

THE YOUTHS AND LEADERSHIP IN EMERGING DEMOCRACIES

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ABSTRACT

Every generation of youths tends to have its own leadership challenges and opportunities. These are usually posed by the prevailing political and socio-economic circumstances of the day and the effects on the youths as a social and generational category. In Nigeria, different generations of youths have experienced leadership challenges and opportunities which can be said to have been peculiar to them. How well or otherwise they have tended to grapple with them appears to have been a function of their proper diagnosis of the leadership challenges and opportunities as well as the determination to face them with a unity of purpose and commitment. What are the leadership challenges and opportunities in emerging democracies of today? What implications do they have on the Nigerian youths? What can the Government and the leaders do to help them instead of just labelling them “lazy” as President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria did in London, U.K. at the Commonwealth Heads of States and Governments Meeting on the 18th April, 2018? This paper attempts to address these questions. It concludes that while we expect the youths to do their best, there are two major things that the Government and leaders can do to help them succeed. First, Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), whose tasks are focused on Youths Affairs, must do their work diligently and mobilise the youths to be able to deal appropriately with these leadership challenges and take advantage of the opportunities in contemporary Nigeria. Second, National Youth Leadership Education and Skills Training must be organised for the youths for them to successfully tackle the challenges of their generation. This way, they will be ready to become good leaders of tomorrow.

Key Words: *Youths, Leadership, Nigeria, Emerging Democracies, Mobilization; National Youth Leadership Education; Skills Development; Challenges and Opportunities*

I. INTRODUCTION

Delivering a Keynote address at the Business Forum at the just concluded Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting (CHOGM), which held in London, United Kingdom, from 16th-20th April, 2018; President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria declared, quite undiplomatically, “that a lot of Nigerian youths are very lazy”. As he puts it:

About the economy, we have a very young population, our population is estimated conservatively to be 180 million ... More than 60 per cent of the population is below 30, a lot of them haven't been to school and they are claiming that Nigeria is an oil producing country, therefore, they should sit and do nothing, and get housing, healthcare, education for free (Buhari, 2018).

This statement has already generated a lot of controversy across the world, especially by Nigerians, on the social media. Most have overwhelmingly attacked, condemned and refuted President Buhari's depicting of "a lot of Nigerian Youths as lazy".

The point of interest to us, however, is that these controversies over the tagging of Nigerian youths by their own President Buhari in an international forum abroad as "lazy" has drawn attention, quite compellingly, to the need to investigate the contemporary conditions of youths in emerging democracies, especially Nigeria. We undertake this task here.

Every generation of youths tends to have its own leadership challenges and opportunities. These are usually posed by the prevailing political and socio-economic circumstances of the day and the effects on the youths as a social and generational category (Mou, 2015, 2017). In Nigeria, different generations of youths have experienced leadership challenges and opportunities which can be said to have been peculiar to them. How well or otherwise they have tended to grapple with them appears to have been a function of their proper diagnosis of the leadership challenges and opportunities as well as the determination to face them with a unity of purpose and commitment (Mou, 2015, 2017). What are the leadership challenges and opportunities of today? What implications do they have on the Nigerian youths of today? This paper attempts to answer these questions.

By the youths, in this context, we are referring to young people normally between the ages of 18 and 30, even though the age range varies across cultures. It is known that this group of men and women constitutes a specific generational category in the society with certain specific qualities and attributes that set them out as distinct from the other members of the society (Mou, 2015, 2017). Because of their excessive physical energy, they are usually regarded as the backbone of any society. In short, it is generally common to refer to them as the "leaders of tomorrow", signifying their over-riding importance to the future of the society in which they live. It is partly in the light of this that their reactions to the challenges of leadership and the opportunities are seen as matters of great importance. Leadership, on the other hand, according to John C. Maxwell and Jim Dornan refers to: 'every one or person' who has "influence" on his society, community or group, or profession" (Maxwell and Doman, 1997, p.2).

