



ISSN 2336-3274 (Print) ISSN 2570-7558 (Online)

<https://edu.uhk.cz/africa>

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**The Problem of Incorporating Entrepreneurship
Courses into the Youth Service Programme in
Nigeria**

Author:

Adeyemi Balogun – Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS), University Bayreuth, Germany

Recommended citation:

Balogun, A. (2018). We are going to join millions of unemployed graduates. *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society*, 6(1), 85–106. <https://doi.org/10.26806/modafr.v6i1.165>



University of Hradec Králové
Philosophical Faculty

**“WE ARE GOING TO JOIN MILLIONS
OF UNEMPLOYED GRADUATES.”
THE PROBLEM OF INCORPORATING
ENTREPRENEURSHIP COURSES INTO THE
YOUTH SERVICE PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA**

Adeyemi Balogun

Abstract: As part of the measures to deal with the rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria, entrepreneurship programmes were incorporated into the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme, which was initially meant to promote common national awareness among graduate youths. While this experiment created a problem due to the NYSC posting policy, the empowerment programmes face other challenges that constrain their outcome. The posting policy privileged the allocation of graduate youths to work establishments where many of them are either under-utilised or incompetent. The NYSC empowerment programmes, on the other hand, grappled with the problems of corruption by job empowerment agencies, the negative attitude of corps members towards vocational and technical skill acquisition and inadequate resources to assist corps members who want to put their business plans into practice. The present paper concludes that the NYSC posting policy and empowerment programmes offer corps members little chance for the acquisition of relevant skills needed for self-development and is unable to properly address the problem of unemployment in Nigeria.

Keywords: *youth, entrepreneurship, unemployment, vocational education, nation-building, NYSC*

Introduction

Over the past three decades, there has been an increase of youth unemployment in Nigeria (Roopanarine 2013; Akande 2014; Ighobor 2013). In 2011, the National Bureau of Statistics in Nigeria estimated that the overall youth unemployment rate stood at 23.9%, rising from

21.4% the previous year (NBS 2011: 10). The youth unemployment rate in rural areas accounted for 25.6% while the figure was 17.1% in urban areas. Since the late 1980s, one of the measures taken by the government to address this problem was to incorporate vocational and entrepreneurship courses into the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme. The NYSC was established in 1973 for graduate youths (also called corps members) as part of the country's post-civil war reconstruction policies to promote nation-building among the diverse groups of Nigerians. This objective was expected to be achieved by deploying the youths to other states different from their own ethnic groups so that they can work with and relate to other Nigerian groups. By introducing entrepreneurship education into the NYSC, the objective was to encourage the youths to learn various skills that may interest them, thereby becoming self-reliant by setting up businesses of their own after the service programme. However, more than thirty years after the vocational and entrepreneurship courses were introduced into the service programme, little impact has been made in addressing the unemployment situation of graduates in Nigeria. This is due to problems in the operationalisation of the entrepreneurship programme. The problem could be understood by considering the relation between entrepreneurship programme and youth service and how they are operationalised within the structure of the NYSC.

Vocational and entrepreneurship skills are considered useful to address the problem of unemployment and impact positively on the growth of the economy (Taylor and Creech 2012; Okafor 2011). In the same vein, many scholars are of the view that youth service is useful for dealing with several problems confronting the youths and society such as unemployment, drug abuse, cultism and integration (Sherraden and Eberly 1982: 179–187). Given the similarity in goals of the two programmes to address unemployment, it is possible to conclude that those who undergo the NYSC programme are better positioned to acquire relevant entrepreneurial skills and be job creators after the service year. But this is far from being the case because the goal of national integration of the NYSC usually takes precedence over that of entrepreneurship programmes. This goal is responsible for the mandatory NYSC policy that all corps members must be deployed to work in establishments called place of primary assignment (PPA) such as schools, government ministries, banks

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and telecommunications industries. This policy prevents those who are willing to devote full attention to a vocation rather than working in the PPAs. A major problem that also arises is that most of those deployed to the PPAs are either largely under-utilised or incompetent to work in them. As a result, only few people could be said to have skills for self-employment after the service period. It is important to point out that this attempt to engage the imagination of graduate youths towards entrepreneurship skills is also affected by other factors such as the negative attitude which most of them have towards vocational skills, as well as the problem of funding and corruption which beset the empowerment programmes of the National Youth Service Corps.

