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The four-year programme (2017-21) is funded by the European Union and implemented by the British Council.

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ADDRESSING POLITICAL EXCLUSION, YOUTH RESTIVENESS AND CONFLICTS IN YOBE STATE

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF POLITICAL EXCLUSION

This report was commissioned by the Managing Conflict in Nigeria (MCN) a British Council programme funded by the European Union. The report was necessitated by an increasing concern about the implications of continued exclusion of youths on security and stabilisation initiatives in Yobe State. For the purpose of this study, 'youth' is defined as a young man or a young woman aged 18-40 years old. The growing awareness among Yobe youths about global and national social movements for youth political participation has prompted agitation among Yobe youths against their exclusion in elections and political leadership. This was evident with the large number of youth that indicated verbal interest to contest for elective positions in the run up to the primary elections of the 2019 general elections. The political aspirations of the disaffected youths were not realized as they also failed to secure tickets for the position given the context of money politics. The trend of youth exclusion in politics manifested in the May 2018 ward congresses of the ruling party. This is because the resolution of the party that led to the retention of the existing party executives and delegates resulted in automatic exclusion of the youths.

Although the Nigerian constitution allows youths to contest for some offices, the political processes, which emphasise money politics, robs youth of effective participation. Consequently, there is growing realisation across the country that effective youth participation can only be achieved through



affirmative action. This is the main proposition of Nigerians involved in the not-too-young-to-run campaign. The outcomes of elections in Yobe State show that dominant political actors are apparently not swayed by the advocacy for increased youth participation. This has fuelled resentment among Yobe youths as evidenced in the critical commentary among Yobe youths on various social media platforms. The feelings of exclusion among youths clearly have implications for post-conflict stabilization and development initiatives in Yobe State. It is in the light of this background that a research on political exclusion, youth restiveness and conflict in Yobe State is considered germane in a post-conflict Yobe State.

OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study is to establish the causes of youth political exclusion with a view to addressing them in order to foster sustainable peace and security in Yobe State. The study will more specifically be guided by the following objectives:

- 1 To examine the social, economic, political, security and ideological factors that contribute to youth political exclusion in Yobe State**
- 2 To examine the implications of youth political exclusion to conflict dynamics in Yobe State**
- 3 To examine the effectiveness and challenges of the responses of state actors to youth political exclusion in Yobe State**
- 4 To examine the effectiveness and challenges of responses of non-state actors to youth exclusion in Yobe State**
- 5 To identify policy options for addressing youth political exclusion in Yobe State**

Study area

The research took place within eight, out of the seventeen, Local Government Areas in Yobe State viz.: Bade, Damaturu, Fune, Geidam, Gujba, Nguru, Potiskum and Tarmuwa. Each of the LGAs has a Community Peace and Safety Partnership platform convened by different organisations and institutions with the support of MCN. While Bade and Nguru; Fune and Potiskum; and Geidam and Tarmuwa were selected to reflect each of the three senatorial zones in the state, Damaturu was selected because it is the state capital. Gujba was selected for the study because it is

recovering from the impact of the insurgency. Furthermore, each of the local government headquarters is either a sub-urban area or an emerging sub-urban area witnessing a bulge of youths that are daily becoming enlightened about the place of youths in political participation. All the LGAs selected for the research have history of youth agitation in respect of youth participation in political leadership with some resulting in violent conflict.

Sample and sources of data

The study included 24 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) – 3 in each LGA. Participants included young men and women (including those with disabilities), representatives of political parties and community associations. Each FGD is made up of 10 participants. A total of 240 persons were involved in the FGDs across the state. 48 key stakeholders in issues that relate to youth participation in political leadership (6 per LGA) were engaged in key informant interviews. They include officials of the state and local governments, security agencies, youths, community and religious leaders, serving and former legislators, former members of the state executive council and leaders of political parties in the LGAs. Observation techniques were applied to collect data from meetings of youth associations, political parties and community groups. The secondary data were sourced from government publications, official documents of political parties, newspaper reports, research reports and social media postings on youth exclusion for the purpose of content analysis.

