

**NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS SCHEME IN
FOSTERING UNITY AND INTEGRATION IN POST WAR
NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS**

Uzoho Ikechukwu Princewill. Ph.D

Department of History and International Studies
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra, Nigeria
iprincewill7@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Youths constitute a dominant force for national mobilization and growth and as such have a crucial role to play in the all-important task of nation-building. This led to the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme after the Nigeria-Biafra war; this historic initiative was gravely misunderstood in several quarters and greeted with widespread skepticism in many parts of the country. Today, all that has become merely a part of history. It has in fact come to be acclaimed as one of the most effective and successful instruments in our continuing efforts towards achieving a just, humane and egalitarian society, based on understanding, trust, tolerance and common vision. The NYSC has impacted positively on the citizens. To hundreds of thousands of our youth, the service year has been a critical eye-opener to the vastness, richness and beauty of the Nigeria nation. To thousands of communities, even in the most remote parts of the country, corps members have served as important catalysts of socio-economic development. It is over forty-five years since these lofty ideals were encapsulated in Decree 24 of 1973, and handed down to an organization to implement and pursue. Many Nigerian graduates have passed through the scheme, and perhaps it is expedient to make an assessment of its impact on national integration. However, this study does not seek to offer a definitive judgment on the performance of the scheme. This paper merely places the NYSC in proper perspective - to present to the reader the lofty vision that informed and inspired the scheme, its true mandate, its



mode of operations, and its performance over many operational years.

Key words: National, Corps, Service, Integration, Mandate

INTRODUCTION

The supreme challenge which confronts multi-ethnic and multi-religious nations is not one of social and economic development. Countries like the former Soviet Union, the embattled, Indonesia, Malaysia, India and Nigeria are called upon to build one nation out of many nationalities, to foster a sense of common identity and destiny amongst their disparate and distinct peoples.

It is a problem which needs to be admitted if it is ever to be successfully confronted and combated. It is a problem which has defeated countries like the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and even broken some others into multiple sovereign nations. It is the most important problem confronting Nigeria. The sad experiences of Yugoslavia have shown quite clearly that the challenge of building unity out of diverse entities cannot be solved by easy resort to force. This merely sweeps the irritating causes under the carpet of surface harmony, until they flare up again, often with disastrous and bloody consequences. Nigeria, one must remember, fought a war to keep the country one. The circumstances of the war taught that sovereignty does not necessarily confer nationhood on a diverse people; and after the war, we were forced to learn that unity must be consciously and deliberately fostered.¹

Historically, there are basically two mutually reinforcing ways of addressing the problem of inter-ethnic diversity. One is to pursue a set of policies which is designed to prevent the dominance of one group at the expense of other groups, such as regional autonomy, federal character, the quota system among others. The second approach to the challenge is to engage in deliberate social engineering, designing programs and pursuing policies "which are meant to promote national unity, de-emphasize points of discord amongst the constituent groups, and foster greater inter-ethnic understanding and harmony. These programs may entail both compulsory elements and voluntary incentive systems, either to discourage certain types of conduct



deemed inappropriate, or to promote healthy behavior and interaction across ethnic divides.² The National Youth Service Corps is a program of deliberate social engineering designed to weld Nigeria's disparate peoples into a cohesive nation.

Nigeria is made up of over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own distinct history, political culture and belief system. Many of these nationalities had a well-developed system of government prior to colonization, and all of them reacted to westernization / modernization in different ways. Indeed, colonialism, rather than bringing the people together, served to further accentuate and exploit their differences. The policy of divide and rule was consciously adopted to polarize the people by breeding mutual suspicion in order to more effectively control them. At independence then, Nigerians were no nearer true nationhood than they had been at amalgamation. And the complex demands of federalism, combined with the politics of revenue allocation, progressively pulled the nation-state apart.³ The 1967-1970 war appeared to be the logical and inevitable conclusion to the process set in motion as far back as 1914.