Maxwell and Doman argue that everyone is an influence of other people. "It doesn't matter who you are or what your occupation is. A politician, such as the President of the United States, has tremendous influence on hundreds of millions of people, not only in his own country but around the globe. An entertainer has influence on an entire generation of people in one or more cultures. A teacher touches the lives of his own students and also indirectly influences all the people those students grow up to influence" (Maxwell and Doman, 1997, p.2). He cautions that everyone, especially youths, should strive to learn how to become good leaders or influencers. As they put it: "No matter what your goals are in life or what you want to accomplish, you can achieve them faster, you can be more effective, and the contribution you make can be longer lasting if you learn how to become a person of influence." (Maxwell and Dornan, 1997 p3).

The importance of leadership to any group or society is long established by a political sociologist Gaetano Mosca. According to him: "Society is divided into the few who have power (leaders) and the many who do not (followers). Only a small number of persons allocate values for a society." (Mosca, 1939 p.50)"

To Mou and Nwabuzor (1991), the role of leaders in Nigeria goes beyond the allocation of values identified by Mosca. It also includes serving as political socialization models to the followers or the "masses". The

leadership tends to influence or even to be imitated by the followers. (Mou and Nwabuzor, 1991). The phrase, "Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities" of Leadership, connotes the prevailing political, economic and social conditions in the society. These could come about as a result of natural endowments or catastrophies, such as earthquakes and floods; or they may be man-made. Socio-economic and political conditions, generally, tend to be man-made. In the Nigerian case, it is the latter that seems prominent in setting the agenda for the youths to make their mark in history (Mou, 2015, 2017), as we shall see below.

Historically, the Nigerian youths have played very significant leadership roles in the different developmental stages of the county when confronted with the prevailing conditions of the day (Mou, 2015). A brief review of the historical roles of the youths, so far, may serve to illustrate this point. It should also serve as a context for a proper analysis and discussion of what is expected of the youths of today in the Nigerian society as far as the leadership challenges and opportunities are concerned.

II. NIGERIAN YOUTHS AND LEADERSHIP IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the traditional Nigerian societies, youths were recognised and given specific social and political leadership roles. It is on record that the men and women in the youth age-grades were usually organised as a recognised group and given specific leadership duties by the society in which they lived (Mou, 2015). For example, because of their excessive energies, the expectation on them from society was that they carry out the most physically demanding jobs. These included, especially for the men, the tasks of defending the society from external aggressors. The men and women who belonged to the energetic youth-grade, were also given the task of weeding, wood clearing, livestock grazing etc. It is clear that in traditional societies, youths constituted the backbone, since they were the basic labour force in society. As MAMSER'S Political Education Manual points out:

Although seniority by age was very important and elders were specially respected, the views and interests of the youths usually influenced the decisions taken by the elders in matters affecting the community. In direct democratic meetings of the community, the youths were themselves present to participate in the discussions and final decisions (1989, P.40).

This recognition to youth's leadership abilities was also accompanied by moral responsibility of elders to the youths and their problems. In fact, in most of Nigerian traditional societies, the death of any one belonging to the youth age-grades was considered a taboo. Where it did occur, it was regarded as more painful than the death of an elder person or an infant. British colonialism in Nigeria, however, altered this whole respect for youths, even though it continued to exploit their energies to the maximum. Thus, youth labour was mobilised to serve the British political, economic and social interests. In the First and Second World Wars, for instance, many Nigerian youths fought and lost their lives (Mou and Vivikananda, 1993). Such British colonial antagonism toward the youths also promoted the necessary antagonistic reaction from the youths toward the colonial apparatus. For example, in 1944/45, students of Kings College, Lagos violently resisted the colonial government's attempt to convert their dormitories into barracks for soldiers. Youths were also in the forefront in the formation of early political parties in Nigeria that engaged in the Nigerian struggle for independence. The Nigerian Youth Wing was indeed a factor to be reckoned with and contributed in no small way to the attainment of independence (Mou, 2015).