The problem observed in the attempt to introduce graduate youths to entrepreneurship skills shows how political consideration is linked with entrepreneurship development and the overall impact on youth empowerment. This can be contextualised within Nigeria's political history where the challenges of ethno-religious diversity usually inform political considerations in policy making. At the same time, the NYSC experience shows the challenges of many public institutions and interventions on socio-economic development in Nigeria and other African countries. Using the example of Nigeria, Akande (2014) discussed how the problems of coordination, inefficiency and corruption have affected youth empowerment programmes. The present paper argues that the problem of these initiatives is also related to the definitions of their goals and strategies employed to achieve them. In this regard, the paper contributes to earlier studies on challenges of entrepreneurship and youth studies in Africa (Richardson, Howarth, and Finnegan 2004; Legas 2015; Oketch 2007).

This paper explores the question why the attempt to use vocational and entrepreneurship programmes to solve the problem of graduate unemployment through the instrumentality of youth service has achieved minimal results in Nigeria. The analysis of this question is based on personal experience and that of corps members whom I interacted with between 2010, when I participated in the NYSC programme, and 2015, as well as on published reports in newspapers and online media. This experience provides information about the activities of corps members during their service and how they imagined their lives to be after the service programme. Official documents from the NYSC and other government agencies are also used, which provide

information on the history of the service programme and its activities. The paper in the first section gives a background to the topic. Section two discusses how youth service and vocational and entrepreneurship skills are construed as relevant instruments to deal with the problem of youth unemployment. Section three focuses on the history of the NYSC and its deployment policies, while section four explores the various skill acquisition programmes of the NYSC. Section five analyses the problems of youth service and entrepreneurship courses of the NYSC, and section six provides a conclusion.

The Instrumentality of Youth Service

Many scholars have argued that youth service, in which young people are engaged in community works, is instrumental for community and national development (Barwick 2006; Perry and Thomson 2003; Perold, Stroud and Sherraden 2003; Jastrzab, Blomquist, Masker and Orr 1997; Tolman et al. 2001). Youth service is considered to have benefits for young people and the communities they render the service. It is also emphasised in many studies that youth service can help them to increase their motivation to volunteer, develop social skills, enhance confidence and self-esteem, influence and expand career choices, increase employment rate, improve well-being and health, promote cultural understanding, and create public facilities (McBride, Benitez and Sherraden 2003; Devlin and Gunning 2006). In addition, youth service is regarded as a civic service, which provides an alternative to military service much needed for the task of nation-building (McBride, Benitez and Sherraden 2003: 67-8). These various goals are some of the major reasons why youth service programmes have grown in many parts of the world.

Earlier studies by Sherraden and Eberly (1982) showed that service is demanded from the youth because of the problem of unemployment, drug abuse, alcoholism, violence, crime and educational imbalance, most of which affect them. It is expected that they would be reformed and be productive for themselves and the community through this service. Landrum, Eberly and Sherraden (1982) also identify three significant perspectives to explain why the youths are called upon to serve the community. One of these is the human development perspective, which considers service as a form of activity that shapes the abilities and character of people that educational institutions

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cannot inculcate. The second perspective considers young people as a national resource whose energy, flexibility and innovativeness can be used to deal with social and economic needs beyond the reach of existing institutions. The third perspective considers that young people are needed to address social problems like crime, drug abuse and unemployment.

However, many youth service programmes are facing serious challenges across the world, which has raised doubts about their supposed benefits. Many countries face the problem of finance to keep the programme running, while others are not convinced that the programme has helped to address the socio-economic problems they are established to deal with (Obadare 2007 and 2005). In Nigeria, the youth service scheme is considered by many to be a deception by the government to give an impression of its commitment to nation-building (Madunagu 2004; Aturu 2011). This perception has largely grown because of the inadequate attention to the welfare needs of corps members and how to keep them employed after the service period. But the Nigerian government found a way to review and reinvent the scheme to adjust to the challenges of youth unemployment. This review assumed that youth service could help to address the problem of unemployment, and it supports the evidence across the world that entrepreneurship programmes could be delivered at different levels for people with varying socio-economic and academic backgrounds (Chappell, 2003; Aring 2011; Education International 2009). The preference for a choice usually depends on various factors relating to the target community and the goal of agencies involved in the programme. Their expected outcomes equally depend on the policies and strategies deployed to achieve them. It is within this perspective that the NYSC entrepreneurship experiment could be understood.