FINDINGS

Structural and facilitating causes of youth exclusion from political leadership in Yobe State

An overwhelming number of the respondents agreed that youth are excluded from political leadership in Yobe State. However, they all emphasised that young women are the most marginalised in political leadership in the state. They provided some explanation on factors responsible for youth exclusion from political leadership in Yobe State. The factors cited were lack of financial capacity, lack of leadership experience, lack of internal democracy in political parties that favours youths, inadequate voter/civic education, fear of victimization, fear of social security (concern for job security) and negative self-concept (low self-esteem).¹ In addition to these factors, cultural restrictions/barriers were mentioned as other factors that lead to the exclusion of young women from political leadership.²

¹ While lack of financial capacity could affect all categories of politicians irrespective of age, poverty and unemployment rate among youth in Yobe State is high as revealed by the report of the Yobe Economic Summit and National Bureau of Statistics thus making them more susceptible in this respect. Furthermore, lack of internal democracy in political parties excludes politicians from leadership, their age or gender notwithstanding. However, respondents emphasized that youths are deliberately marginalized except they have a 'godfather'. In addition, respondents agreed that the fear of victimization is a factor that is apparent in the system. Lack of experience, inadequate civic/voter education, lack of job security and low self esteem are factors that are exclusively related to youths than older persons in the system.

² The study found that there are no cultural barriers against young adults seeking for political leadership. However, many respondents emphasized that the culture in Yobe State does not allow women to hold political positions.

Among all the factors, lack of financial capacity and lack of internal democracy in political parties were significantly recurring in the responses made by the participants as the major factors propelling the exclusion of youth from political leadership. An overwhelming majority of key informants cited lack of financial capacity as the major impediment to youth participation in political leadership. Respondents expressed concern on the exorbitant amount one pays to secure party nomination and expression of interest forms and the huge amount one needs to mobilize supporters to vote for one. Majority of respondents from key informant interview schedules and focus group discussions respectively showed concerns that even if a young woman has the financial capacity to fund her campaign, she would be faced with a lot of challenges that border on cultural beliefs that are inimical to the inclusion of women in political leadership.³ Respondents agreed that lack of defined affirmative action on youth inclusion in political leadership is another reason necessitating youth exclusion from political leadership.

Community perceptions on youth participation in political leadership

Responses indicate communities are not in support of the exclusion of some category of youth from political leadership. However, the perception depends on the part of the community one belongs. It was found that Islam supports youth participation in political leadership. However, the support is exclusively for the male youth.⁴ The Islamic scholars interviewed emphasize that a youth must be 40⁵ years before he should be allowed to hold political leadership position. On the part of the Christian community the support is for both male and female youths. Representatives of the Christian community interviewed were of the view that a young adult of twenty five and above could be allowed to hold political office (by election or appointment). The consensus among members of the religious communities (both Islamic and Christian) is that youths are the life-wire of the society and religion. Therefore, they need to be given the opportunity to participate actively in politics by not only canvassing for votes for older aspirants but also vying for political positions and being appointed into positions that would make them assume political leadership at the executive or legislative levels.

All the respondents acknowledged the roles played by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in agitating for inclusion of youth in political leadership. Respondents indicated that Civil Society Organisations have vehemently opposed

youth exclusion from political leadership in the state. The study found that programmes working on electoral reform and youth empowerment have supported CSOs to organize sensitization workshop on civic education thus raising the consciousness of youth on the need for youth inclusion in political leadership.⁶

While the representative of the political parties interviewed in the key informant interview schedules indicated that their political parties view youths as essential in political leadership, almost all the youth that participated in the focus group discussions stated that in principle the political parties appear to favour youth participation in political leadership but in practice youths are excluded from political leadership. Youth indicated that no political party has ever overtly denied youths from vying for political position. But then, the conditions that the political parties bring up are adequate enough to make youths to be frustrated from contesting for positions.