These patriotic leadership roles taken by the youths also continued in the immediate years after independence. For instance, they violently resisted the formation of the Anglo-Nigerian defence pact. Nigerian youths also constituted the bulk of soldiers, which fought for the unity of Nigeria during the Civil War (Mou, 2017). In fact, they continued to put their best in the nation-building efforts of Nigeria through the National Youth Service Corps scheme.

However, some of our elders who constituted the bulk in the hierarchies of political parties in the precious Republics started to misdirect the youths to engage in unpatriotic acts. It is now known that the previous Republics' politicians mobilised and misused the youths to engage in all forms of electoral and census malpractices. These included acts such as thuggery, stealing, burning of opponent's houses, religious violence, militancy (Boko Haram and Herdsmen/Farmer's clashes), destruction of ballot boxes and papers and so on. As it was to be expected, these actions gave birth to the culture of negative violence from our youths (Mou, 1989).

Consequently, our youths in educational institutions, particularly Universities, started to think, wrongly, that the only way to get recognition and attention from government and the society was to engage in violent demonstrations. Hence, Nigeria started witnessing students' unrests, resulting in extensive campus violence and vandalism, almost on a daily basis, throughout the 70s and 80s (Mou, 1989). This has tended to create the misleading impression that our campuses have become grounds for breeding those who see no other way of putting across their grievances than through violence. This has, in fact, degenerated recently into some of our youths even forming secret societies on the campuses with their attendant negative consequences (Mou, 1989). All these have served to make campus life increasingly insecure and the objectives for which these institutions were set up largely compromised. In the end, everybody is losing: the students that is the youths, their parents, the campus communities and the society at large (Mou, 1989).

The Federal Government has once again instituted programmes that can, more appropriately be described as "bringing back the golden age of the youths in Nigeria". These programmes have, nevertheless, come at a time when our youths are confronted with the various political, economic, social and other leadership challenges of contemporary Nigeria. These Challenges have caused different problems and opportunities for the Nigerian youths. It is to the discussion of these leadership challenges and opportunities, caused by the current situation in the country, that we now turn. We shall also consider how the Nigeria youths can grapple with leadership challenges and opportunities for a better and more promising tomorrow, under a new political and socioeconomic order that is democratic and promises a better deal for Nigeria.

III. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTHS IN EMERGING DEMOCRACIES

Given the enormosity of these leadership challenges and opportunities facing the Nigerian youths, we shall examine them under several broad categories. Such an examination will, of course, certainly not cover all the leadership challenges and opportunities that our youths now have to confront. They are, however, chosen in such a manner as to make them representative samples of the rest.

(i) The Youths and Political Leadership Challenges and Opportunities

One of the main problems that have confronted Nigeria as an independent nation is the development of a viable and stable political system. The quest for the establishment of democracy as a system of government has arisen, not only in Nigeria, but the World over, as one of the major agenda of the generation. It is an indisputable fact that democracy has become the most universally accepted form of government today. All over the World, people have fought for democracy and are still fighting for its establishment since it has come to be accepted as the best system of governance (Mou, 2017; Ake, 1996; Young, 2012). Instances abound of struggles and fights for democracy in Pakistan, Poland, Benin Republic, Liberia, Nigeria, Nicaragua, China, Cuba, Soviet Union, Bulgaria etc. The transformations in these societies, however, have not been all smooth-going. The match from dictatorship to democracy in Nicaragua, for example, was not a rosy one. It was smeared with blood, sweat and unspeakable economic hardships. The same match in El Salvador seemed to be bloodier and so is the one in the Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda and Cameroon. And yet, in all these political traumas, democracy is a goal all political systems, including Nigeria, hope to attain (Ake, 1990; Diamond, 1990 and Liphart, 1977; Mou, 2017).

It is only under a democratic arrangement that Nigeria can hope to develop and prosper and the youths of Nigeria too will have their aspirations and ambitions fully realised and their energies, skills and knowledge fully harnessed and utilised. However, in the post-military rule in Nigeria, these creative attributes and qualities of our youths have not been properly utilised. Instead, they were diverted to negative political attitudes and actions, which have had disastrous consequences for our democracy.