The NYSC: goals and deployment policies

The NYSC was established in 1973 with the goal of promoting national unity through the development of common ties among the youths of the nation (NYSC Decree 1973). This goal became paramount after the bloody coup of 1966 and the civil war of 1967–70 had revealed the peak of critical political and socio-economic crises during the first decade of Nigeria's independence (Falola and Heaton 2008: 158-80;

Nnoli 1995). Most importantly, the crisis exposed the deep ethno-religious biases, mutual suspicion and politics of Nigerian leaders who birthed the nation into independence. As a result, Nigerians were assumed to know very little of each other because the colonial government had only amalgamated them without being fully aware of their different historical backgrounds (Otite 2000; Nnoli 1980). It was also assumed that most members of the political class that were expected to bridge this gap lack discipline and patriotism towards the nation (*Daily Sketch* 1972: 4).

To address these problems, Nigeria's military government under Yakubu Gowon (1966–1975) considered that Nigerians needed to know themselves and interact more closely to eradicate the mutual suspicion and prejudice which they harbour towards each other. It argued that those who should lead the nation in the future must be taught the values of discipline, hardwork and patriotism to the nation (Sanda 1976). These became the major rationales for establishing the NYSC for graduates of tertiary institutions by Gowon's government in 1973. There was a nationwide protest by university lecturers and students who challenged the need to employ graduate students rather than other Nigerian groups for this service scheme. But the government opted for them because they were considered as intellectuals who understood the challenges of nation-building and could overcome them better than those with little educational training (Balogun 2015).

To achieve its main goal, the objective of the scheme was to ensure that corps members "are assigned to jobs in states other than their states of origin," and that "each group, assigned to work together, is as representative of the country as far as possible" (NYSC 1973). This process was expected to foster closer interaction and facilitate more knowledge of each corps member's differences. Similarly, the government hoped that the scheme would help corps members to seek permanent employment in their PPAs, thereby encouraging them to also settle down as residents and integrate themselves into their host communities.

The principal parameter used for the distribution of corps members is based on the equality of states (Obasa 1995). This principle ensures that all the states of the federation have corps members deployed for national service. The second factor is the ability of the states to

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absorb and utilise the services of corps members. This is necessary to avoid cases of rejection of corps members in places where they are not needed. The third factor is posting made on concessional grounds. Owing to this, married women are free to choose where they want to serve. In such cases, the NYSC recommends the state of residence of their spouses. Corps members with a history of health-related problems can be posted to areas where the hospitals that keep their medical history are located. Graduates from institutions abroad are also given a fair hearing concerning where they intend to be deployed. The fourth factor is a posting made on demand by certain organisations including federal government establishments, agencies and tertiary institutions.

The NYSC ensures that this posting is done based on the academic qualifications of corps members. This is to ensure that their knowledge is maximally utilised (Obasa 1995; NYSC 1973). While the NYSC is not mandated to secure permanent employment for corps members, the distribution of corps members to the PPAs is expected to enhance their chances of employment in these PPAs. Many corps members have been employed in their former PPAs because of this policy. On the other hand, a majority continued to be thrown into the labour market. This informed the perception of many Nigerians that the NYSC is also contributing to the problem of unemployment because of its supply of cheap labour to employers that ought to employ properly paid staff (Udoh 1983; Diribe 1984; Shadare and Elegbede 2012). However, as this study will show, this is only one part of the crisis.