The end of the war brought with it new hopes of reconciliation amidst the old fears over unity. The country would remain one, but would its peoples become truly united? It was in the euphoria of reconciliation that the dream of the National Youth Service Corps was born. The program was specifically targeted at "youths", broadly defined as graduates of tertiary institutions of learning. The scheme was not set up merely to foster national unity; otherwise neither the enabling decree nor the organizational structure would have been so elaborate. The Decree in fact lists eight clear objectives, the first to the fifth of which deal, respectively, with inculcating discipline, raising the moral tone, mobilizing the people, encouraging self-reliance and enhancing national economic development. Only the final three listed objectives speak of promoting national unity, removing prejudice and developing a common destiny.⁴

Over forty five years, since its inception in 1973, the National Youth Service Corps scheme has grown metaphorically from its turbulent infancy to a comparatively settled and assured



adulthood. This feat is the immediate inspiration for this discourse, to undertake an objective historical appraisal of its successes as regards the mandate of national integration. This paper attempts an appraisal of the National Youth Service Corps scheme, its achievement and limitation, both against the background of its original mandate as well as its changing social and political environment during the past years. But certain questions have persisted and needed to be re-stated:

- To what extent have the mandate being realized?
- How well has this ingenious device, of having corps members live and work (during the service year) in states other than their own, enhanced the socio-cultural relationships between the corps members and their onerous task of development?
- Could it have served the nation better if the reverse had been the case i.e. if corps members had been made to live and work in their, presumably, familiar states of origin?

These questions are inevitable, especially now that the scheme has endured for over forty five years – an unlikely thing for a program that is less loved. The methodology of systematic presentation of research findings makes this paper of unique value.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

National integration entails a systematic process of containing negative aspects of cultural pluralism. It means going beyond the ethnic-culture imperative to evolve a nation-culture ethic. It means accepting cultural diversity, cultural interpenetration, cultural cross-fertilization and sharing. In the process, the nation moves forward as it witnesses gradual efforts to evolve a relatively uniform social and cultural ethos, homogeneity, and cultural consonance. This process will have to be characterized by a coincidence of beliefs between groups, determined by the number of issues upon which there is agreement of attitudes, beliefs, values and view among the interacting groups.⁵ It is when this happens that the slogan ‘unity in diversity’ can then become meaningful and tenable at the same time as the slogan loses some



of the hollow deceptiveness that had often characterized this social process in Nigeria. In the light of this discussion of the problems so far, it is easy to give special prominence here to what may be regarded as basic prerequisites for integration. These include,

- Co-existence, awareness and acceptance of this social value
- Contact and inter-penetration among groups form choice, with positive affective undertones;
- Compromise arising from gradual discoveries and acceptance of arrears of compatibility and relatedness.
- Coalescence of values, views and loyalties around new and emerging common core and
- The emergence of genuine acceptance and empathy among the various constituent groups.

Rather than have groups relating according to their divergent outlooks and intentions, we notice a growth of cultural convergence and fusion through the discovery and/or creation of areas of common interest, values and ideas.⁶

Historical Overview of the National Youth Service Corps

In the immediate post war era in Nigeria, there had been an outcry from a number of pressure and interest groups advocating the creation of a service scheme similar to such foreign organizations as the American Peace Corps, the British Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), the Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO), and the Tanzanian People's Militia. But when it appeared that some decision was going to be reached in this regard by the Federal Military Government under General Yakubu Gowon in late 1972 and early 1973, the affected youths, surprisingly, rose up in protest against the establishment of such a corps. This unexpected negative reaction stalled for a while the implementation of the regime's plan. But Gowon's administration was determined to establish one or both of its two projected youth schemes, especially in the peculiar circumstances of that regime's post war reconstruction efforts. It felt a need to win post-war peace, bring all Nigerian into same fold once again and create a



favorable climate for a new sense of nationhood among all Nigerians.⁷ In this new war to win peace and ensure national harmony, the Gowon administration recognized the need for another and different “army” of young Nigerian men and women. Such an “army” would emphasize service to the nation as well as tolerance and mutual trust among all Nigerian. This was how the idea of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) came to be. Like a young adolescent, the NYSC scheme had its own “adolescent crises”.

It is helpful to recall the reasons that informed the setting up of the NYSC scheme by the Gowon administration in 1973, which are as follows;

- To integrate Nigerian youths;
- To foster national understanding;
- To utilize the energies and rich professional abilities of Nigerian youths in the development process;
- To break down the barriers of ethnicity, language and religion in order to facilitate the task of nation building.

After the uproar, protests and demonstrations that followed the setting up of the scheme in the then six universities namely, University of Nigeria Nsukka, University of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University, University of Ife, University of Lagos, and University of Benin many Nigerians came to recognize the scheme, and quite early enough, as a veritable and potent agent of national integration. These well-meaning Nigerians and sympathizers to the cause believed that for the wounds of the civil war to heal rapidly without leaving their scars on Nigeria and Nigerians, the ideals that informed the establishment of the scheme needed to be upheld and pursued with vigor and enthusiasm. The eventual capitulation of the affected students and their willingness to serve were due largely to their tacit realization and admission that this vast nation had good potentials for speedy recovery from the scorches of the bitter war as well as for speedy development and reconstruction of its battered infrastructures.