It is true that the average Nigeria claims to be politically advanced. However, the performance of the politicians in the post-military rule era leaves much to be desired. These periods witnessed a lot of undemocratic practices in form of electoral malpractices, political intolerance, economic mismanagement, political thuggery, lack of intra-party democracy, manipulation of religion, especially “Sharia”, and ethnicity, for selfish political ambitions. This has given rise to an insurgency group known as Boko Haram. It has also fuelled Herdsmen/Farmers’ clashes. These practices, together with the little regard given to constitutional provisions, have combined to set democracy on a very shaky foundation. (Usman, 1987; Young, 2012; Joseph. 1991 and Nnoli, 1980; El-Rufai, 2013 and Mou, 2017).

During Babangida administration, he argued that the problems of a stable democracy in Nigeria lay not so much on the lack of relevant constitutions as on lack of democratic attitudes. It is the old brigade politicians, he argued, who refused to play the game of politics according to the rules; and it is they who saw politics as a do-or-die affair. It was because of this reason that the Babangida administration initiated decrees banning and disqualifying those politicians who were deemed responsible for denying Nigerians democracy. He then ushered in a crop of “new-breed politicians” so as to enhance the chances of the survival of democracy in the country. According to the then President Babangida, the youths:

...are now part of a new class of politicians completely divorced from the old political class and imbued with patriotism and an iron determination to make Nigeria not only great, but a shining example of democracy in Africa and beyond. You (the youths), as part of this new political class, have a heavy but noble responsibility which enjoins you to observe diligently the provisions of both the Nigerian Constitutions and other relevant Decrees and pronouncements on the transition programmes... (Babangida, 1990, p.9)

The new political order, he argued, required that the new breed politicians ensure the active participation of men and women who live in the rural areas, as this was thought to be the imperative of grassroots democracy. Their active participation in the political process, Babangida believed, would ensure that they were not just spectators vulnerable to religious bigots or ethnic and communal champions. This approach, though undemocratic, led many youths to be elected into leadership positions. But one will concede that their performance is no different (Mou, 2014). Leadership demands and responsibilities, which democracy has placed on the youths, are enormous. However, the general principle of democracy, moderated by the specificity or uniqueness of our national historical context, should be our guide. As then President Ibrahim Babangida once pointed out, “Government has great hope and confidence in a more united, strong and economically virile Nigeria for tomorrow.” (Babangida, 1990, p.6).

For a long time, the youths have had the notion that to participate actively in politics, one has to be “rich”. This erroneous attitude stems from the unfortunate consequence of “money politics”, which characterised the First, Second, Third, and even Fourth Republics. However, the present civil rule or democracy discourages the emphasis on money (moneybags) and therefore the role of money in politics. Nonetheless, this is yet to be obeyed. “Money bags” still continue to dominate in Nigerian politics.

The Youths, on their part, must not sell their votes, as this will be tantamount to selling their conscience and their rights, to elect only competent men and women into offices based on merit. As then Hon. Minister of Information, Professor Jerry Gana warned Youths:

don't demand money for your votes. If you do, you are contributing immensely to the serious problem of corruption in the society. Be men and women of honour and insist on merit. The youths have the strength to contribute actively in the political process. They must not be dormant followers and allow themselves to be manipulated by some selfish individuals and groups to perpetrate electoral and census malpractices. As undemocratic acts have the tendency to threaten the success of democracy now and in future. (Gana, 1989)

(ii) The Youths and Economic Challenges and Opportunities

The economic problems that have confronted Nigeria, particularly since 1979, have tended to increase the pressures on Nigerians, especially the Youths, quite tremendously. The pressures, indeed, became more severe with the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 to date. This is because SAP, while promising long term benefits, had in the short-term caused severe economic problems for every Nigerian, especially the Youths (Mou, 1989; Deng and Mou, 1985). With the massive devaluation of the Naira and high inflationary trends in the economy, for most families, their salaries could not sustain them the then increases by the then President Obasanjo Administration, notwithstanding. The youths, being the most vulnerable group in the society, were and still are feeling the burdens of the economic problems more. They are haunted by the increasing foreign and domestic debts that are threatening their future and prosperity as Nigerians. Unemployment for the youths, is at an all time high, as Government, the major employer of labour in Nigeria, can no longer offer enough youths employments (Mou, 2017, Mou, S.P. and Dan Mou, 2017). The National Bureau of Statistics has estimated youths unemployment at 35% as of 2018.

