



Youth Voice in Africa

*A Case Study of Young
Nigerians Changing the
Narrative through the Art
of Debate*

NIGERIA
YOUTH
FUTURES
FUND



Copyright © LEAP Africa 2023

Report Design and Concept: Evi Michael

When using this work, please attribute the credit to LEAP Africa using the following statement:

LEAP Africa(2023). Youth Voice in Africa: A Case Study of Young Nigerians Changing the Narratives

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01.	Abstract	4
02.	Study Background	5
03.	Introduction	7
04.	Literature Review	8
05.	Theoretical Framework	12
06.	Methodology	14
07.	Demographic Data of Participants	17
08.	Key Findings	20
09.	Discussion	32
10.	Recommendations and Conclusion	34
11.	Limitation	36
12.	References	37
13.	Appendix	40

ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of a Youth Leadership Debate in amplifying youth voices for National Development in Nigeria. The Youth Leadership Debate provided a platform for young people from different tertiary universities in Nigeria to speak on critical issues surrounding the development of the country. The research, adopts a mixed method methodology, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The findings derived from this study indicates that the debate platform is useful for youth to express themselves on the challenges in the Nigerian system and to proffer solutions these issues. However, to achieve greater impact through the platform, more actionable steps to solve these issues beyond debating are to be taken to leverage on the impact being created on the platform.

The programme through the capacity building elements were highly instrumental to the holistic development of all the debaters, with some sharpening their communication and public skills and others acquiring new skills.

STUDY BACKGROUND

This research study was conducted to answer pertinent questions revolving around youth voices in Africa, using a case study approach to reflect key findings on the Youth Leadership Debate implemented by the LEAP Africa in collaboration with the Nigerian Youth Future Funds. The programme focused on engaging university and tertiary-level students in the six (6) geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The goal of the programme was to provide capacity building to select young people across tertiary institutions and support them to critically evaluate information, to advocate from the point of knowledge, and to collectively shape their vision for Nigeria, hence equipping them to be active citizens.

True to this, the structure of the programme was built in a way that provided several capacity building components such as live sessions, virtual community of practice (VCOP), coaching, online self-paced courses and the residential courses. The chief aim of infusing these components was to equip participants across these tertiary institutions with the knowledge and tools to become active citizens and transformative leaders. In the same vein, it served to increase their interest and responsibility towards political leadership and civic engagements. More so, the programme also aimed to empower young people with a renewed understanding of leadership, and making commitments to lead change across communities

This research seeks to answer two questions;

- 1) To what extent does debate among young people amplify youth voice and foster national development?
- 2) Is capacity building effective in sufficiently motivating and empowering young people to engage in active citizenship and ethical leadership?

The study also aims to contribute to the body of knowledge, to produce sound evidence regarding youth voices through the debate platform.



INTRODUCTION

Young people in Africa have become more vocal and assertive especially in recent times, in advocating for social change. Advocacy hinged on critical fundamental issues across the nations have become evident especially in the digital era, which enables the populace to take a deep dive into conversations while asking the relevant questions. Generally, one thing is sure - young people require a change and they are not backing down!

With more predictions stating that African youth are projected to account for 42% of the world youth population in 2030 [1], it can be said that young persons in Africa wield a fundamental stake in Africa and much more, globally. Given the grey realities of young people in this context, perhaps it may be in our best interest to truly recognize and accord youth their rightful position of being at the forefront to navigate through the complex and diverse narratives encountered as a continent. This cannot be overemphasized as inclusivity of the youthful population in political and governance discussions provides a basics to truly offer adequate resources and attention to the needs of young people.

With resilience and doggedness, youth have gone on to challenge systems by lending their voices through conscious advocacy which was occasioned by the continuous disappointments in structures meant to protect them. Despite several limiting conditions that affect different aspects of their lives, young Africans, have shown great hope and belief in the future of their continent and are continually striving for a better Africa. In 2020, Nigerian youth embarked on the # EndSARS protest nationwide in a bid to register their stance to the appropriate authorities and officials in government. These occasions and many more across Africa have shown that indeed, young people are a force to be reckoned when focused and dedicated to a cause.