Advisedly, the architects of the program came to the conclusion that in order to maximize the expected gains from the scheme, participants should be made to live and work in areas of



the country outside their immediate ethnic or cultural backgrounds throughout the duration of the service year. This was seen as an easy way of re-orientating the youths and re-fraternizing the entire citizenry. It was thus designed to prepare the soil that would nurture the seeds of a rejuvenated citizenry and foster national growth.⁸ These were the dreams of the designers of the program – and great dreams they were, one might say.

An important aspect of Nigerian life in which the NYSC scheme recorded tremendous success is its socio-cultural aspect where the scheme has served as the mainstream for the social, economic and political growth of the country. In the early years of the scheme, the social relationship between the service corps members and the inhabitants of the host communities were generally poor. The reasons for the near-mutual alienation and distrust between the corps members on the one hand and the host communities on the other were not hard to find. First, there was lack of proper knowledge among the masses, especially the illiterate members of the various communities, of the true intentions of the scheme. This lack of adequate information about the scheme explains, in part at least, the almost total ignorance and, therefore, lack of appreciation of the aims and goals of this otherwise laudable program. The resultant unease in the host communities was further accentuated by the fact that the war had left many in the war-affected areas in a state of total dejection. Naturally, in the war-ravaged areas, especially among those that fought on the other side of the battle line against the federal forces, there was initially a high degree of general apathy regarding government activities. Needless to add, that many of the people in those areas were still nursing their bitter memories of the war. They were suspicious of Nigerians from the other ethnic groups. This was one of the greatest impediments in the way of the scheme's success in its early years. It accounted for the initial lukewarm, if not negative, reception of the scheme in the affected parts of the country.⁹

It took time before many people, especially those in the rural areas, could establish cordial relations with serving corps members from the suspect ethnic groups. Besides, the spread of



youth corps members in many areas at that time was unfortunately misconstrued. The ill-informed citizenry wondered why it was necessary to deploy able-bodied young men and women to their midst. Their fears were that the scheme might have been designed as a ploy that could generate fresh squabbles. Thus, in many cases, rather than associate with the corps members such people watched them with great suspicion as potential 'spies' of government. It was not until after the first few batches of corps members had gone through the program without any unpleasant incidents that indigenes of the war-torn areas began to accept corps members and to feel at ease with these new 'strangers in cap and boots' among them.

While in some parts of the country the corps members were thought to be spies, in other rural communities they were seen to be some kind of social outcast. Among the latter groups, they were generally believed to be fugitives that ran away from some unknown crime. They had come to take refuge among them, wishing to be assimilated in a social, political and economic environment in which they were not known. With this at the back of their minds, members of such communities were generally unwilling to grant the corps members immediate and total absorption. Related to this general misconception was yet another; that the service corps member was serving some kind of punishment imposed on him by the authorities. He was thought to have committed some grievous crime. So grievous must have been the crime, it was surmised, that government dressed him in his weird outfit and dumped him in an unknown place. On this assumption, some villages thought it would be a mark of incivility and impropriety to openly interact with this 'stranger'.

Ironically, on his part, the service corps member, who was in the forefront of the violent demonstrations that followed the setting-up of the scheme, was in no hurry to correct the wrong assumptions which some of the people around him had about the scheme. This was because in the early years of the scheme many service corps members submitted themselves for service, not because they loved to, but because they had to. There was still an unspoken reluctance to be identified among the group of service



corps members generally. Many of them thought that there was little or nothing to be gained from their association with their rural hosts and so did not feel inclined to relate meaningfully with them, learn their language, eat their food and much less imbibe elements of their culture. Corps members who felt this way longed to be discharged at the end of their service year.

It needs to be pointed out, however, that as youths, fresh from the universities and other institutions of higher learning, the majority of corps members took with them to their places of service, social habits and styles of living that were sometimes alien to, or that ran counter to the cultural norms of, the host communities. These included such social habits as alcoholism, smoking, disco-partying and, in some cases, even the manner of dressing. Such mode of living made the hosts, especially the more conservative ones, very uncomfortable with resultant strain in their relationships with the youths.