The economic problems are accentuated by the rural/urban migration, which has seen the movement of able-bodied young men and women, from the rural areas to the urban centres, leaving only the aged and infirm on the land. The attendant result has been rural poverty and neglect of agriculture which used to be the main stay of Nigerian economy (Akor and Mou, 1984).

In order to reverse this trend and provide more opportunities for the youths, the Administration of then President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan under its **Transformation Agenda** policy, was determined to develop the rural areas evenly through the provisions of potable water, electricity, and a good network of road and telecommunications facilities and by the establishment of cottage industries. Government agencies, which have been charged with the responsibility of opening up the rural areas were, with time, to improve the well-being of the youths and make rural life more attractive to them. Already, former President Jonathan had inaugurated a Special Presidential Jobs Board tasked with creating jobs for the teeming youths and other Nigerians.

Basically, the economic challenges of leadership dictate that Nigeria has to look inwards and imbibe the spirit of self-reliance and economic reconstruction. The opportunities opened up for the youths to alleviate the scourge of mass unemployment in the country include the establishment of Poverty Alleviation Schemes; National Directorate of Employment (NDE) - which has the Youth Employment and Vocational Skills Programme; the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme and the School on Wheels Schemes under its umbrella. In addition, there is the Social Investment Programme which is currently being run under the Buhari Administration. It is estimated that 75% of jobless Nigerians are in fact youths (Mou, 2016).

Another agency, which complements the NDE Programme for self-employment is the Medium and Small-Scale Business Agency, which gives soft and interests-free loans to less fortunate people, including the unemployed youths. Coupled with Government commercialisation and privatisation of public corporations, more opportunities for small-scale industries and investments through shares in these companies and corporations, have now become available to the youths. The resultant deregulation of the economy has made it unnecessary for the youths to depend solely on public employment. Private initiatives are now being encouraged by the Federal Government for the youth through the programmes already mentioned above.

(iii) The Youths and Social Leadership Challenges and Opportunities

Social leadership challenges and opportunities also do affect the youths, just as the youths try to deal with the social conditions in the society. This has also been the case in the Nigerian society. Perhaps, the greatest threats to the stability of the country are from what we can call social leadership challenges which are ethnicity and religious bigotry. (Nnoli, 1980; Usman, 1987; Young, 1977 and Joseph, 1991, Mou, 2017). Ethnicity, we know is a reality in Nigerian politics. The youths must, however, shun any political leader that champions the cause of his ethnic group alone, disregarding the fact that there are many ethnic groups in the country. The fact of the matter is that leaders have a lot of influence on their followers, whether such influence is positive or negative, (Mou and Nwabuzor, 1991). It is time for the youths, who form the core of the new breed politicians, to de-emphasise our minor differences which were created by the colonial masters for their administrative convenience and face more serious developmental issues to put this nation on a sound democratic pedestal.

Furthermore, the youths must try to overcome the problem of ethnicity in Nigeria. They must learn to see and perceive one another based on individual qualities and brotherliness. In an effort to de-emphasise the issue of ethnicity, for instance, the National Population Commission, as a policy, has excluded questions based on ethnic groups or religion. The notion of Federal Character in the Nigerian Constitution, 1999, is also meant to solve the problem of ethnicity and religion (Ake, 1996; Mou, 2016).

