Identity Issues in the Nigerian State and the Problem of Youth Alienation at the Southeast Zone: Reflections on Health, Livelihood and Sustainable Development Implications

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ABSTRACT: Nigeria has a population of over 170 million. She is the world's sixth largest oil supplier and is blessed with enormous economic potentials. However, identity issues arising from her multi-ethnic structure remain a major problem contributing negatively to her socio-economic development. Majority of Nigerians remain abjectly poor due to bad governance, corruption and related factors. This paper examined the relationship between identity issues, youth alienation (particularly in the Southeast zone), health/livelihood of youths, and sustainable development in the Nigerian context. The paper posited that government in Nigeria is biased in handling identity issues and that democracy has not been able to bring about much anticipated positive social change. The paper therefore recommended that Nigerian political leaders should, do away with biased treatment of social groups to the disadvantage of some others. Government should also articulate and conscientiously pursue democratic ideals that will positively stimulate sustainable development at all levels.
 Keywords: Health, Identities, Livelihood, Nigerian state, Sustainable Development, Youth Alienation

I.　INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is increasingly becoming more divided in recent times because of identities. The character of the colonial Nigerian state and its mode of creation have led to conflict situations and identity issues while it lasted. Similarly, Nigeria's post colonial state re-enacted the ills of the colonial state which they replaced with newly created elites and new authority order that jettisoned the traditional authority giving rise to further identity cleavages. This is racist, and has set natives against one another. Thus, it could be rightly concluded in the words of Ahaneku (2018) that from inception, the Nigerian state has being enmeshed in a rising vortex of a miasma of crises, rooted in an unhealthy interplay of its pluralistic identities: particularly culture, religion, ethnicity, jostling for advantageous positions in the country's power structure, and to a great extent contributed to the unfortunate events of 1967 – 1970 civil war.

 Unfortunately, such identities, as well as power structure in the Nigerian context, whether formal or informal, are yet to be harnessed and mobilized to ensure fairness, equity and justice for the sustainability of the Nigerian State. The expectation that the state will be reasonably neutral in managing identity issues in her territory is yet to materialize in the Nigerian circumstance. Rather, the Nigerian state, over time, has remained biased rather than neutral. She regularly connives with groups it has sympathy for, to maltreat other groups. Because of these, individuals and groups within the maltreated segments become frustrated and alienated from meaningful participation in the socio-political and economic development of the country.

Indeed, there is so much alienation in the land, especially among the youth category in the Southeast region due to construction of identity politics in Nigeria with its traits of inclusion and exclusion that allow one or two identity groups to completely hijack power and resources of the state to the disadvantage of others. Identity in Nigeria is thus wrongly used as basis for rewards.

Some cases of identity politics in Nigeria include the proscription of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) as terrorist group while Fulani herdsmen who have attacked several farming communities go scot free. Another instance is the fact that there are five states in Southeast region as against six states in other zones. Also worrisome is the situation whereby Unity Schools and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board operate lopsided admission policy in favour of so called 'educationally disadvantaged' northern states to the detriment of students from southern states that may have scored higher in the screening tests. Furthermore, when people are extremely poor, the state could further entrench such poverty and sow seeds of alienation if its structure and responses to identity issues are heavily biased. This is exactly the case of youths in Southeast Nigeria.

II. CONCEPTUALISING IDENTITY

Identify, essentially entails peoples' explicit or implicit responses to the questions of "Who they are" and "who are they" These questions can be further broken into three: who are you?", "who am I?" in other words, identity is a multidimensional construct that taps into cognitive, moral, cultural, and social aspects. It encompasses different levels of analysis that includes personal and social dimensions.

For Erikson (1968), identity refers primarily to a subjective feeling of sameness and continuity across time and across contexts. This also, means that individuals, groups and/or communities could assume different identities through their life span. A proper understanding of the multidimensional nature of identity is important because it provides a goal post for current action and an interpretive lens for making sense of experience and so, should influence both wellbeing and motivation.