As the years went by, the relationship between youth corps members and their hosts began to improve with greater enlightenment and understanding of the purpose of the scheme. This gradual normalization of relationships was due largely to the efforts of the various Heads of State, directors/national director of the scheme as well as media men who worked with unrelenting vigor to create a more favorable image for the corps members while at the same time diffusing information about the usefulness of the program. In the rural areas and among the illiterate communities the purpose of the scheme gradually became clearer and was better appreciated by them. The rural dwellers, who were themselves witnesses of the several social benefits emanating from the scheme, started to see it as a blessing rather than a curse. Parents whose own children had come back, safe and unscathed after their service, to happily settle to their respective careers began to treat service corps members among them with greater cordiality and amity.

The newly enlisted service corps members, on their part, had watched their predecessors pass out without regrets and had seen many of them secure good jobs and watched them settle to face hopeful years ahead. They began to purge themselves of some



of the inherited misconceptions about the scheme as they embarked on their assignments during the service year. Thus, the much despised scheme of the pre-1973/74 service year gradually grew to become a reality, not only for undergraduates and other youths in tertiary and secondary institutions, but also for students in primary and post-primary institutions who wished that the benefits of the scheme could be extended to them. This is evident in the persuasive arguments that have been canvassed on their behalf over the years for their inclusion in the service corps scheme. The service corps member's uniform, which was seen, hitherto, as some kind of prisoners' outfit has been transformed in the eyes of many Nigerian youths into the outfit of modern-day heroes and potential *avant-garde* liberators.

Systematic Community Penetration Approach

The infusion of the self-reliant Community Development concept into the service corps scheme has heightened the cordial social relationship between the host community and corps members, who began to see the rural dwellers as part and parcel of the same political entity, and whose upliftment must be considered a major determinant of their own success or failure as an educated person. The rural dweller, on his part, looked up to a member of the young educated elite for direction and guidance. It is now widely believed on both sides that in order that Nigeria may survive as one great nation, all segments of the population must endeavor to build a mutually sustaining network of social linkages and trust that thrive on co-operation.

The Community Development Service (CDS) component of the scheme has demonstrated beyond doubt that corps members meant well for the people and should, therefore, not be seen and treated as outsiders. They are, by the nature of the service scheme orientation, expected to help in the construction of roads, bridges, bus stops; to help in the people's farms, clinics, and, if need be, even in their homes.

Some corps members, have successfully organized, and continue to organize, lectures at no extra cost for students under their care during the service year. These gestures have endeared



such corps members to a great number of the local inhabitants with whom they come in contact. To the same extent – and this needs special mention – public lectures organized by service corps members to educate the masses have improved substantially the social relationship between them and their host communities.

The service scheme has also greatly influenced the social outlook of some of these communities in a less formal way, through theatrical performances put up by the various NYSC drama groups. These performances have served the dual purpose of entertaining and educating the audiences as part of the social enlightenment programs and activities of government. In fact, and quite frequently too, the people's cultures and traditions are projected as informing themes in some of these theatrical performances. Thus through the medium of drama both parties are led to appreciate the need to face the challenges of nation building, to see Nigeria as a unit, and to shun inter-tribal or inter-ethnic, social, economic and political differences which had been the bane of post-independence Nigerian society prior to the establishment of the scheme.

The corps members, it could be convincingly argued, are now better informed about, and now more inclined to show genuine interest in, the cultures and traditions of their host communities. They are now generally more disposed to enjoy their food, learn their language and even sometimes consciously or unconsciously fall in love across ethnic and linguistic lines. It is now common knowledge that many corps members have forged relationships which have remained lasting testimonies to the practical social value of the scheme. This trend does provide a valid parameter to measure the impact of the scheme in helping to build the binding blocks for integrating and uniting Nigeria into a large social community.

The feeling of insecurity on the part of corps members among stranger communities have virtually disappeared. Such feeling now manifests in isolated cases, considering the number enlisted every year; in the form of grudges and requests for relocation by some youths corps members. In fact, several corps members are now known to settle among their host communities



long after their years of service. The emotional farewell scenes that have marked their parting moments as they leave their places of primary assignment are further testimonies of the considerable impact that several of them had made on the host communities during the period of their stay. It could be said, and with a measure of certainty, that the scheme has ultimately confirmed the validity, in the Nigerian environment, of the precept enshrined in the motto of the founding fathers of the Man O' War scheme which remains a cornerstone of the mandatory preparatory orientation training designed for new service corps members, namely: 'Build the man, [then you] build the community'. The efforts made to transform the Nigerian youth through systematic re-orientation for greater self-actualization and self-reliant development as provided through the NYSC scheme bear directly, ultimately, on the continuous process of reordering the social environment for more meaningful and productive existence of all, both young and old.

