are grossly understaffed and the result is that this vital aspect of the operation of the scheme has suffered a serious setback. In addition, there is acute shortage of vehicles for schedule officers to carry out routine inspection of corps participants, many of whom are serving in remote rural areas.

Inadequate Funding: Quite expectedly here has been inadequate funding of the scheme (*Daily Times*, May 9, 2016). The problem of inadequate funding has also impacted very adversely on community development projects (CDs). Some projects conceived by corps members could not secure financiers and in some cases others that were started have had to be abandoned when the money to complete them was not forthcoming. This has led over the years to declining interest by both corps members and sponsors in community development projects, thus making it difficult for the service corps to attain its objective of rapid development of the country particularly the rural areas.

Cross Cultural and Religious Differences: Ethnicity and religion are two issues that have played prominent roles in public governance in Nigeria. Religion dominates the roots of the cultural areas of Nigeria and to a greater extent accounts for the incessant crises that bedeviled the country in both past and present. Little or no distinction existed between the profane and the sacred dimensions of life. Thus, all activities and instruments of governance and survival were clothed in religious ritual, language and symbolism (Kalu, 1989). Enwerem (1995) corroborates this point when he suggests that over and above the factors of environment, political organisation and outlook of traditional Nigeria, the religious factor remains the major source of inspiration in the catalyst for the people's activities and world view. Experts have also argued that the political behaviour of some Nigerians is still influenced heavily by the hyperbolic assumption that one's destiny is intrinsically and exclusively linked with one's ethnic, linguistic and religious identities (Diakwa, 1997). The ethnic and religious composition of Nigeria and its manipulation by the political elite has posed serious challenges to governance and security in Nigeria. This has been aggravated by the failure of the State to perform its core duties of maintaining law and order, justice and providing social services to the people. For instance, the failure of the State has led to the emergence of ethnic militias in several parts of the country such as the Odua Peoples Congress (OPC) and Bakasi Boys (Igbuzor, n.d.).

Despite the cultural and religious differences, corps members in the course of their service have come to appreciate their host communities so much that most of them wished they had married from their host communities.

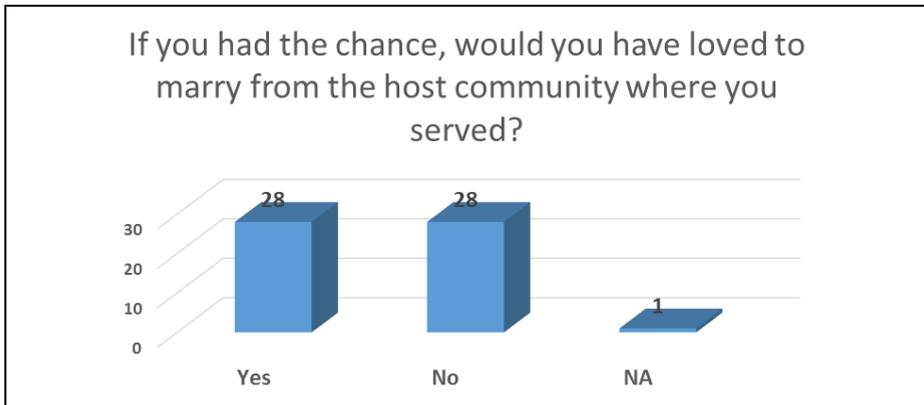


Figure 3 above indicates that 28 out of the 57 respondents would have loved to marry the natives of their host communities if they had the chance while 28 differed as their answer was negative.

Environmental Challenges: While the current fear or risk associated with the NYSC scheme is largely driven by the violence being unleashed by Boko Haram on a section of the country, the authorities of the scheme should be

blamed for certain aspects of the ongoing controversy. It is recalled that the NYSC had last year (2017) come up with a policy not to post corps members to “volatile states” with weighted indicators to categorise states into red, yellow and green zones. The indicators used were incidents of bomb explosions and targeted attacks on corps members, etc. It therefore beggar’s belief that the authorities of the scheme would insist on posting members to already identified volatile areas when the notion of NYSC is contingent on national peace and stability.

While this paper does not support NYSC members being posted to states that are so patently unsafe, Nigerians nonetheless miss the point if we persist in isolating the issues and chipping away at them one by one. The question is: Can one, in all honesty, say majority of Nigerian states are safe enough to the point where all feel comfortable to send their children to serve when at the last count military men were deployed in 28 out of the 36 states of the federation due to security concerns? Where the government cannot guarantee its first and foremost duty of protection of life and property, especially in the case of young and vulnerable NYSC members, what is undermined is the very idea of national integration and cohesion that the scheme is meant to promote. The current problem is therefore more about the failure of the State than the refusal of Corps Members to serve.

That explains why it is believed that forced postings can only make nonsense of national integration, which is the *raison de’tre* of the NYSC programme. Given that the NYSC scheme is one of the few national integration policies that have, to a large extent, achieved its objectives, we should look for a solution that neither compromises its integrity nor exposes corps members and NYSC workers to danger. There is clear consensus that NYSC is an ideal worth preserving. The major concern in making the scheme continue to serve the nation is the security situation that now calls for a total overhaul and minimise the probability of corps members being physically harmed wherever they may be posted to in the country (*This Day Live*, 09 July 2012).