Another social challenge on youth leadership closely related to the issue of ethnicity is statism. This has resulted in many border clashes between indigenes living within the same State and between States. These border clashes have resulted into massive destruction of lives and property. Seen against the backdrop of the fact that we are all Nigerians, there should be more civilised ways of resolving such differences in places where they do occur. Youths have the responsibility to ensure that this is indeed so. Yet, another issue in the social challenges on youth leadership of our time is religion. Religion is basically a collection of beliefs and values relating, especially, to the link between the individual and the Almighty Creator. Given the personal, intimate and delicate nature of religion, most modern governments adopt a neutral posture to forestall any accusation of partisanship. On the other hand, most countries in the World whose governments have, unfortunately, dabbled into religious issues have had a lot of crises or even civil wars. Examples of such countries include Lebanon, Ireland, Yugoslavia and Sudan. Fortunately, in Nigeria, the Constitution guarantees the neutrality of government in religion and it also guarantees the freedom of individuals to associate with or believe in any religion of their choice.

This is why the illegality (since it is not in line with the Constitution) of the emergence of SHARIA as a State religion in some Northern Nigerian States, rests on the youths to ensure a stable and peaceful nation, especially to give democracy in Nigeria a chance of survival. They can do this by shunning religious bigotry and extremism, accommodating people of differing religions, and more importantly, by refusing to be manipulated by some selfish individuals or groups to cause anarchy and instability in Nigeria. This is what the insurgents Boko Haram and Herdsmen/Farmers' clashes groups are doing, in the society in the name of religion. For the sake of stability and peace, now and in the future, all these must be stopped. The unfortunate incidents, such as those that have repeatedly occurred in Borno, Adamawa, Benue, Taraba, Kogi, Kebbi, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Nasarawa, Bauchi and Plateau religious disturbances, must not be allowed to persistently repeat either in these places or any other part of the country. The destruction and killing of farmers by Fulani and other foreign herdsmen all over the country, especially in the Benue, Taraba, Adamawa, Plateau and Kogi States, must be stopped forthwith. The youths that are being mobilised to cause these illegalities and atrocities must be courageous enough to resist being used by the criminally minded elders in Nigerian society. Nigerians are tired of violence, bitterness and disunity. We want to move forward into real development and democracy with social justice. That is why the issue of the insurgent Boko Haram movement and other criminal gangs, such as the herdsmen, recruiting youths for their evil agenda must be resisted by the youths themselves, as well.

IV. Child Abuse, Neglect, Trafficking and Drug Abuses as Challenges to Youth Leadership Potentials

The involvement of some of the Nigerian youths in many crimes in recent times is a great concern to all patriotic citizens and their leadership potentials. It is disturbing to note that our homes and streets are no longer safe, both at night and in the daytime (Mou, 2016, 2017). Our roads are also infested with dangers from armed robbers, kidnappers, and other social misfits. Reports show that the majority of these criminals are the youths, unfortunately (Mou, 2016, 2017; Usman, 1977; Oduyela, 2017; Onaiyekan, 2013; Musa, 1987 and Oyeniyi, 2010). It must be emphasised that if the country is to move into an economically and socially stable nation, that is democratic, these ugly phenomena have to be controlled and possibly stopped in order not to destroy the leadership potentials in our youths, and even elders. (Munroe, 1996; Pidgeon, 1998; Mou, 2015).

On many occasions, the youths are exploited, maltreated and misused by misguided elders and criminal syndicates, with negative consequences to them and their leadership potentials. For example, they are used as drug couriers by drug barons, with the result that they are always the ones that face the wrath of the law when they are caught while their drug masters revel in comfort in their ill-gotten wealth (Mou, 2015, 2016). To the nation, drug trafficking has dented the image of the country internationally. Nigerians travelling abroad are subjected to humiliating searches and treatments at foreign international airports and other points of entry. (Mou, 2015, 2017)

The tradition and practice of giving under-aged girls into marriages, whereby they are treated like slaves and sexually abused, is condemnable. This undesirable act has adverse physical and psychological effects on these innocent female youths (Mou, 2015b). . Perhaps, it is pertinent at this juncture, to call on our Traditional Rulers, who are our fathers and mothers, to make deliberate efforts to prepare and equip the youths for the task of leadership and establishing an enduring grass root democracy where the dignity of every youth, male or female, will be guaranteed. The attainment of this is sure predicated on the quality of our youths. It is here that the nature of socialisation processes to which our youths are exposed and indoctrinated by our leaders and elders become crucial (Mou, 2015b).