An Appraisal of the NYSC Mandate on National Unity

An appraisal of its aim and objectives were largely affective though the means to these ends included some psycho-motor strategies. The effective objectives stressed the need to do the following:

- Inculcate discipline
- Raise the moral tone,
- Encourage self reliance and industry
- Promote greater labour mobility and
- Foster national integration.

The concern of this study is to examine the task of national integration, which features prominently under sub-section 3 of the NYSC decree which among others stipulated;

- (a) To develop in our youths attitude of mind, acquired through
- (b) shared experiences and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest.
- (c) To develop common ties (among our youths) and promote national unity by ensuring that



- As far as possible, youths are assigned to jobs in states other than their states or origin.
 - Each group, assigned to work together, is as representative of the country as possible:
 - The youths are exposed to the modes of living of the people in different parts of the country with a view of removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance, and confirming at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups,
- (d) To encourage members of the corps to seek at the end of their corps service, career employment all over the country, thus promoting the free movement of labour.⁹

These were the stated objectives of the scheme at its inception in 1973, forty five years ago. In terms of historical periodization, as earlier suggested in our introduction, this length of time is sufficiently long and generally acceptable for purpose of review, impact assessment and evaluation of any organization. This study has attempted to stand back and with the advantages of hindsight and that of detachment, examine critically in what ways and how far the NYSC scheme has contributed to the attainment of this cardinal objective of fostering unity and national integration.

Scholars of impact assessments and program evaluation are generally agreed on the fact that one cannot undertake any effective and fair evaluation of any program unless he or she has carefully provided a detailed canvas of the context and situation before the intervention of the program under review.

The NYSC Scheme and Situation at Inception

The NYSC scheme as has been reiterated in some of the sections above was conceived in the immediate aftermath of the traumatic experiences of the Nigeria-Biafra war. The war itself is now generally agreed, was caused principally by unbridled ethnicity, which is the off-shoot of conflict model of ethnic-cultural pluralism.¹⁰ It was this conflict model of ethnic-cultural pluralism which bred the suspicions, hatred and parochialisms which the then 'regional' politician exploited for their selfish ends.



Since the NYSC scheme was designed to combat some of these aspects of our national conflict model of cultural pluralism, Some of its key features require identification and reiteration here. These futures included the following:

- Mutual avoidance
- Social cleavages and conflicts between groups:
- Relative absence of consensus:
- Relative absence of institutional integration;
- Segmentation into groups usually along ethnic lines
- Ethnic exclusiveness
- Relative presence of cultural heterogeneity:
- Real, perceived or feared domination of one group by another
- Extreme suspicion and distrust
- Effective neutrality in links
- Primacy of instrumental and utilitarian relationships, largely with a manipulation intention among hostile ethnic groups:
- Ethnic Machiavellianism and Darwinism and
- Primacy of ethnic ties and affiliations¹¹

All these negative traits and factors form a perfect pre requisite for social disintegration, as researches in the social science on inter-group relationships in plural societies have been quick to point out. This was broadly the situation before the establishment of the NYSC scheme. In seeking to foster national integration, therefore, the NYSC scheme was designed to combat these evils. An appraisal of the NYSC pursuit of its mandate is systematically approached under the following sub headings;

Building Bridges of Friendship

The service year affords the corps members a very good opportunity to meet new and exciting people from other parts of the country than their own. In the process, genuine and lasting friendships are usually developed. Many of such friendships have survived the service year. They invariably give rise to frames of mind that favor greater inter-cultural interaction which is a *sine qua non* for promoting national integration. It is easy for one to



under estimate the force of friendship. The beneficial effects of friendship made among corps members and between host communities during the service year must be seen against this background and to the extent that they have constituted fundamental contributions of the scheme to national integration and unity.