It is therefore highly important to enable platforms and environments where youth are able to use their voices to speak to issues and solutions without fear of rebuttal. Through these platforms, such as debates, young people are able to delve into these social issues and proffer dynamic solutions to solving them. More so, arguments within contextual conversations are stirred up which increase evidence targeted at improving policies in the social development spaces in Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth Voice

The term 'youth voice' has become increasingly popular especially in recent times as a result of the societal mindset shift towards governance structures set in place for order. To truly understand what youth voice truly means, one would have to demystify its true meaning according to different contexts. It can be said to the active, distinct, and concentrated ways young people represent themselves throughout society[2]. This definition in itself, connotes an actionable representation aligned with a purpose more than just the production of sounds from our mouths. Another definition that provides a resounding basis is that youth voice provides an avenue by which youth become active citizens and participate in decisions that affect them[3]. This begs us to question the extent to which young people have actually realised these definitions in light of their actions so far in recent years.

The status quo of youth voice in recent years

There are varied philosophies and presumptions about youth and their representative actions towards instigating social change especially.

Many argue that the impressions of young people being burdens to their society may indeed, create the notion that their opinions or general ability to contribute to governance dialogues are not significant [4]. While objectively analyzing situations across Africa, some perceptions tilt in favor of narratives which provide stiff assumptions on how a collection of youth action pose as threats [5].

However, a number of studies have been carried out to showcase the role of youth-based activities in the representation of youth voices in National Development. In the case of the United States of America, the study of Owens, La Rochelle, & Montgomery-Blocky show that a youth-based learning initiative for teenage youth and young adults in Sacramento communicated youth voices to policy makers[6]. The study shows that youth channeled their challenges and aspirations through videos, comic books and public forums and meetings with policy makers. In the case of Kenya, Mphamba et al carried out a longitudinal study on the outcome of a sexual violence prevention intervention in Nairobi[7]. The authors find that participants felt more empowered to speak out on sexual harassment at the end of the intervention. Furthermore, In Nigeria, Umar et al finds that the participation of young people in a School

Based Management Committees (SBMC) allowed students to take part in governance[8]. Students on the committee were given the opportunity to initiate and supervise projects, perform administrative tasks and share ideas on issues pertaining to their schools. Despite numerous forms of political engagements and activism, for a period of time, young people have continuously leveraged more on protesting and digital advocacy to showcase youth demonstrations on critical issues. Similarly, Richard and Rika study the use of social media by Eleme Youth in Rivers state, Nigeria. The authors find that youth from Eleme use social media as a means for voicing their opinions on government programmes and policies[9]. Relatedly the #BlackLivesMatter movement which took place in 2020 in the United States of America experienced a myriad of young persons' who took to the streets to condemn systemic racism [10]. This was closely followed up with the escalation of the social movement on social media through various channels. Bringing it home to Africa, Nigerians in the same vein also wore the cloak of activism when they actively participated in the #EndSARS campaign against police brutality on the citizens, specifically young people in the country. This was one of the biggest movements in history of Nigeria with its memories still fixated in the minds of many till today as it served as an effective opportunity at a not-so subtle attempt

to vocalize their frustrations regarding corruption and police brutality as well as to hold the government accountable on various counts [11].

Further diving into situational reports on how young people gathered momentum by using their voices to drive political agendas, youth in Algeria,

Democratic Republic of Congo and Senegal have gone on to push against abuse of power and corruption in governance and leadership while encouraging young people to participate in carry out their civic responsibilities [12]. The agency of young people especially in Africa have been quite monumental, with the positive aspects less featured in mainstream media especially in fragile regions. Many young people are changing the narratives and becoming the active change makers through channeling their agency and using their voices. Despite several studies on youth voices around the world, there has been little emphasis on the use of youth debates as a platform for amplifying voices on governance. To the best of our knowledge this is the first study to focus on youth debates as a tool for promoting youth voices in national development.

Challenges in harnessing youth voice

Young people are gradually being recognized as instrumental drivers of socio-economic change but despite this, there is still a huge gap in inclusion in political processes and decision making [13]. This may be due to different reasons as numerous studies have begun to ask questions regarding the lack of support to enabling youth voices. On a large scale, a major concern points to the area of power imbalance between young people and older persons which highly inhibits the ability for young people to voice their opinions[14].

Relatedly, this gives credence to a report citing how young Nigerians have been denied opportunities to speak on critical issues mainly because of discrimination based on age, wealth and fame [15]. More than that, youth need to feel a sense of security to be able to speak out honestly on vital issues and to their harsh realities. A breach of ethical laws protecting citizens from facing extreme and brutal treatments from governments and opposition when they hold officials responsible can serve as a basis to destabilize order as well as reduce civic participation [16]. Suffice to say that a level of support from the government is also required for young people to become aware of their rights and civic responsibilities so that they can make informed decisions regarding political processes.