(v). LEADERSHIP AND SOCIALISATION OF THE YOUTHS

There is the general contention that one of the main factors that has undermined attempts at establishing a democratic society in Nigeria is the quality of leadership. In other words, for democracy to survive in Nigeria, there must be good, effective, efficient and committed political leadership. For a developing country, such as Nigeria that wants to sustain democracy, what is needed is a crop of new breed leadership with democratic qualities and orientations. This is because it has now become clear that the role of leaders in Nigeria goes far beyond the mere allocation of values and resources as it is commonly believed (Mou and Nwabuzor, 1991, 2001).

Leadership also involves serving as political socialisation models for the followers, especially youths. The leadership (political leaders, community leaders, religions leaders etc.), tend to influence or is even imitated by the followership. So that whatever forms of political behaviour the leaders engage in, tend to be seen as the “right” political behaviour by the followers. For example, if political leaders take to politics of bitterness, intolerance, extremism and so on, these negative political behaviour are likely to be copied by the followers, especially the youths. Similarly, leaders who promote the politics of tolerance, fair play and consensus, are likely to influence the followers along the same positive lines. We must not forget that leadership simply means purposive efforts by an individual or group of individuals to direct the energies and behaviour of others towards the achievement of common objectives (Mou and Nwabuzor, 1999,2001). Every effort should be made by the leaders to direct the energies and behaviour of the youths to the attainment of an enduring and stable democracy in this Nation, Nigeria.

In the same vein, the youths should be mindful of the fact that they constitute the bulk of the voting population who would be electing the political leaders of their choice, if only they behave themselves. The youths must be conscious of the fact that politics in a democracy gives Nigerians the very best in terms of the quality of leadership and peaceful politics based on principles, issues and concrete programmes. What the youths need, therefore, is to mobilise themselves to fully participate in politics. The various elections in this country offer the youths golden opportunities to seize the leadership of this country and direct the affairs of the Nation in such a manner that would promote self-reliance, social justice and political stability. This way President Buhari and other elders who feel the same way he does, will no longer claim that “a lot of Nigerian youths are lazy” (Buhari, 2018). But to be able to do so, they must ensure that only the most competent, effective, efficient and honest among them are elected to positions of power and authority.

Conclusion

We have, in this paper, examined the leadership challenges and opportunities in emerging democracies as well as the implications they have for our youths. It is necessary to point out that there exists government agencies and ministries, whose major tasks are focused on Youth Affairs and they are to mobilise the youths to be able to deal appropriately with these leadership challenges and opportunities in contemporary Nigerian society. We believe that if the youths in Nigeria are fully mobilised, they will be able to successfully address these leadership challenges and in the end, they will triumph. We do not agree, even now, that a lot of Nigerian youths can be rightly regarded as “lazy”. They need, however, both the Government and the leaders/elders, to create a favourable environment for them to realise their potentials.

National Youth Leadership Education, Social Development Programmes and other mentorship ventures, must therefore be put in place, if our youths are to successfully tackle the challenges of their generation and take full advantages of these opportunities and others that already exist, to become good leaders. We believe and agree with those who see the youths as very central to our development and democracy and thank them for identifying correctly, the problem of leadership as the most critical issue of this country. We disagree totally with the view that “most Nigerian youths are lazy”. As Jesus said, “the harvest is much but the harvesters are very few.” He was certainly referring to the dearth of leadership in human societies of his time. The problem seems even worst today in Nigeria. It is indeed this lack of capacity in leadership that has made our leaders, in and out of Government, to fall back on the blame game, even against our Youths.

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