Conceptualizing Alienation

This refers to distaste, disgust, frustration and despair, causing of someone to become indifferent or hostile. It also implies separation, being withdrawn or isolated from the objective world through indifference or disaffection. Other definitions include:

- Turning away or estrangement from socio-economic involvements, freedom from obligation or occupation.
- The state of being an outsider or the feeling of being isolated as from society.
- Loss of rights by people to institutions which in reality are hostile to them.
- In the social sciences, alienation could be associated with problem of rapid social change (such as industrialization and urbanization) which has broken down traditional relationships among individuals and the goods they produce).
- Alienation is often associated with youths and minorities (the poor, the unemployed and other groups) that may have limited power to bring changes in the society

Conceptualizing 'Youths'

Youths usually constitute those persons possessing distinct physical characteristics like: ability to think fast, ability to display much energy towards actualization of goals, assertive and resistant personality, and ability to change a state of art. Youths are expected to be the most active population of a country. The higher the number of youths, the higher should be the quantity of wealth and national income, all things being equal

Using the United Nations definition, a youth is someone who is between the ages of 15- 24 years. For the World Bank, such an individual must attain 25 years before he/she can qualify to be a youth. The Federal Government of Nigeria pegs the age limit at 30 years maximum. There are however researchers who contend that youthful ages exceed 30 but not above 40 years (Jike, 2002).

Youth Alienation and its Forms or Nature in Southeast Nigeria

The concept has many discipline-specific uses, and can refer both to a personal psychological state (subjectively) and to a type of social relationship (objectively). According to Ankony, (1999), it is a condition in social relationships characterised by a low degree of integration of youths or a high degree of distance or isolation of youths from the rest of society and or work environment". Youth alienation in Southeast Nigeria has manifested in various forms or situations like:

(a) Economic *and social alienation* in which youths/workers are disconnected from socio-economic production (there contributions are not maximized). In this scenario, Marx argued that alienation is a systematic result of capitalism.

(b) *Political alienation* of youths manifests in forms where youths are relegated out of political participation. They do not occupy important political positions, or play key roles in the political process (perhaps except as thugs or ballot box snatching).

(c) *Youth replica of human alienation*, individuals becomes estranged to themselves in the quest to stay alive, where "they lose their true existence in the struggle for subsistence" (Axelos, 1976)

(d) I*deological alienation*, For instance, when people use the 'ideology of marginalization' to remain lukewarm and not rise to challenges of self development and actualization Marx believes that all religions divert people away from "their true happiness" and instead turn them towards "illusory happiness".

We can also summarize youth alienation in Southeast Nigeria along the ideas of Seeman (1959) who drew from Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and others. He constructed what is considered as *six prominent features of alienation* thus: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, self-estrangement, cultural estrangement. These six features also aptly apply to the situation in Southeast Nigeria.

Major Causes of Youth Alienation in Southeast Nigeria

A major cause of youth alienation in Southeast zone of Nigeria is identity manipulations by the state which is often biased in favour of other regions or ethnic nationalities to the gross disadvantage of the Southeast zone. In such circumstances of ugly and absolute lack of state neutrality in addressing identity issues in Nigeria's multi-ethnic and culturally heterogeneous society, the youths of Southeast zone become hopeless about their future. They are bothered that all yardsticks and resources for fair competition with youths from other zones in the country are heavily tilted to their disadvantage. In frustration, they reluctantly incline to alienation.

Furthermore, lopsided distribution of resources and appointments, by the state, compound feelings among youths of Southeast zone, of worthlessness, powerlessness and estrangement from mainstream socio-economic life of the nation. There is sufficient evidence that the Southeast zone does not get its fair share from the Nigerian patrimony. For instance, the geo-political zone has the least kilometre of federal roads (see Table 1).