For example, a research carried out in Tanzania attested to the fact that many young people do not feel supported by the government and in fact, and quite a low number of young people were actually aware of any government policies targeted at enabling the youth [17].

Ways to enable youth voice

The individuality of young people should not be undermined as they have continued to prove themselves more unique each day. There are different ways to empower the youth to be more proactive to engaging in political dialogues as well as involving themselves in governance processes [18]. More recently, the participatory approach has been encouraged as it has shown to increase young people's active engagement because of the measure of value placed on their opinions [19]. Through formal (voting, political party membership) or informal (protest, campaign, volunteerism) participation, young people should be able to directly contribute to decisions that ultimately affect their lives [20]. Ultimately, both formal and informal methods of engagements are recognized in the political space, although evidence show that young people are less engaged in the formal processes[21].

Other ways to enable the agency of youth is to support youth led initiatives and programmes while also providing adequate capacity building avenues and trainings to foster their inclusion and political participation [22]

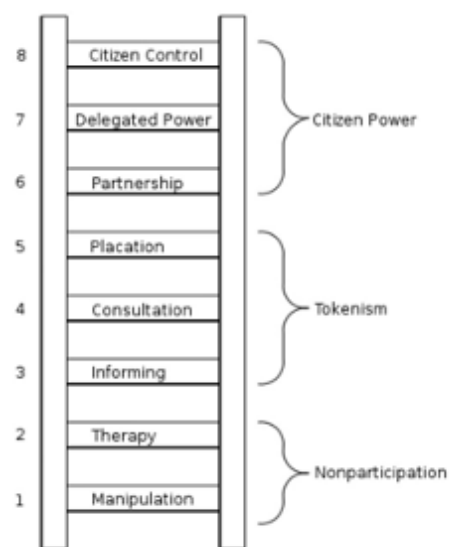


THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study hinges on the Ladder of Citizens Participation model by Sherry Arnstein which is one of the most utilized models in describing the participation of youth in civic demonstrations and engagements [23]. Using a ladder to demonstrate this, the framework depicts the level of young people's involvement at different levels with the pinnacle showcasing the highest form of power and access to decision making. As shown in the diagram, Sherry argues that categorically, these levels progress from a point of no power to the pinnacle of involvement with true power. The first two stages represented by manipulation and therapy signifies a stage devoid of power which poses to be not only redundant but quite harmful as individuals at this level are deceived with the illusion that they possess power. In the same vein, the deception trickles into the need to subtly change the mindset and behaviors of community members to align more with the agenda of those in public institutions.

As shown in the diagram, Sherry argues that categorically, these levels progress from a point of no power to the pinnacle of involvement with true power. The first two stages represented by manipulation and therapy signifies a stage devoid of power which poses to be not only redundant but quite harmful as individuals at this level are deceived with the illusion that they possess power. In the same vein, the deception trickles into the need to subtly change the mindset and behaviors of community members to align more with the agenda of those in public institutions.

FIGURE 1: LADDER OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION LADDER ILLUSTRATING EIGHT LEVELS OF CITIZEN POWER IN DECISION MAKING



SOURCE: THE CITIZENS HANDBOOK
[HTTPS://WWW.CITIZENSHANDBOOK.ORG/ARNS
TEINSLADDER.HTML](https://www.citizenshandbook.org/arnsteinsladder.html)

The level of tokenism further depicts the informing, consultation and placation stage which introduces a glimpse to true citizen recognition and inclusion. Nevertheless, with informing the citizens, Sherry acknowledges that a one-way mode of communication is mostly employed in this regard where the constituents are only made to listen to directives from the government. This closes the door to feedback from constituents, limiting the extent of communication as well as providing irrelevant information in most cases. In its entirety, this approach mostly recognizes that the passage of information alone represents the acknowledgement and agreement to the proposed ideas of the officials. However, this framework also highlights individuals in the community who are consulted under guise of seeking communal opinions to address critical issues. While this is a way forward, it amounts to nothing when robust data is gathered from these interactions and there are no results or programs set up in light of presented data.

Sherry describes this as a sham when the individuals are not included beyond this level. In some cases, some people may be extended the opportunity to belong to decision making groups. Conversely, this display of inclusion is a faux attempt to placate the affected population in a bid to make it seem like their voices are being heard and their votes count but in hind sight, their power are shadow banned and limited.