Entrepreneurship and Nation-Building: The 1993 Decree

By the late 1980s, many Nigerians questioned the rationale for not scrapping the NYSC since other post-war reconstruction programmes had been completed by this period. Incidentally, this was also the period when Nigeria experienced a deep economic crisis that led to an increase in the problem of unemployment, poverty, crimes, insecurity, cultism, drug abuse, destitution, ethno-religious violence, among others (Adebayo 2013; NCEMA 2004). Many graduate youths also faced the problem of unemployment in this period. Owing to this, the government under Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993) decided to review the NYSC in a way that would enable the agency to help

address the problem. It revoked the 1973 Decree establishing the NYSC and promulgated a new one with the objective “to enable Nigerian youths acquire the spirit of self-reliance by encouraging them to develop skills for self-employment” (NYSC Decree 1993). In section 1 (3e), the decree emphasised the objective of the NYSC to further “contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy” (ibid.). These additions imply that while the 1973 Decree considers the promotion of national unity to be an end, the 1993 Decree regards the development of Nigerian youths and the nation’s economy as ends. These objectives ensured that the NYSC was transformed from being just a post-war reconstruction programme to an agency that also addresses the problem of youth unemployment and the development of the nation’s economy.

A more important implication of this policy is how the government links Nigeria’s economic development and youth empowerment with the objective of nation-building. This does not appear to be a cause for concern because nation-building is not only an attempt to create common awareness and integration among diverse ethnic groups, it also involves the need to encourage economic growth and development of the people (Hippler 2002; Brock 2001). What remains a problem is how the NYSC’s objective of national integration and common awareness posed a challenge to the emphasis on entrepreneurial development for graduate youths. Before examining this challenge, it is also important to understand the nature of entrepreneurial courses that were offered to corps members and the outcome of these programmes.

NYSC Empowerment Programmes

The NYSC entrepreneurship courses started with technical and vocational education training (TVET) in the late 1980s. TVET is widely supported by international organisations in different parts of the world and has been used to intervene in the problem of youth unemployment (Taylor and Creech 2012; Brixiová, Ncube and Bicaba 2014). The argument in favour of TVET is that skills learnt in this process are considered to give people life-long training and help them to produce goods and services that will be useful for themselves and society (Aring 2011; Okafor 2011; Udofia, Ekpo and Akpan 2012). In

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effect, such productions are expected to lead to an increase in national production. It is traditionally assumed that TVET offers hope to people who are weak to pass through the high academically inclined school system. Middle level technicians would be created among such students when they acquire TVET (Psacharopoulos 1997). Beyond this assumption, TVET is a kind of education that could direct the attitude of the youths to manual works away from white collar jobs which are scarce to get in the labour market (Middleton, Ziderman and Adams 1993).

To facilitate TVET, the NYSC collaborates with the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) which was established for the purpose. The NDE focuses on training young people in such skills as carpentry, welding, tailoring, printing, painting, electrical engineering and bricklaying. The intervention of the NDE usually commences with an awareness programme for corps members on the nature of trades and skills that are available to them. During the programme, they are encouraged to volunteer for any trade of their choice which would be supervised by the NDE in their training workshops. Successful trainees are expected to be given start-up funding to set up their own businesses. However, it has not been easy to ascertain the exact number of trainees that have undergone the NDE programme since it began. Yet it is discovered that most corps members do not volunteer for this course because they consider it below their educational status.¹ One of the earliest reports for the scheme showed that between 1987 and 1989, NDE organised training for 82,772 NYSC corps members and for 15,789 unemployed graduates of tertiary institutions (Edet 1991: 20). Out of these trainees, 2,335 received loans totalling N65,805,075 or 330,323.06 USD. A 2010 annual report of the agency also revealed that 138,226 corps members benefited from its programme (NDE 2010).

Some governmental and non-governmental agencies also collaborate with the NYSC to tackle the problem of graduate unemployment. Foremost among them is the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), together with partner agencies such as Africa Leadership Forum (ALF), Opportunities Industrialization Centres International (OICI), and CEDR-University of Nigeria (EDC 2013). Around 2008, the bank introduced a Venture Prize Competition and NYSC Entrepreneurship Training Programme to sensitise corps members on the need to look