Table 1: Length of federal roads by geopolitical zone, 2006 & 2008

Zone	Length in 2006	% in 2006	Length in % in 2008	% in 2008
North Central	7,831.20	22.8	7,874.20	21.0
North East	7,803.40	22.7	7,850.40	21.0
North West	6,668.90	19.4	6,876.20	18.4
South East	3,121.70	9.1	3,642.0	9.7
South South	4,150.89	12.1	6,066.60	16.2
South West	4,528.26	13.2	4,848.50	13.0
FCT	236.60	0.7	244.60	0.7
Total	**34,340.95**	**100**	**37,402.5**	**100**

Source: Adapted from National Bureau of Statistics 2009, pp. 369-370

Moreover, the South-East is the zone most dependent on private initiatives for service delivery in the social sector. Also, as Table 2 shows, the zone has the highest number of private health facilities and lowest number of government-owned (public) health facilities.

Table 2: Ownership of health care facilities by geo-political zone, 2004

Zone	Public	Private
North Central	3,306	1,852
North East	2,225	353
North West	3,874	420
South East	912	2,416
South South	1,841	1,285
South West	2,439	2,481
FCT	10	225
Total	**14,607**	**9,032**

Source: National Bureau of Statistics 2009, p. 183

Nonetheless, the survey on investment climate in Nigeria shows that the Southeast is the most unfriendly geo-political zone to do business. All the five states have the lowest ranks in the aggregate score on business environment (see Table 3). Although the main indicators for measuring investment climate were mostly the nature of tax regimes and the time gap for securing licenses and government approvals, it is most likely that the parlous security situation in the region (which could have resulted from youth alienation) featured in the calculations of the assessors.

Table 3: Police formations by geo-political zones, 2006

Zone	Number Police Stations	% of Police Stations	Number Police Posts	% of Police Posts	Number of Police Divisions	% of Police Divisions
North Central	367	22.96	708	26.9	184	17.69
North East	269	16.83	498	18.93	154	14.8
North West	188	11.76	671	25.5	216	20.78
South East	161	10.08	134	5.09	127	12.21
South South	258	16.15	202	7.68	167	16.06
South West	307	19.21	298	11.33	162	15.58
FCT	11	0.69	44	1.67	16	1.54

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2009: 263

The Southeast is also the least represented in federal executive posts (see Mustapha 2006). There is widespread perception that the travails of region partly stems from political marginalization

Furthermore, alienation among youths in the area has a socialised dimension (it constitutes an attitude/disposition that could be socially acquired).In this regard, it is noteworthy that especially among young people, feelings are contagious. Skewed family, school, peer, religious, media and other societal orientations or influences constitute additional factors in youth alienation in Southeast Nigeria. The youths are thus not well guarded and guided against wrong steps

Painfully, there is an unduly long *'wait hood period'* for youths aged 15-30yrs. Large proportions of youths spend their best years (youthful energy) waiting, resulting in debilitating state of helplessness and dependency. Factors in wait hood period include:
  a. Unemployment rates are three times the world average (30 -60 % compared to 10-20 %)
  b. Queuing time for their first job is measured in years rather than in months compared to their counterparts in Asia, Latin America, and Europe among others. Some youths have waited for upwards of 5 – 10 years for jobs. This suggests that there is no strong policy in existence to productively engage the pool of human capital (youth bulge), economically, socio-politically and even spiritually. Indeed, lack of employment opportunities and poor reward system (salary/incentives). contribute significantly to youth alienation
  c. They (youths) cannot afford housing; dowry, lacks access to credit (if they exist) or sidelined because of high interest rate.
  d. They involuntarily delay marriage which is a rite of passage to adulthood and independence. This elongates youth's dependence on their parents.

Other contributory factors are rapid urbanization, high expectations on the part of job seekers, environmental stresses, and the failing role of religion, all of which compound problems of youth alienation. Wrong public behaviour, decisions and negative *Perceptions about Education, Employment and Marriage (PEEM).* Examples of such wrong perceptions include that;
  a. University education is the only goal worth pursing
  b. Notion of a life time secure desk job as the only dependable means of sustenance
  c. Marriage is only contingent upon both university and a stable job.