Dismantling the Walls of Misunderstanding

A lot of the hostility and suspicion in the Nigerian society today derive from ignorance and misunderstanding. The service year exposes the corps member to new worlds, to new socio-cultural environments and to something disarming realities. The service year gradually witness the erosions of his long-held prejudices and fears and the growth in the corps members of greater understanding of the ways and culture of other Nigerian groups than their own. With greater standing, there is of course greater degree of acceptance, tolerance and empathy. It is pertinent to give special prominence to the two levels in this gradual breaking down of the walls of ignorance and misunderstanding.

First, the corps member interacts with members of his host communities and gets to understand their ways better. Secondly, the corps member interacts with other corps members from other parts of country. These two interactive processes involving the same corps member entail, for him, a process of socio-cultural enlightenment as he gradually but gently begin to adjust his judgment of other people and places. In place of those unfounded generalization which fuel the embers of hostility, the corps members are placed in a position to acquire empirical, first-hand experience, which brings the walls of prejudice to a collapse. Thus, with time in place of rash judgments, the corps members are better able to now acquire a critical social sensitivity and empathy to the culture of other Nigerian peoples with whom they come in contact during the service year. The gains for all involved parties are mutual and reciprocal. The host community of the corps member, for instance, gains as much as does the corps members. At the end of the service year, the corps members go home and with this experience become new ambassadors for national



integration. The 'returnee' corps member brings back with him for his people, information which could be used to detoxify the chambers of their ignorance and limited horizons. To that extent, therefore, the returnee' corps member becomes a potent and very valuable agent of cultural diffusion, an agent who works away imperceptibly, perhaps, at the hearts of men and women with their age-old misconceptions and prejudice urging them to be better informed and more tolerant and accommodating Nigerians.¹²

National Service as Training in Rural Sociology

The service year forces the majority of corps members in any single batch to experience life in rural setting. The corps member learns at firsthand what living in the rural community entails. He is more likely, as a consequence of his posting, to be more sensitive to the plight of the rural poor. The rural poor themselves are glad that they have been afforded an opportunity to interact with products of our tertiary institutions. In the course of his mutually beneficial interactive process, social cleavages of class have had their sharp edges blunted.

In addition, the primary assignments of a corps member in a rural setting usually involve activities which have had the cumulative effects of gradual, social, cultural and economic transformation and an attendant rise in the standard of living of a hitherto marginalized rural community. It is important to make this point because national integration would be incomplete without particular mention of socio- economic integration. Where a society is sharply polarized between the rich and the poor, between urban and rural communities, that society lacks all forms of social cohesion and integration. If anything at all, it cultivates and nurtures a simmering bed of discontent and class conflict.¹³ The NYSC scheme has helped and continues to help to reduce those social cleavages that separate the urban rich from the rural poor. Thus, in addition to fostering cultural integration, the NYSC scheme has continued to provide the necessary climate for socio-economic integration through its Community Development Service (CDS) and general promotion of economic activities either



in the identified permanent orientation venues or in the society at large.

National Service year as Cultural Education and Intercourse

The service year affords the corps members opportunity to live in a host community and to acquire, sometimes openly at other times often surreptitiously, some form of cultural education. This aspect of cultural education has been formalized through specially designed course or lectures during orientation on the culture and tradition of the different host communities with which corps members are bound to come in contact. This cultural education, as have been indicated earlier are dancing, dressing, marriage, burial, eating and framing habits of the information on the ethos of the community. Now better informed, he becomes like the anthropologist in a participant observer study, more tolerant of and sympathetic towards the behaviors of members of his host community.

Another important aspect worthy of attention is the extent to which the service year encourages social intercourse among various Nigerian youths and people. In several cases, such social intercourses have ended happily in inter-ethnic marriages, to the great benefits of the nation. Such has been the importance attached to this channel of social intercourse and fostering of national integration that governors in certain states have been known to offer special inducements to promote inter-ethnic marriages among corps members deployed to their states. The NYSC Directorate Headquarters and State Secretariats quite often give due publicity to such relationships which have the likely effects of promoting greater inter-ethnic mobility, greater contacts, greater interaction and hopefully, greater inter-ethnic understanding.

National Service as a Catalyst for Labour Mobility

One of the sources of social cleavages in Nigeria has been and still remains in some parts, the unequal availability and distribution of



competent labour force to man certain sectors of the economy. It was not uncommon in the seventies, for instance, to observe that the educationally less developed (ELD) parts of the country had to rely heavily on migration labour force from outside the country, to help them. At the same time, the educationally developed states had to contend often times with labour gluts in some sectors of the economy.¹⁴

Through its deployment policy, the NYSC scheme has, in some measure, helped to reverse this unwholesome trend. Nigerian youths have been contributing to national development and again getting an opportunity to know and learn more about the country. In the course of the service year, the corps members interact with Nigerians from other states, collaborate with them on projects, share common experience and ambitions, and jointly acquire competences, and skills whilst on their assigned jobs, consequently, their readiness to develop a spirit of comradeship, an *esprit- de -corps* and a commitment to the mobilization and posting makes even economic and social transformation of the integration more easily realizable.