1 Interview 1, conducted on 17 December 2013

towards self-employment after their service years. These programmes were used to introduce corps members to the basics of “writing good investment feasibility reports, which is expected to enhance their chances of accessing financial services from banks” (Sanusi 2012: 7-8). They were also used to train corps members on how to “develop and nurture their pet projects into big business outfits that can eventually contribute to the development of the nation’s economy” (ibid). After the sensitisation, CBN encouraged participants to develop viable business plans for themselves. Corps members whose proposals are adjudged feasible are to be given soft loans to start up their own businesses at the end of the service year. In 2013, the Entrepreneurship Education Centre (EDC) which was set up by CBN to oversee this programme reported that it trained a total of 18,167 clients; 5,571 males and 12,596 females between 2008 and 2013. Out of this number, only 5,199 were graduate youths while others were non-graduates. It further noted that 222 new jobs were created in the same period, while 715 trainees assessed N96,460,599 or 484,205.21 USD to start up their businesses. In all, the EDC reported that their trainees represented 35% business owners in this period while 65% were not in business (EDC 2013, 2-3).

The NYSC is also working with a group called NYSC Foundation whose objective is to target unemployed youths who have undergone the NYSC programme. The Foundation was introduced in 1998 by a group which includes former Director-Generals of NYSC, ex-corps members, the Industrial Energy Company Ltd. and the Industrial and General Insurance Ltd. (IGI) (Muhammed 2013). The intervention of the Foundation is to make loans available to corps members to start their own business after their service years. To access the loan, corps members are issued receipts of payment which they must present together with other documents such as the NYSC discharge certificate, recommendation letters and copies of their business/feasibility plans. Some reports showed that in 2010, N250,000 (1,200 USD) each were issued as soft loans to 43 ex-corps members (Ogbeche 2010). In 2013, N400,000 (2,000 USD) each was disbursed to 51 ex-corps members by the Foundation (Alao 2013).

In 2012, the Nigerian government also established the Department of Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) for the NYSC. This department is charged with the responsibility to

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empower corps members with entrepreneurial and agro-enterprise skills to generate employment, eradicate poverty, hunger and create wealth for the economy. The Department is also expected to help corps members to access interest-free loans which they can use to start their own businesses. In March 2015, it was reported that NYSC-SAED trained about 45,000 corps members (Apata 2015). This comprises 24,074 males and 20,936 females, out of which 5,404 were trained in agro-allied skills; 5,509 in food processing and preservation; 8,035 in culture and tourism-related skills; and 5,062 in cosmetology. About 8,119 were also trained in ICT, 2,885 in power and energy, and 2,672 in environmental enterprise. Another set of 2,837 corps members were reported to acquire skills in beautification, 2,057 in construction and 2,425 in education (ibid.).

Since the NDE and other bodies have been collaborating with the NYSC, the impact of their activities on the reduction of youth unemployment cannot be accurately ascertained. However, the present study suggests that the impact of their efforts has been constrained. The reports of the NYSC on the outcome of its entrepreneurship programme as well as the findings of the National Bureau of Statistics offer some insights into this observation. In 2013, the NYSC confirmed that its SAED entrepreneurship programme trained about 410,000 graduate youths between 2012 and 2013. However, only about 1,600 of these youths were said to register their own businesses with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) (Ayansina 2015). Similarly, according to the findings of the NBS the rate of graduate unemployment in the country increased by an average of 1.8 million between 2006 and 2011 (NBS 2011: 11).

Youth Service and Empowerment: The Major Challenges

How the NYSC manages the goal of national integration together with entrepreneurship development for graduate youths created some crises in the nation-building project. One of these could be linked to its deployment policy. The posting policy, which considers the need to foster common national awareness, assumes that the place to make this happen is the places of primary assignment (PPAs). As a result, all corps members must be posted to PPAs. A major fallout of this policy is observed in the unwillingness of many establishments to employ

people seeking stable jobs because they consider it cost effective to employ corps members whose bulk of wages are borne by government (Shadare and Elegbede 2012: 146).

By demanding that all corps members work in the PPAs, the NYSC considers any other activity of corps members as secondary. As a result, this denied many corps members the opportunity to pursue other productive ventures. The most affected are those who volunteer for TVET and other entrepreneurship courses. Some of these corps members only have one day in a week while others may have a few hours in the evening to attend the entrepreneurship course they volunteered for.² This arrangement may not be a problem if corps members could maximise their time schedule. The problem becomes obvious when experiences in the PPAs show that most corps members are largely under-utilised.