Some Problems Associated with Youth Alienation in Southeast Nigeria
  - Nigeria (especially her Southeast zone) experiences economic misfortunes and demographic boom (particularly youth bulge)
  - The economic and social exclusion of youths stagnate growth and creates social strife (Boko haram, herdsmen, community crashes, violent etc.)
  - Youth bulge has potential to destabilize Southeast region due to tendency to fuel violence. There is a large army of disaffected youths who are susceptible to recruitment into rebel, terrorist groups or for

agitations of self governance of localities/regions etc Countries (like Nigeria) with weak political institutions are most vulnerable to youth bulge related violence and social unrest

- Between 1970-1999, 80% of civil conflicts occurred in nations where 60% of the population or more are under the age of 30yaers (Population Action International, 2007)
- Social unrest and violence is related to youth bulge and alienation but in the case of Nigeria are compounded by corruption, ethno-religious tensions, poverty, poor /weak political institution
- Nigeria is considered ''very young''- meaning that two –thirds of her population, are under 30yaers of age and less than 6% above the age of sixty. Other countries with similar credentials are Pakistan and Afghanistan, among others.
- There is widespread unemployment
- Youths Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEET) constitute additional concept and indicator that reveal high youth vulnerabilities in Nigeria
- Youth disengagement from labour market have immense costs for the individual and society at large (affects youth participation in social activities, democratic and civic engagement, low disposition to vote, low interest in politics and low disposition for voluntary work for political parties)

Reflections on How Alienation Affect Livelihood and Health Status of Youths and Sustainable Development of Southeast Zone of Nigeria

A person's livelihood refers to their means of securing the basic necessities such as food, water, shelter and clothing for survival. It also involves the capacity to acquire above necessities working either individually or as a group by using endowments (both human and material) for meeting the requirements of self and other household needs on a sustainable basis with dignity. The activities are usually carried out repeatedly. For instance, a fisherman's livelihood depends on the availability and accessibility of fish. The concept of livelihood extends to include social and cultural means, i.e. "the command an individual, family, or other social group has over an income and/or bundles of resources that can be used or exchanged to satisfy its needs. "This may involve information, cultural knowledge, social networks and legal rights as well as tools, land and other physical resources (Blaikie, Cannon, Davis, & Wisner, 2004)". A livelihood is a means of making a living. It encompasses people's capabilities, assets, income and activities required to secure the necessities of life. A livelihood is sustainable when it enables people to cope with and recover from shocks and stresses (such as natural disasters and economic or social upheavals) and enhance their well-being and that of future generations without undermining the natural environment or resource base (IFRC 2013).Healthcare service delivery, access to such services and health status of individuals in society constitute major indicators for measuring development and standard of livelihood in a country. However, despite the importance of health to the development of a nation, National health indicators in Nigeria are possibly among the lowest in the world for almost all measurable indices (WHO, 2012, cited in Jamo, 2013). For instance, life expectancy in Nigeria as at 2012 was 48 years compared to 73 years in China and 83 years in Japan, while maternal mortality rate was 1,100 deaths per 100,000 in contrast to 45 and 6 deaths per 100,000 in China and Japan respectively (WHO, 2012). These poor indicators among others, compounded by disposition to alienation among youths in the Southeast zones, negatively affect their health status and livelihoods,

Within the Brundtland Report, the concept ″development", as distinguished from "growth″ focuses on getting "better" rather than getting "bigger". The idea was to have a "qualitative concept incorporating ideas about improvement and progress in the cultural, social and economic dimensions" (Abrahamson 1997:31).

> *"... sustainable development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations"* ((UNCED, 1987:46).

According to the definition given by Brundtland Report (1987), the term sustainable development is usually understood as "intergenerational" equity which would be impossible to achieve in the absence of present-day social equity, if the economic activities of some groups of people continue to jeopardize the well-being of people belonging to other groups or living in other parts of the world. Imagine, for example, that emissions of greenhouse gases, generated mainly by highly industrialized countries, lead to global warming and flooding of certain low-lying islands—resulting in the displacement and impoverishment of entire island nations. Or consider the situation when higher profits of pharmaceutical companies are earned at the cost of millions of poor people being unable to afford medications needed for treating their life- threatening diseases.