Recommendations for Policy & Legislation

It is our opinion that the NYSC on its own is a faultless programme. But like other Nigerian projects, it has certain structural deficiencies which must be addressed, or reviewed periodically as time demands. Interestingly the deficiencies in the scheme are not strong enough reasons, going by the calls of some Nigerians, that it should be scrapped. Instead, Nigerians should be interested in getting back to the past days of glory when corps members had good time in their service year. Then, they got good treatment from their hosts communities who promptly provided their needs. According to one source “Then, to adorn the NYSC uniform. They were so jealously protected that

some of them decided, after the service year, to settle in their places of assignment and actually picked their better half there” (Sami, 2009). The source continues “They were properly accommodated and in some places, apart from their government approved stipend, they were periodically given foods and transport allowances to make them comfortable (Sami, 2009). They were seen as ‘government children’ and pampered by all. It is on the strength of the foregoing analysis that the following recommendations are made:

Amendment of the NYSC Act CAP N84, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004:

The programme as it is currently is good but needs little amendments to take care of the lapses of the scheme. For instance there should be increment in the allowance of corps members and states should through the employers of these corps members provide adequate and conducive accommodation for corps members. The Nigerian youths in the programme should be assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin. To achieve this, it becomes the responsibility of every Nigerian to ensure that youths work together as representatives of Nigeria as far as possible and that they are exposed to the modes of living of the people in different parts of the country. Because of the recurrent nature of violence in certain parts of Nigeria, there should be a properly coordinated insurance scheme for corps members all through their service year. This will at least assure them of their safety within the period. However, insurance without adequate security is as building with substandard materials in a flood prone area. Therefore, security of lives and property of Nigerians should be guaranteed by the federal government through the relevant security agencies; especially as security is one of the parameters for measuring whether a country is a failed state or not.

Aggressive National Sensitization Programme:

There should be a massive inter-agency national re-orientation to impress upon Nigerians the need for unity and patriotism. This should be carried out by the NYSC, National Orientation Agency, Federal Ministry of Information and Communication and Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development. Nigerian youths should be encouraged to eschew religious/ethnic intolerance by accommodating religious/ethnic differences. They should be encouraged also to discharge their services and to seek at the end of their national service year, career employment anywhere in Nigeria, thus promoting the free movement of labour. Again, employers should be encouraged partly through their experience with members of the NYSC to employ them more readily and on permanent basis, irrespective of their states of origin, once they are qualified and found competent. A situation where employment is based on patronage or other non-rational factors should be discouraged. Since these corps members are eminently qualified for whatever job they were assigned

during their service year, they should be encouraged to stay in their states of service by either retaining or offering them a better job on permanent bases.

Security of Corps Members should be guaranteed:

The event of April 2011 post-presidential election violence was an unfortunate one which should not be allowed to repeat itself. Therefore, it should be the primary responsibility of state governments, security institutions, community/traditional rulers and employers to safeguard the lives and property of these corps members. Though some corps members have lost their lives in the course of serving their father land, there is no justification whatsoever to completely argue that such grave mishap like death occurs because these patriotic Nigerians were in their areas of primary assignments. Many Nigerians have lost their lives to terrorist activities in the north, some during militancy and kidnapping activities, yet we cannot because of all these cease interaction or tell our people resident in these areas to leave (i.e. return home). For emphasis, in Jos mayhem, hundreds of lives and not only three corps members were lost. Lecturers, students, traders, artisans and many other Nigerians who were going about their lawful daily activities were killed in that regrettable Jos incident. Other corps members have died unnoticed in other parts of the country. All these are irreplaceable lives. True, other members of the NYSC have equally lost their lives in various road accidents as a result of the dilapidated roads across the country as they moved from one area of their primary assignments to another. And this is after their parents have spent fortunes to train them. Therefore redeploying corps members because of the crises is not the answer; rather security agencies should be more proactive in the fight against crime and terrorism, while government should offer Nigerians good governance. Above all the welfare of corps members should be stepped up to make these young Nigerian graduates offer their country their best.

Conclusion

The NYSC scheme has weathered several storms and has been able to stand the test of time, yet it is still very much relevant in the scheme of things. Nigeria has been enjoying the good trapping of the scheme. Through the scheme, a lot of unquantifiable achievements have been attained at the fabrics of our society. Walls of prejudices built over time have been demystified by the scheme. There is an appreciable measure of mutual trust among Nigerians of diverse languages and cultures. Today, the NYSC has enhanced and promoted inter-ethnic marriages among the youths of this nation. Nigerians now move freely and reside permanently in states other than their own resulting in labour mobility and greater integration. Some areas of the country that hitherto lacked certain manpower in the past now enjoy such privileges as a result of NYSC

posting. Nigerian youths that have passed through the scheme are now better informed than they were before participating in the National Service. This paper has discussed the challenges faced in achieving the objectives set by the scheme including security challenges, unemployment, and inability to provide quality food and accommodation for corps members and other socio-economic problems such as poor roads. It was recommended that redeploying corps members is not enough to ensure their safety rather proactive measures have to be adopted by security agencies and policy makers to ensure not only adequate security for the youths and Nigerians as a whole but also to ensure social provisioning and access to basic infrastructure of development as a part of broad governance renewal reforms in the country.

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