Citizens begin to gain leverage into actual power when there is partnership between them and public institutions. Although not achieved easily, partnerships are achieved through advanced negotiations which causes power to be distributed to individuals. With this, their voices are heard and their issues are partially solved. In the process, access to power is increased as individuals begin to have a sense of ownership in their communities. They begin to harness their agency to handle projects aimed to instigate dynamic change in their communities, recognizing their power and utilizing it judiciously across various areas.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs the use of qualitative and quantitative data, adopting a mixed method approach to provide viable answers to the effectiveness of debates in augmenting youth voices on fundamental issues. By adopting this method, it provides the basis to mitigate bias which emanates from using only one method. More than that, it provides a more in-depth explanation to the outcomes and results, certifying its validity and reliability in varied extents. While the quantitative data offers to show what relationships exist, qualitative data reveals a more insightful explanation into key findings.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are as follows;

- 1) To what extent does debate among young people amplify youth voice and foster national development?
- 2) Is capacity building effective in sufficiently motivating and empowering young people to engage in active citizenship and ethical leadership?

Scope of Study

The research was conducted to answer the research questions while appraising the outcomes from the Youth Leadership Debate, a project implemented by LEAP Africa in conjunction with the Nigerian Youth Future Fund.

The project was carried out in Nigeria, with the goal to support and build the capacity of young Nigerian students with necessary skills to advocate and shape their vision for the country while helping them become active citizens in their own right.

Data Collection Tools

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected utilizing different methods and approaches. Online surveys were deployed to all participants who began the competition from the onset of the project. Questions regarding their background, perspectives as youth, their experiences as well as feedback on different components of the programme such as the VCOP, coaching, online classes etc were asked to understand their standpoints. Qualitative data was collected through focus group discussions and observation of the participants. The behaviors of the participants were generally observed

and a focus group discussion was carried out during the physical residential training, which was relevant in building themes to further gain understanding on how young people feel or think in different contexts. Qualitative data was collected mostly as a tool to explore and further triangulate available information from the quantitative data.

Procedure

Survey monkey- a data collection software was used to develop the survey which was deployed to all participants through a WhatsApp group (VCOP) at the start and end of the programme. The participants were asked to fill the survey and be as honest as possible with their responses. Focus group discussions were organized physically during the semifinal competition. Six (6) of the semifinalists from different schools (Kaduna state university, University of Ibadan, University of Ilorin, Gregory University and University of Benin) volunteered to participate in the discussion which enabled us to harness data from diverse viewpoints based on their location. Ethical practices regarding collection of data and reporting were ensured in the process. The participants of the focus group discussions were also assured

of the confidentiality of their identities when reporting.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data was analyzed with the use of Survey Monkey and Excel which enabled us to interpret the data with representation in graphical visualization by using graphs and charts. All focus group discussions with the participants were recorded and transcribed manually. Thematic analysis was carried out, with themes teased out of the discussion session to provide deep insights into the experiences of the participants.



NIGERIA
YOUTH
FUTURES
FUND



PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Gender

In this study, it was revealed that at the start of the programme, 60% of the respondents were male while approximately 40% were females.

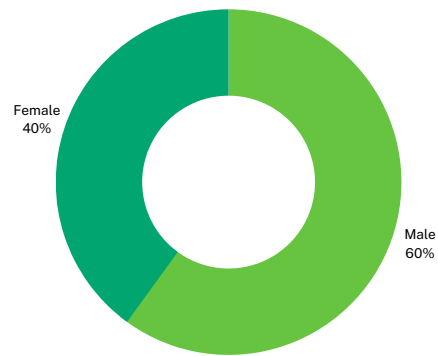


Figure 1: Gender Disaggregation

Type of Tertiary Institution

The tertiary institutions were further categorized into federal universities (16), state universities (6), private universities (2) and training institutes (1).

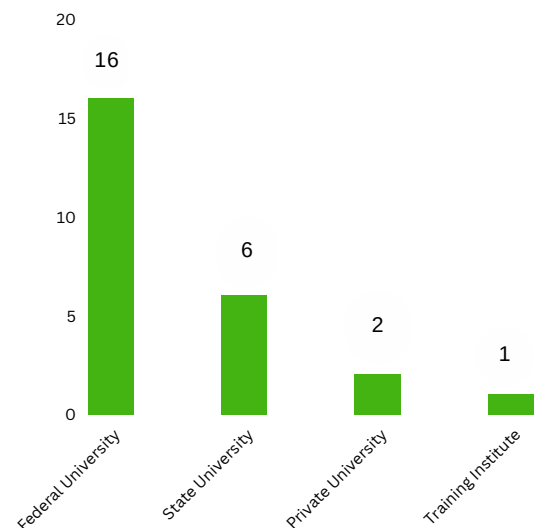


Figure 2: Number of institutions according to category

Regions

The programme was well represented across the six (6) geopolitical zones in Nigeria. However, the South-West region (32%) was shown to have more tertiary institutions participate on the programme. This was followed by the South-South region (16%), North central (16%), South East (12%), North West (12%) and North East region (12%).

