

Youth Advocacy: Breaking Down Silos is How We Win

By Evi Michael



Image Source: LEAP Africa

Introduction

In recent times, the term active citizenship has gained momentum and has become quite popular, especially in countries undergoing diverse democratic changes. However, one must question the translation of its meaning across different contexts and geographical regions. Nonetheless, one thing is sure; it is more than just about the legal status. It revolves around stirring up environmental changes through carrying out responsibilities and fulfilling one's rights in that community. Generally, it involves being a part of the community through civic engagement.

With active citizenship becoming more prevalent in political discussions, it has become more prominent for youth to take up roles in effecting changes at both local and national levels. This is important, seeing that in 2015, 226 million African youths between the ages of 15-24 made up 19% of the global youth



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population and this is projected to increase by 42% in 2030¹. As such, young people cannot afford to be complacent and take risks by not engaging in activities that foster democracy. With that knowledge, it is paramount for young people to challenge themselves through political or non-political avenues and champion opportunities to impact their communities and beyond. This article aims to enlighten and reveal how advocacy can be a collaborative tool in active citizenship to bring about social change in the communities.

Change Through Advocacy

An intrinsic part of advocacy can be achieved through citizen participation and community engagement. Recognizing the potential of youth, LEAP Africa launched one of its flagship programmes – the Youth Leadership Development Programme (YLDP), to equip young people aged 18-30 in various higher institutions. The programme is aimed at strengthening, supporting, and enabling young people in Nigeria to participate in leadership, activism, and social change critical to national development. In the same vein, the community change projects which are carried out by the different teams, provide an excellent opportunity which fosters team spirit and collaboration amongst the participants. [Evidently](#), after the programme, participants have gone further to demonstrate the effectiveness of their learning by contributing in diverse ways to address the social issues affecting them in their communities.

Notably, the influence and use of social media have not gone unnoticed over the years. Online or digital activism has indeed been a driving force. Citing movements such as the #EndSARS and the #NotTooYoungToRun campaigns, online activism has triggered and augmented collective action among the youths regarding varied problems.

This further led to youths coming out in their numbers across many states to mutually protest against injustice in the country. Indeed, with issues ranging from economic to social matters, online activism has been a gateway for the youths to press for efforts from the necessary authorities to eradicate these problems. This act has undoubtedly been a relevant avenue for social change.

¹United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division (2015). *Youth Population Trends and Sustainable Development*. <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/YouthPOP.pdf>



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Conclusion and Recommendation

It is not far-fetched to say that collaboration is key in advocacy. It is also essential to recognize the importance of leveraging relationships and liaising with other organizations to foster the goal of change in our community. To this effect, the youths should look to collaborate seamlessly with organizations as this will provide a platform to amplify their voices on diverse issues. Access to new networks and resources further expands a campaign's reach to numerous people with a higher probability of success.

In addition to that, having opportunities to advocate for change and seizing them is a critical factor in actualizing the dreams and goals being set. The youths need to engage more in synergistic platforms that will enable their voices to be heard. Local youth forums, advocacy groups, unions, and political classes should become more within reach. The youths can engage and have their voices heard on diverse issues through publicity. The government and other international organizations can also focus on expanding such groups in different states and other countries. This singular action will, no doubt, consolidate efforts toward tilling the ground for the evolution of social change.

Summarily, reports from the Next Generation research ², suggests that young people would be able to speak freely on issues affecting them when there is no fear of attack, threats, or retribution by persons or groups with opposing notions. This alone shows that security for the youths in the context of advocacy is paramount for them to address and make known crucial issues to the government. In the long run, the fruition of this act will lead to the development of the communities. As such, the government is encouraged to provide safety for young people, especially during protests or online activism.

² British Council (2020). *Next Generation Nigeria Research*.
https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/I039_next_generation_nigeria_final_digital_v4.pdf