For most part of the service years, medical personnel, pharmacists and corps members in the legal profession are some of the most utilised in their fields as virtually all of them are deployed to establishments relevant to their professions. A majority of other corps members are deployed to teach in schools. Those in this category are usually more than 70% in a service year (Ige 2014). Among them are mainly graduates of education, who are deployed to teach in schools. Also, there are corps members who are not trained educationists but are deployed to teach. Whereas this has encouraged the problem of under-utilisation of participants in the service programme, it may not necessarily be a critical concern because some of these corps members are competent to teach their subjects. But it is also worth noting that a majority of those deployed to teach, including graduates of education, are not competent to teach their subjects (ibid). This was the argument of the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) in 2012 when it pointed out that the cause of mass failure of pupils in primary and secondary schools could partly be attributed to corps members posted to teach without having the required skills (Kayode-Adedeji 2012).

Outside the schools, some corps members are posted to industrial establishments such as banks, breweries, oil companies, and broadcasting stations. Many in this category are posted based on

2 Interview 2, conducted on 12 December 2015

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their specialisation. Aside this, many corps members are posted to firms whose job specialisation does not correspond to their academic disciplines. This may not be a problem for those who often rediscover other productive careers in these establishments. But the challenge of working in establishments such as this is the impact it can have on their future search for a job if they are not retained. This is why a corps member expressed dissatisfaction about the service experience and called for scrapping the NYSC:

The experience is not worth it, because I was made redundant for 11 months. The best way to engage corps members is to repeal the policy, which makes all corps members to teach or serve in rural communities. I studied Mass Communication and during the service year, I was supposed to be posted either to the print or electronic media. But I was asked to teach. Now, employers will be asking for two or three years' [sic] experience in journalism. My brother, where will I get that when I was posted to a rural school? (Nwokocha 2013).

Owing to this experience, another corps member concluded that this meant “we are going to join millions of unemployed graduates” (ibid). The observation of another corps member was that the whole NYSC programme is a waste of time because corps members did not have enough facilities to develop themselves during the service year while their prospects of employment remained uncertain.

What do you expect when corps members are sent to communities where there is no life for a whole year and yet when they are through, there is no immediate employment? The whole thing is a waste of time (Nwokocha 2013).

Another aspect of the problem of under-utilisation has been reported since the late 1970s by corps members deployed to some government ministries, department and agencies (MDAs). Corps members refer to these establishments as “Ministries of No Work” (Kareem 1979: 6). They complained that graduates of engineering, who are supposed to be fully utilised in areas with emphasis on technology and construction, are reduced to file-carrying messengers (Faniyi 1976: 5-6). What they often found disturbing was that there was work to do in these establishments, but they were not allowed to do that (Adesina

1978: 8). Many corps members thus considered this practice as part of the “plot” of the management in these establishments not to show them the “secrets” of their business transactions or corrupt practices.³

The rejection of corps members from their PPAs is another problem. In some cases, this may be due to lack of vacancy for their services. However, a more disturbing fact is that many employers do not think that corps members are competent to work for them. This was explained by one employer:

We don't just reject corps member indiscriminately. Most times when we reject corps members, it is usually because the corps members knew nothing about what we are doing. For instance, last year, a corps member who studied English Language and Literature was posted to us and we felt, since he could not contribute anything meaningful to the growth of the company, it was not only in our interest, for him to be rejected, but also in his own interest too. When you take into consideration the fact that the corps member needs to gather work experience that is related to his field of study you will accept our position (Jonah and Haruna 2010).

While the poor condition of Nigeria's educational system could be blamed on its inability to match some academic skills with industrial demands, the NYSC is often considered to help in assuaging it by introducing corps members to additional work experience and expertise. Thus, the experiences of corps members who are under-utilised calls for a review of this educational system. It is important to note that rejected corps members usually become frustrated and insecure because of not being employed in PPAs. They face the challenge of not getting their monthly stipend because a monthly report from their PPA is required to facilitate the payment. As a result, many resorted to bribing employers to accommodate them or look for just any establishment on the road to devise means of getting acceptance letters and monthly reports. In all, the deployment policy which prioritises the PPAs created a crisis of under-utilisation and rejection which threaten the whole nation-building project.