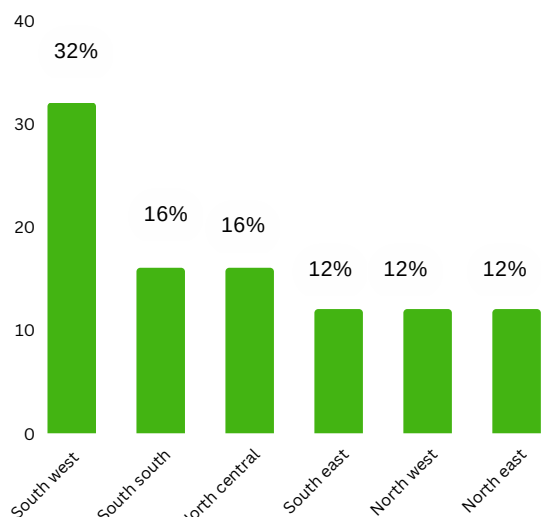


Figure 4: Disaggregation by Region

Participants by Tertiary Institution

At the start of the programme, 25 tertiary institutions were recorded from the responses at baseline, with more participants shown to be from Nnamdi Azikiwe University. This was closely followed by Ahmadu Bello University, Modibbo Adama University, University of Maiduguri and Babcock University in second, third, fourth and fifth position respectively.