The responses sourced from the key informant interview schedules and the focus group discussions indicated that while all members of the community are in favour of youth inclusion in political leadership, the preference is for the male youth. Supporters of female inclusion in political leadership are viewed as encouraging an aberration. Young female that expressed interest in contesting for political offices are considered wayward, especially if they are not married.⁷

Youth participation in political leadership can be inimical to their safety. 100% of respondents to the key informant interview schedules and the focus group discussions agree that the safety of young political office holders could be at risk especially when they are not the popular candidates.⁸ Political opponents can hire thugs that would physically attack a young aspirant into political office. The social media is also used to vilify the personality of young people contesting for elective positions with older politicians. Content analysis of such hate speeches and character assassination against young adults aspiring for political leadership during the events leading to the primaries of the 2019 general elections were found to be from fellow young adults.⁹ The background in Yobe State is you rarely see older people and politicians using the social media to attack contestants.

Perception of youths holding political leadership positions about themselves

Respondents agree that some youths have been elected into political leadership position, especially at the local government level from 1999 to date. Only a very few of

³ This is not applicable to young men.

⁴ While male youths are supported to hold headship positions like president, governor, leadership of legislature, LGA chairman etc.; experts in Islamic jurisprudence and governance concurred and stated that except for unavoidable reasons and in rare and exceptional cases young women should only be allowed to hold supporting positions like commissioner, adviser, membership of legislature etc.

⁵ Validation of this position by experts in Islamic jurisprudence and governance revealed that there is no explicit specification on the age at which one is to hold leadership position. What is considered is whether the individual is "matured and responsible".

⁶ For example, Hope Interactive.

⁷ Female respondents stated this in all the LGAs.

⁸ While this is not necessarily delimited to the youths, it should be noted that youths are more vulnerable in this case. It is believed by the respondents that some youths could be rash and recalcitrant thus making them more susceptible to danger.

⁹ The content of one of the hate speeches reads: "when did he join the party? He is a gold digger who wants to reap where he did not sow." Another reads: "we don't support you and we are against your supporters." Tell your candidate to go to the school of practical politics to acquire the certificate of politics. We are against him."

them were appointed as commissioners or special advisers at an age under 35 years during the period under review. In consequence, respondents expressed their positions as to how these few youths that held political leadership positions during the period under review viewed themselves when in office. Qualitative analysis of the responses revealed that it depends on the individual. Thus, there was no need for over-generalization. However, there was a general agreement that most of the youths that served at the local government executive and legislative councils; and those that served at the state executive and house of assembly between 1999 and 2003 viewed themselves as servant-leaders. They have respect for the worth and dignity of fellow Yobe State citizens. They have respect for elders.

Implications of youth exclusion from political leadership on youth restiveness

All the respondents agreed that youth exclusion from political leadership is a trigger of youth restiveness. They stated that in the run up to the primaries of the 2019 general elections, there were instances of youth agitation for their total inclusion in political leadership. All the Yobe State House of Assembly constituencies had youths vying for the positions of the State House Assembly on the platform of the major political parties in the state. There were youths that contested for the positions of members of House of Representatives and the Senate in all the constituencies in the state.

Furthermore, in all the constituencies, there were agitated youths seeking for change of representation from older people to a relatively younger generation. Of concern in the build up to the primaries were the vehement positions of youth groups that power must shift to them. Terse warnings were expressed in the social media, and as youths go about mobilizing support for their candidature. Content analysis of the manifestoes of the youths that aspired for political leadership positions in the build up to the primaries indicated agitation for change. The results of the primary elections in some local government areas were greeted with violence. Where there was no violence indices of conflict indicate that youths were threatening to vote for youths that were given opportunity to contest on the platform of political parties other than the ones their favourite candidates (youths) were not given the opportunity to contest.

Key informants in their analysis asserted that unless the issue of youth exclusion from political leadership is addressed there is likelihood that youth could be easily lured into violent radical groups, which would come up with a revolutionary stance that would entice youths with leadership possibilities.

Respondents argued that lack of involving youth in political leadership has negative effect on good governance. They stated that if leadership recruitment is not prioritized for the youths, by the time they become leaders without leadership experience when they were youths what they would exhibit is bad governance, which would trigger violence.