The attitude of graduate youths to entrepreneurial courses is another factor in this crisis. Despite the scarcity of jobs in the country, most

3 Interview 3, conducted on 12 July 2014

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graduate youths still assume it is possible for them to get their dream white collar jobs. They deride TVET for not being profitable and something meant for the non-academic and school drop-outs. This attitude might be linked to Nigeria's educational and economic system which prioritises the value of university education over technical skills (Airahuobhor, Apata, Alabandan et al. 2015). Nonetheless, the attitude of such graduate youths further confirms the idea that TVET cannot be forced on people.

A lack of adequate funding and training equipment for volunteers of entrepreneurship courses are also major setbacks. In 2015, NYSC-SEAD pointed to the problem of funding as a major factor that prevented the establishment of training centres to further train and evaluate corps members who volunteer for entrepreneurship courses. It also underscored the problem of getting competent resource persons and trainers for the courses (ibid). Such a problem is not limited to the NYSC, it is also the case in other socio-economic sectors of Nigeria such as education, health and sport which affected their development. Thus, despite its benefits, the NYSC entrepreneurship course has become another government policy whose impacts and potentials are constrained in Nigeria's socio-economic development due to inadequate funding.

The problem of corruption has a telling effect on NYSC entrepreneurship programmes, too. The experience with many empowerment agencies suggests that they are conduits for personal gains rather than having any altruistic goals. The reports of scam against the NYSC and the NYSC Foundation in 2013 is a case in point. A revelation in this report was that the two institutions forced corps members to pay a certain amount of money before they were issued their discharge certificates. What remains baffling is that the Foundation only gave out its first batch of loans in 2010, ten years after it was established (Ojo 2013). This could only have gone unchecked because of the pervasive corrupt practices in many socio-economic and political institutions in Nigeria. Ijewereme (2015) has argued that corruption is common in Nigeria's public sector because of tribalism, nepotism, societal pressure and the low risk and high benefits it entails, caused by the ineffective law enforcement and judicial system to contain it. Although it has been a problem since the 1960s, it was under the Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993) administration that corruption became institutionalised

in public service, especially among those who hold political offices (Ogbeidi 2012: 9). It is therefore a systemic problem that has impacted negatively on the entrepreneurial development of young Nigerians and the nation's economy.

Conclusion

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) experience in entrepreneurship does not in any way challenge the idea that entrepreneurship courses cannot be offered together with other socio-political objectives. The lessons learnt in the case of the NYSC is that when such is the case, there is a need to tailor the objectives effectively in line with the methods of achieving the set-out goals. The major problem in the NYSC experiment is the inability to work out how the goals of national integration can be achieved in ways that will not constrain the potentials and goals of technical and vocational education training (TVET) and other entrepreneurship development programmes. Political consideration continues to take precedence in the NYSC scheme and this is responsible for the crisis created by its deployment policy. The most obvious fallout of this is the under-utilisation of corps members. In this way, the NYSC did not only offer a limited opportunity for graduate youths to acquire the skills to become self-employed, it also impacted minimally on stemming the rate of unemployment in the country. This led to the concern of most graduate youths that the NYSC programme is a waste of time because their skills are not effectively utilised and developed. With the Nigerian labour market offering a slim chance to employ them, they are also left to cope with the uncertain future.

However, national unity and economic development can be fostered through the agency of NYSC as assumed in the reviewed law that established it in 1993. This is expected to be achieved when corps members stay in their states of deployment after service and find opportunities to start their own business or secure employment in industries where their expertise is needed, thereby allowing them to integrate with their host communities. The introduction of an entrepreneurship course to the NYSC, therefore, may not necessarily hinder its goal of national unity because it is also a form of nation-building through economic development. Nigeria's unity is crucial for its economic development and peacebuilding among its diverse

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groups. The NYSC can play a significant role in this process if its deployment policies are reviewed and its entrepreneurship courses are implemented effectively.

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