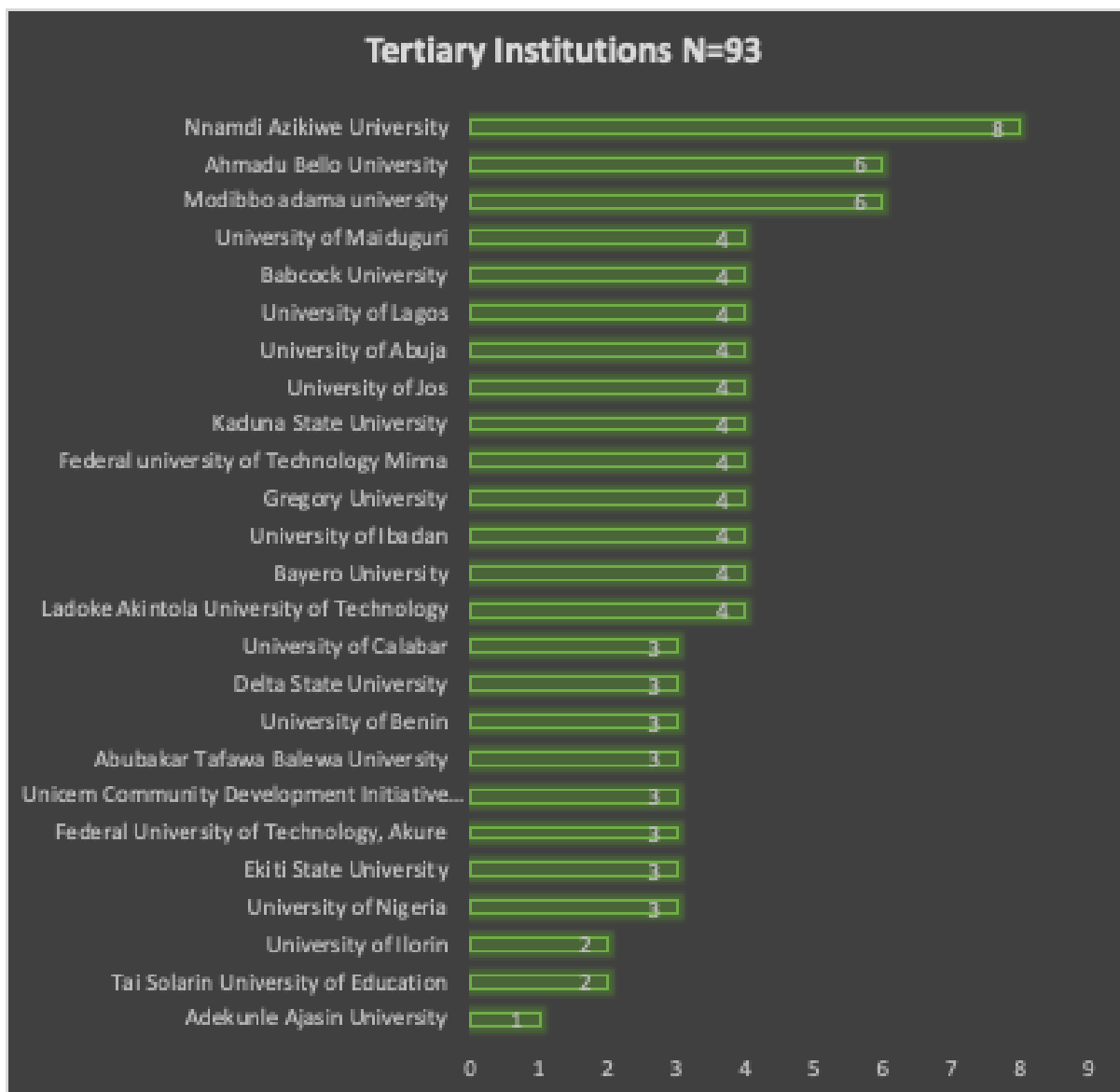


Figure 3: Number of Tertiary Institutions and Debaters

LEADERSHIP

E 1.0

IA WE WANT

MacArthur
Foundation

FORD
FOUNDATION



Key Findings

The findings from the study provides profound insights which attempt to answer the research questions.

Research Question 1: To what extent does debate among young people amplify youth voice and foster national development?

In the endline survey, the participants (n=45) were asked if they had debated at any point before this competition. This question, which was further explored served as an indicator to gauge their level of interest and motivation for engaging in competition.

As shown in the figure, approximately 87% of the respondents revealed that they had participated in debating. This was further corroborated through intense discussions with six of the participants during the focus group discussion. The questions were slightly varied for the sake of validity and this provided an opportunity for the participants to further elaborate on their experience in using their voices through debating.

Five (5) out of the six (6) discussants shared that they had debated before, even adding that they have participated on diverse

HAVE YOU BEEN IN A DEBATE BEFORE? N=45

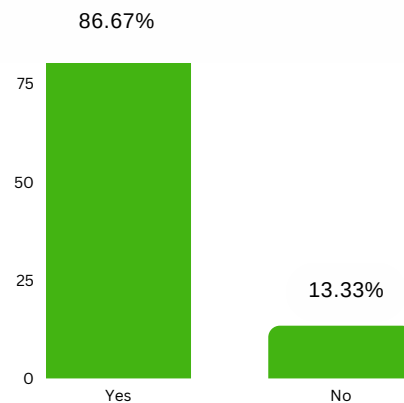


Figure 5: Number of Participants who had debate experience

occasions using varied methods such as the American Parliamentary style, Asian Parliamentary debate and British Parliamentary style. The debaters expressed their level of enthusiasm when it came to speaking through the art of debate which can be correlated to the high number of participants who had had opportunities to debate and use their voices to speak on social issues. Speaking directly on the motivation to use their voice through this platform, a general consensus was centered around the belief that debating had the ability to influence the minds of people to create the much needed change.

" I have learnt that speaking should not just be something you use to catch fun or impress people but it is a tool for social change and social justice. Everyone that has the ability to speak well needs to be part of national development because speakers in their own rights are leaders because they have the ability to influence the minds of people and proffer solutions to things that are happening within our space as a people"

D.O, Male

In speaking deeply, some of the participants have been able to go beyond debating only. Many shared the sentiment that they have been involved in other forms of advocacy that have been instrumental in supporting and impacting others.

'In the last couple of years, like two years, I have done a lot more than just being an active speaker. So part of the things I do currently is to mentor adolescents in the art of debating, specifically using the American Parliamentary style"

H.U, Female

The discussions exposed and unveiled different ways young people have been able to modify the art of speaking to go beyond mere speaking to engage in advocative activities. This was evident as the participants when discussing on the art of debating tended to veer into other ways they have been able to use their voices beyond debating.

