

A Beginner's Guide to Active Citizenship

by Chidera Okoma



Figure 1: Project volunteers from YDOS 2021

In Nigeria, conversations about active citizenship are believed to be the preserve of a selected few - something esoteric and that only the chosen ones like the politicians or influencers can become active citizens. However, active citizenry is for everyone especially within the current political climate. Today, Nigeria's population of over [200 million](#) is made up of about 60% youth within the ages of 15 -35 years. This means that the youth would increasingly form the bulk of the population, hence their agency must be engaged positively to enable better outcomes for the nation. In line with LEAP Africa's mission, the development and growth of Nigeria by extension Africa is hinged on youth who are active citizens.

It is important to note that active citizenship is not only policy making or holding public offices, but it also involves little responsibilities like picking up the trash/rubbish, planting trees to protect the environment and contributing/volunteering for a charitable cause. These little acts done to improve and enhance local communities is a right step towards being an active citizen.

An [active citizenship](#) or an [engaged citizens](#) also means people getting involved in their communities and democratic processes at all levels, from the grassroot upwards. It is frequently used to describe citizens that engage in a broad range of activities that promote and sustain democracy. These actions include civil society activities such as protesting and collecting petitions, community activities such as volunteering, and conventional

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political engagement such as voting or campaigning for elections. In addition, it refers to participation that requires respect for others and activities that does not contravene human rights and democracy. Therefore, as a member of a community, knowing your rights and privileges as well as duties and responsibilities is important to make society comfortable, safe, and secured.

Even if providing uninterrupted power supply, regular water supply and good road networks are far from our reach as individual members of society we can still participate in the betterment of our community by being involved. This article highlights 4 key steps to becoming an active citizen:

- **Be Informed:** Active citizens are people who feel inspired, motivated, and empowered to make a difference and information is a bedrock for these. Know your rights and responsibilities within your community, learn about your society, how to influence decisions, improve your community and solve problems.
- **Volunteer:** This involves teaming up with local organizations to support communities. As [United Nations 2011 report](#) states that, “Volunteerism is an act of human solidarity, of empowerment and of active citizenship.” Therefore, those who are interested in global issues should volunteer for organizations that feed or offer healthcare to people in war zones across the continent and others might protest bad governance or more youth involvement within their local communities. Overall, give your time to a greater cause.
- **Advocacy (Speak Up):** [Advocacy](#) is any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports, or defends, or pleads on behalf of others. It is public support for an idea, plan, or way of doing something. Hence, use your platform (including social media) to support positive change in your community. It can be an act of active citizenship to promote active citizenship in others.
- **Donate/Give to a Charitable Cause:** Donating to the causes you care about not only benefits the charities themselves, but it can also be deeply rewarding for you too. It is a privilege to contribute and improve the lives of others and your donations can inspire others to do the same. Your resources can go a long way in improving and supporting your community.

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In conclusion, ***everyone is called to be an active citizen.*** It is our responsibility as members of our community to pursue the public good above the narrower interests of our private lives. Therefore, be interested and get involved in your communities' development and the global community at large.