According to the more operational (practice-oriented) definition used by the World Bank, sustainable development is "a process of managing a portfolio of assets to preserve and enhance the opportunities people face". The assets that this definition refers to include not just traditionally accounted physical capital, but also natural and human capital. To be sustainable, development must provide for all these assets to grow over time— or at least not to decrease (Last, 2001).

Sustainable development includes economic, environmental, and social sustainability, which can be achieved by rationally managing physical, natural, and human capital. Thus, *s*ustainable development could probably be otherwise called "equitable and balanced," meaning that, in order for development to continue indefinitely, it should balance the interests of different groups of people, within the same generation and among generations, and do so simultaneously in three major interrelated areas–economic, social, and environmental. Therefore, sustainable development is about equity, equality of opportunities for well-being, as well as about comprehensiveness of objectives.

III. CONCLUSIONS

From our discussion on identities and youth alienation in Southeast zone of Nigeria, evidence abounds to show that there is a link between the two concepts. However, in Nigeria different indicators revealed that identities have been poorly managed by successive governments in Nigeria. This has not brought about any meaningful development. Unfortunately, the hope that return of democracy in the country since 1999 in line with global climate is yet to dismantle biased approaches to identity issues and to facilitate sustainable development.. Although, there are individuals, and NGO's committed to and driving change, the organizational support required for sustainability and great impact is still lacking. The challenge is to build robust public institutions with dynamic and visionary leadership (as well as a committed followership that is dedicated to positive change). That stage is what is desirable in Nigeria today to enable her attain political, democratic and economic development.

This paper therefore contends that for alienation among youths of Southeast Nigeria to be curtailed, every culture or social group in the country must be fairly treated, justice must have a universal definition applicable to all the social collectives. More so, identities and democracy should be appropriately manipulated to lead to development, particularly by ensuring the protection of human rights, public participation in budgeting processes and periodic free and fair election. The political leaders must initiate visible intent to implement the social contract principle by being transparent and accountable to the general public on all state matters.

Recommendations: What Works in Attracting and Sustaining Young Talents in South Eastern Nigeria?
   (a) Basic Steps and Policy Enactments that ought to be in Place:
- Brain storming exercises /Reflections on ideal social attitudes and institutions. Role of best intelligence to provide substitute actions or alternatives to stamp out alienation.
- Define causes and justification for the present youth alienation.
- The role of youth work should be central (need for long term youth investment)
- Adoption of anti-radicalism strategy which elevates 'youth development' alongside defence and diplomacy both in principle and practice.
- Reform that will ensure that prospects of young people improve significantly and rapidly in Education, Income, Employment, Training.
- Parents should invest in broadening skills for their wards rather than on narrow set of skills to reduce waiting phase for public sector jobs (which may never materialise)
- Private sector (formal and informal) should be supported by the Government to absorb youths and remove the stigma and insecurity attached to work in the private sector.
- Investment on 'Youth Volunteerism Initiatives'. This is an arrangement where youths volunteer their skills and time to organisations. Such experiences should be taken into cognisance by private and public recruitment agencies in sourcing for talents.
- Introduction of soft technologies and curriculum review in educational system.
- Transform 'Youth Bulge' to 'Demographic Dividend' through right investments toward economically productive population that drives economic gains.
- Adoption of pro-growth norms of' hard work and high investment in youths' (boys and girls alike)
- Extra – curricular activities that allow youths to ventilate
- Apprenticeship scheme should be revitalized and encouraged.
- Micro-credit schemes should be set up by individuals and organizations
- *'Isusu'* contributory scheme and *'nkwu olu'* labour maximization strategy are pro-growth in character and should be strengthened

- Government should create platforms that would better advance youths, provide job satisfaction as well as provide better remuneration..
- Re -negotiating traditional dowry (premarital expenses /rites) to an affordable level.
- Proper family/societal orientation /socialization
- Value reorientation
- Building strong institutions and adoption of   appropriate political culture