The political implication of youth exclusion from participating in a political party is that it would make youths to decamp from one political party to the other. This would not only further reveal the lack of ideology in the youths that have quest for political leadership, but also heat up the polity as people who feel they have common enemies ally to fight for a course. In addition, it could make youths not allowed to gain political leadership positions to form clusters that would promote victimhood or victimization narratives that would make gullible youths to consider constituted authorities as oppressive and insensitive to the needs and aspirations of youths, thus making the youths non-conformist dissidents and prone to radical extremism. Youths not allowed to gain political leadership may attempt to move from their rural areas to urban areas in search for better opportunities. They may as well decide to migrate to foreign countries via legal or illegal ways to escape the seemingly violation of their rights to be voted for or appointed to political leadership positions. All these have negative social, political and economic implications on the state.



Respondents emphasized that youth exclusion from political leadership has led to the emergence of hate speeches targeted at political party leaders, government officials and older people aspiring for political leadership. The social media contains such hate speeches emanating from youths because fellow youths were excluded from political leadership.

Youth exclusion from political leadership has also led to assault and vandalism. If not for the fact that there was a covert partial restriction on political rallies during the build up to the primary election in the run up to the 2019 general elections, violent clashes between supporters of youths and older politicians would have been imminent. By the time the restriction was lifted most of the youths have been technically excluded because they could not afford to buy the expression of interest and nomination forms.

Just like youth groups and other civil society organisations, youths at individual level have been playing significant roles in ensuring that youth exclusion from political leadership is curbed. Respondents stated that youths use various platforms to discuss the issue of youth exclusion from political leadership and calling on their fellows to support youths that are aspiring to hold political leadership positions. The platforms commonly used by youths in this respect are the social media and oral discourse.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Extant laws and the Electoral Act give Nigerian youths the rights to contest for some political positions and get appointed into political office at the local government, state and federal level. The recent past revealed the accomplishment of youths to see that the not-too-young-run bill come to fruition. The existence of constitutional provisions and bills that youth should be allowed to participate actively in political leadership via contests and appointments notwithstanding, youths feel they are being excluded from political leadership. In Yobe State, as at October 2018, the average age of the current members of the State Executive Council is indicative to be above fifty-five years.¹⁰ The indicative average age of the members of the Yobe State House of Assembly, as at October 2018, is forty-five years. In the same vein, youths are insignificantly represented in the headship and membership of the governing councils and boards of government institutions. Thus, it is envisioned that a concerted effort towards providing opportunity for the youths to be actively engaged in political leadership would not only serve as a veritable avenue for youth empowerment but also propel development in the state in an atmosphere of peace and security.

The data collected from this study via interviews and observation reveal that state and non-state actors are aware that the youth bulge in the state and the low-level of youth participation in political leadership could negatively affect the sustainability of the development gains made by the present state administration in the state. It is in view of this that the state government has developed youth empowerment programmes that could enhance youth involvement in the socio-economic development thus augmenting their lack of participation in political leadership. However, with the emerging belief on the parts of the youths that they could contribute more to the socio-economic and political development of the state when given more opportunities for involvement in political leadership, agitation by youths in this respect has been intensified. It is evident from the study that the state government is in full support of constitutional provisions and extant federal government policy statements that encourage youth participation in political leadership.

Despite the positions of state actors on the readiness of the state government to allow youths to contest for elective positions and get appointed into political office,¹¹ practices by national party structures,¹² local

politicians and the community indicate youth exclusion from political leadership. The female youth is at a disadvantage than the male youth. This is given some cultural considerations that see female youths as having some physiological, social and psychological constraints that could affect their effectiveness and efficiency when they assume political leadership.

This study contends that this narrative could change for good. The state government should leverage on its commitment to youth political and economic empowerment, the support of religious and civil society organisations and the pool of youths (male and female) that have the potential to assume political learners positions via learning, and adapting to, the rubrics of political leadership to enact and implement policies that would scale up youth inclusion in political leadership in the state.

The following recommendations to policy makers and other stakeholders are made in the light of the findings of this study:

1 Civil society organisations, youth groups, research centres and programmes working on youth empowerment in the state should embark on purposeful advocacy to the Yobe State Executive Council, the Yobe State House of Assembly, the traditional institutions and political parties on the need for an affirmative action or law reserving some elective positions exclusively for youths.