CONCLUSION

The NYSC scheme has in several ways contributed to this emerging cultural convergence, fusion, openness and acceptance which defined integration, in fact , it can be safely asserted that the growing incidence of national integration in Nigeria today is due, in a large measure, to the impact of the NYSC scheme. The attendant positive social values manifest in a set of behavioral attitudes which point to a greater sense of unity and national integration especially among Nigerian youths who have gone through, and have come under the positive impact of the NYSC scheme. These observable new attitudes include among others;

- Willingness to relate with people from other ethno-cultural groups
- Cultural sensitivity and understanding
- Growing sense of national identity
- Willingness to accept cultural relativity
- Freedom from parochialism



- Willingness to learn more about other cultural groups
- Willingness to accept that the nation is superior to the ethnic group
- Increased geographical and spatial mobility and consequential exposure to new areas and experience modes of living of other people
- Rejection of age-old preconception and misconceptions about other ethnic groups
- Abandonment of superiority or inferiority complexes and
- Avoidance of patronizing condescension and paternalistic attitudes in dealing with people from other ethnic groups.

In reviewing these achievements of the NYSC scheme, one cannot but uphold it as a very laudable scheme. Though hard statistics are hardly conclusive on issues such as attitudinal changes there are these various ways in which the impact of the scheme in fostering national integration can be gauged. The scheme will succeed even more, when as a nation the citizens are able to contain the debilitating effects of a narrowly defined statism. It should be possible then for a corps members, at the end of a very fruitful service year, to take for granted his absorption as a Nigerian by the respective agency to which he had been attached in his state of deployment without having to contend with obstacles put by his state of origin which now characterize the Nigerian polity. It should not be that he has to rely on the special fiat granted to him on his basis of a state merit award or the president's Honors Award to secure job employment in the state in which he served.

More than anything else such specific input of the NYSC scheme in national development would have remained unattainable if the scheme had not succeeded in creating the necessary climate of growing inter-ethnic trust and integration among Nigerian Youths. This cardinal goal of fostering unity and national integration has remained, and must continue to serve as the foundation-head of the scheme's positive contributions to the evolution of a modern Nigerian nation-state. The scheme's achievements in this regard constitute its quintessence as a development –oriented social institution.



END NOTES

1. O. Olusanya, *The Unfinished Task – An inaugural Lecture at University of Lagos.*1976 .
2. F. Heady, *Public Administration: A Comparative Perspective*, Prentice Hall, News Jersey.1960 p.176
3. S. Gaskiya, *Nigeria Economic Crisis, Causes and Solution.* Zaria Corporation. In NTA – Point Blank in 2000.
4. G.Enegwea *et al.*, *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service*, Gabumo Publishing Ltd, Lagos. 1993. p.106.
5. Cohen & Nisbet as cited in Kraemer. H. (ed.) *Youth and culture:Human Development Approach*, Wordsworth Publishing Company 1974. p.78
6. Cohen & Nisbet as cited in Kraemer. H. (ed.) *Youth and culture: Human Development Approach.* p. 107.
7. G.Enegwea *et al.*, *NYSC: Twenty Years of National Service*, p.67.
8. NYSC Handbook revised in 1995, published by the National Directorate Headquarters, Abuja.
9. NYSC Decree No. 24 of 22nd May, 1973.
10. F. Heady, *Public Administration: A Comparative Perspective.* p.183
11. J. Abhuere, *Administration of Youth Service Organization: An Evaluative study of National Youth Service Corps of Nigeria 1973 – 95 – A Ph.D. thesis submitted to Faculty of Social Science Department of Political Science, University of Benin, 1998.*
12. J. Abhuere, *Organization of Youths for National Development* M.Sc thesis, 1983
13. K. Flacks, *Youth and Social Change*, Mark Publishing Company, USA, 1983.p 114.
14. A. Bunza, “The role of youths in manpower development of Kebbi State”, a paper presented at the Government and youth interactive forum, Birnin Kebbi, 1995.