" I wrote an anthology of poems a couple of years ago and that anthology actually addressed politically driven issues so it helped me to put my voice out there as regards advocacy. I have also done a couple of spoken words pieces which are also online- both videos and written poems- about social justice and political issues"

D.O, Male

DO YOU THINK THE YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEBATE PROGRAMME WAS EFFECTIVE IN PROJECTING YOUTH VOICE ON NATIONAL ISSUES N=45

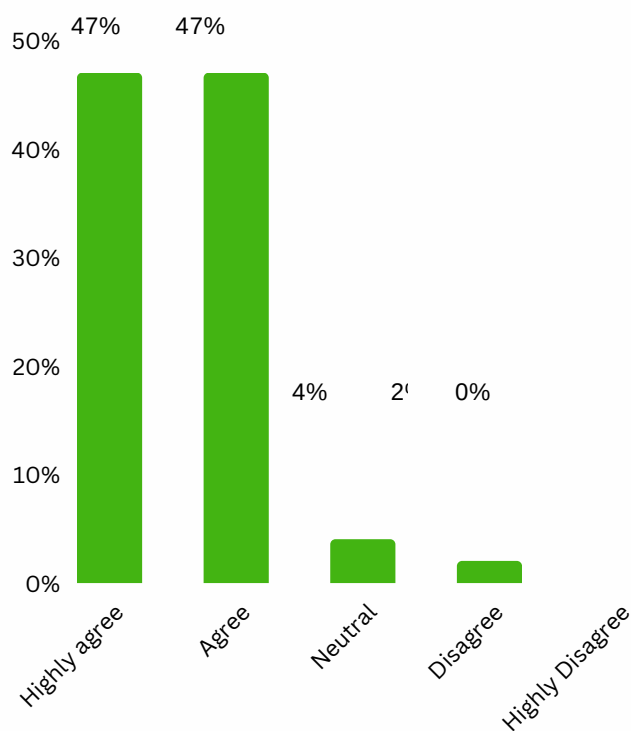


Figure 6 Level of perception on the debate platform

The art of debating involves critical methods employed to ensure that the argument emanates from a depth of wisdom. However, it is highly important that the debater truly believes in the idea they are sharing or even in the medium by which they are utilizing to propagate their message. Furthermore, the platform being used to promote one's voice is almost as important as the message itself as it dictates the level of reach and impact of the message. True to that, the participants were asked if they believed that the debate platform was an effective tool to project youth voices.

In answering that question, it was discovered that 94% of the participants truly believed that the platform was a viable tool for young people to express their opinions and thoughts on critical development issues being faced in the country. However, about 7% of the debaters were neutral or did not agree with the above statement. The high positive rating may likely be connected with the fact that most of the participants have a background of engaging in debates and speaking engagements. This indicates a high level of internal motivation among the debaters which was expressed vibrantly as they engaged each other during the competition.

In seeking more elaborate perspectives concerning the usefulness of the debate platform in projecting their voices, the focus group discussants shared interesting varying views relative to their thoughts on the viability of the platform. One of the discussants explained the impact of the programme using the power of an idea.

"The impact that people have is not because they are able to directly touch a million lives. It is because they touched ten people, those ten persons grow to a hundred and then to a thousand. The power of an idea has the opportunity to cause change as an idea is a seed that grows to become a tree that produces fruits"

Y.T, Female

However, other emerging insights were revealed as some of the participants did not completely share that sentiment and had different views on the subject, with recommendations on how to increase the impact of the programme.

"I think that the debate does hold the capacity of allowing for those currently participating to build their capacity to be able to engage with Nigeria's discourses. I however do not see how it extends to other individuals out there. I think that it has to go beyond five minutes' speeches because to be sincere, there is very minimal ideas that you could share within five minutes or three minutes of your speech. So if you could have more feedback pieces where individuals can then go on to have these discourses, I think it will go a long way to have more individuals contribute to this space and that way, I think we can have a larger form of impact"

G.E, Female

Relatedly, a general unanimity from the participants illustrated the need to further harness and expand the debate platform. While a high percent of the participants found value in utilizing the debate platform to speak on different issues, they were also quite enthused to go beyond just speaking to actual demonstrations through actionable steps.

Research Question 2: Is capacity building effective in sufficiently motivating and empowering young people to engage in active citizenship and ethical leadership?

One of the major goals of the programme was to provide capacity building to young people across tertiary institutions and support them to critically evaluate information, to advocate from the point of knowledge, and to collectively shape their vision for Nigeria, hence equipping them to be active citizens. With that, capacity building and learning components such as coaching, virtual live sessions, residential trainings, virtual community of practice (VCoP) and access to online self-paced courses were

infused into the programme to support their holistic development.

The capacity building arm revolved around topics centered on research, effective communication, public speaking, transformative leadership, public policy and administration etc. through all capacity building activities. However, these components were introduced at varied points on the programme, with only the semi-finalists having access to all these components. Nevertheless, other participants were introduced and given access to virtual live sessions on zoom, the VcoP groups as well as access to the online self-paced courses.