In order not to breach provisions in the constitution and Electoral Act, it is recommended that the affirmative action or policy should peg the eligibility to contest for councillorship and be appointed as a supervisory councillor at the local government level to be exclusively for youths.

There should also be an affirmative action that any local government chairmanship candidate that is not a youth must pick a person that would not exceed the age bracket of youth by the end of their first term as the vice chairman.

Other elective positions at the state and national level should be left open for all people irrespective of whether they are youths or not.

2 In the light of the above, civil society and youth organisations at the respective local governments should engage with the legislators and members of state executive representing their respective local government areas in town hall meetings or open dialogue sessions to lobby that they (political office holders) sponsor or co-sponsor private bills or support the enactment of the law, affirmative action or policy. However,

¹⁰ Some of the members were elected when they were under-forty years. With the passage of time and re-elections they cannot be considered youths at present.

¹¹ It should be noted that religious and civil society organisations are in support of youth participation in political leadership. They believe that it is an effective leadership recruitment avenue.

¹² It should be noted that except for price of nomination forms for LGA Chairmanship and councillorship positions, the prices of other nomination forms are fixed by the national leadership of the parties. Male youths are expected to purchase the forms at the same amount with older male politicians. Female aspirants and persons living with disabilities are given some level of discounts.

research centres and programmes working on youth empowerment should sensitize the civil society and youth organisations on the strategies they should adopt to achieve this objective.

3 The political parties and the state electoral commission should be sensitized to impose affordable fees for the purchase of nomination and other relevant forms.

4 Civil society organisations, youth groups, research centres and programmes working on youth empowerment in the state should also push for the enactment of an affirmative action reserving some percentage of political appointments for youth. This can be achieved via well designed advocacy to the Yobe State Executive Council, the Yobe State House of Assembly, the traditional institutions and political parties. The objective is to make the Yobe State Executive Council and the Yobe State House of Assembly to consider promulgating an affirmative action or law that would reserve at least 30% of appointments into the state executive council, special advisers, senior special assistants, special assistants, members of governing councils of tertiary institutions, and membership of boards of government agencies to individuals, irrespective of gender, that would not exceed the age bracket of youth by the end of the executive governor's subsisting term of office.

Research centres and programmes working on youth empowerment should consider sensitizing civil society and youth organisations on the strategies to be adopted to get the buy in of the executive and legislative arms of government, council of traditional rulers, religious leaders and political parties in this respect.

5 The Centre for Research, Innovation and Linkages, Yobe State University, Damaturu should develop a concept note on how to attract experts from other research centres and academic departments in the tertiary institutions in the state to develop a strategic plan on the reinvigoration, formalization and coordination of youth assemblies at the state and local government levels. The focus of the

formalization would involve the development of a modus operandi recognized by the state government that would not only regulate the activities of the assemblies but also make each assembly serve as an avenue where the voices of the youth would be projected to state and non-state actors for action.

6 The Centre for Research, Innovation and Linkages, Yobe State University, Damaturu and relevant centres and departments at the tertiary education level, National Orientation Agency, the ministry in charge of youth development etc. should organize and implement intensive trainings for youths periodically so as to enhance the capacity of the youths on the principles of youth participation in political leadership.

7 The Centre for Research, Innovation and Linkages, Yobe State University, Damaturu and relevant centres and departments at the tertiary education level, National Orientation Agency, the ministry in charge of youth development, the print and electronic media etc. should emphasize the need for intensive civic education for youths via curricular and extra-curricular opportunities at all levels of education.

8 Given the misconstrued cultural belief on young women participating in political leadership as well as the age one is supposed to hold political leadership position, programmes working on youth empowerment should consider supporting religious leaders and scholars to publish leaflets and use the mainstream media and other platforms (symposia, conferences, public lectures etc) to sensitize the populace on the religious requirement for one to hold political leadership position and the place of women in political leadership. The Ministry of Religious Affairs should come up with a policy that religious organisations and centres in the state organizes symposia, conferences, public lectures etc. on a theme related to youth (male and female) and political participation at least once a year and report the lessons learnt to the ministry.

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