(b) Specific Sectors/Opportunities that Young Talents could Explore in Southeast Nigeria

(i) Agricultural Sector (crop cultivation, fishery and animal husbandry),
(ii) Information, Communication and Telecommunication (ICT) Sector (Many young people are found in the various social media platforms like Whatsapp, Facebook, Yahoo etc, therefore its importance in attracting and retaining talents cannot be over emphasized).
(iii) Works and housing Sector,
(iv) Petroleum/oil and gas Sector,
(v) Power and energy Sector,
(vi) Solid minerals/ Mining Sector,
(vii) Transportation Sector,
(viii) Trade and investments and manufacturing/ industrial Sector.
(ix)Health sector including traditional health system
(x) Entertainment Sector: Entertainment is a major thing that attracts young talents in Nigeria in general. Young people want to be celebrities and show off what they have achieved so they tend to go in the way of entertainment. Those who are not entertainers want to be fans of those who entertain and publicly declare it. Harnessing the entertainment industry would bring tangible result.
(xi) Sports and Recreational Sector: Young talents are drawn to sports, dance, drama etc. Companies and organisations organize tournaments where young people compete to win all kinds of prizes.
(xii) Fashion/Makeovers Sector: This area is one area that is trending. Fashion and makeovers was formerly viewed as a female business but today this industry is flooded with young males and females. Many young people do fashion and makeover exhibitions around the country.

(c) Specific Activities/ Ways to Attract and Retain Young Talents in Southeast Nigeria include;

 Make Connections Early: Sectors could provide opportunities for internship, apprenticeship, or co-op during University. These opportunities would not only provide the work experience needed to get promising talents excited about working for them even before they've graduated. It can also help get these sectors pinpoint and get a head start on training the top talent early

 Create A Fun Work Culture: For young talents in the workforce, culture trumps compensation. Most young person prefer to work in a sector with a positive social atmosphere and earn a lower salary than make more money someplace where it's less fun to work. Employers who offer entry-level employees challenging work while also creating an enjoyable culture are at a competitive advantage. Most young person's show incredible agility and pragmatism as they enter a competitive labor market or /industry

Long Term Development Opportunities (Talent for Now and Later): Young talents want chances to learn and grow. Most young person would prefer a sector that provides training in their first job, but that isn't always the case. Offering long-term development opportunities can give any sector a cut above the competition and help them hang onto great talent after making the hire.

 Use Technology to Attract Young Talents. Young people who grew up with the Internet and smart phone apps expect them to be used everywhere. Younger people expect less physical hardship because of all the technical advances we've witnessed in the past few years. Even in looking for a sector to join they're using digital tools and platforms to look for work. Most sectors in Nigeria are yet to fully utilize digital technology and inculcate it into their work process. This would prove helpful in attracting these young talents.

Show Easy Means for Advancement: Many young people want both creative work cultures as well as environments that promote transparency and give them a chance to advance quickly. Such opportunities should be accommodated in both small companies and start-ups, as well as in bigger companies.

Skill Acquisition/Empowerment Programmes: Majority of skill acquisition programmes have witnessed more than 50% attendance of young people. Such programmes afford them the opportunity to garners skills in the area of their passion. Today skill acquisition programme is a major part of the NYSC scheme. These programmers have been put in place especially to make young people self employed and financially independent.

Camp Meeting: Organizing camp meetings for young talents affords them the opportunity to be by themselves away from the prying eyes of adults. This is particularly for those young ones who are seeking some form of independence from their parents.

Reality Shows: In recent times young people want to participate in and watch on television various reality shows. These shows have up to 80% young person's participation. Such avenue will be relevant in attracting and retaining talents in Southeast Nigeria.

Quiz Competition: Quiz competitions in the science and arts have a potential to attract young talent. This is especially for those who will stimulate growth in science, technology and the academia

Innovation Exposition: There are many talents who want to showcase their innovative ideas but lack opportunity. Putting together programs for young talents to exhibit their innovative idea as well as supporting them to bring their ideas to the market.

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