In a bid to understand if the capacity building activities were helpful to them personally and even as a debater, the semi-finalists were posed this question as they went through all capacity building activities

The idea for incorporating the capacity building elements was to ensure the holistic development of the participants. The aim of fostering these plans was to enable the participant experience a renewed mindset towards political and governance matters which would enable them speak

WERE THE CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES HELPFUL TO YOU PERSONALLY AND AS A DEBATER? N=16

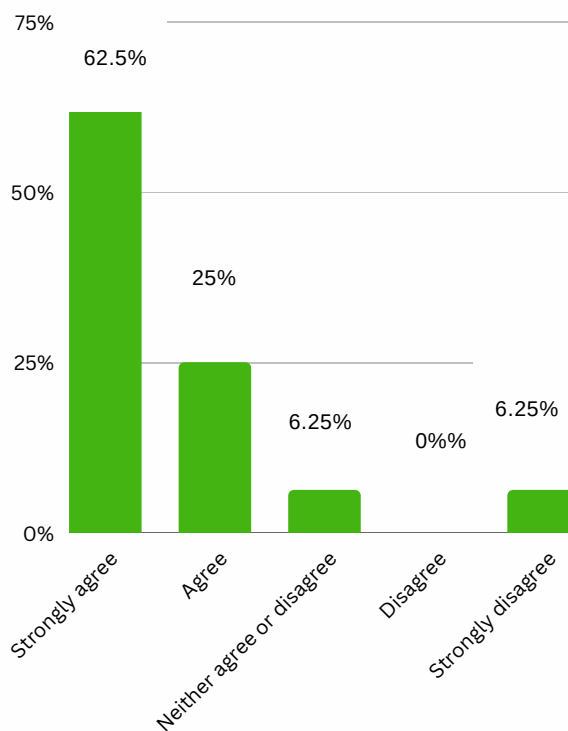


Figure 7: Usefulness of capacity building components

from a depth of knowledge.

As seen from the above graph, over 87% of the semifinalists who responded and experienced all capacity building components agreed that indeed the infused activities was helpful to them personally and debate wise

WHAT MODE OF LEARNING OR TRAINING IN THE PROGRAMME WAS MOST IMPACTFUL FOR YOU? N=21

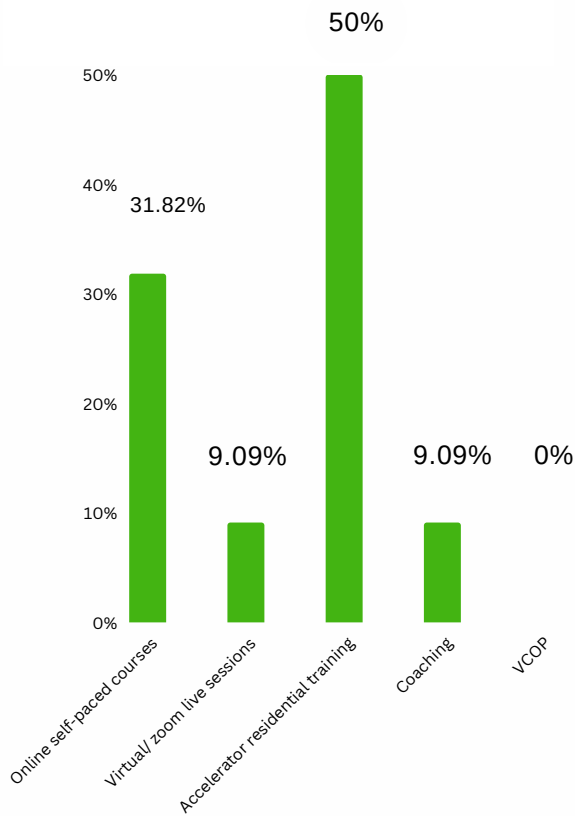


Figure 8: Most impactful component

To specifically ascertain the impact of each component, insights from figure 8 indicated that 50% of the respondents rated the accelerator residential training as most impactful while 31.8%, 9.09%, 9.09% and 0% voted for online-self paced courses, coaching, virtual live session and the VCOP group respectively.

These results were not surprising as analyzed data prior to the commencement of the programme revealed that the participants

preferred more of active engagement (47.31%). This was followed closely by instructor led activity (38.71%) which encapsulated the definition of the accelerator residential training, which was the only physical engagement training component in the programme.

TO IMPROVE AND INSPIRE YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE AND DECISION MAKING PROCESS, WHAT MODEL OF LEARNING WOULD BE MOST EFFECTIVE FOR YOU? N=93

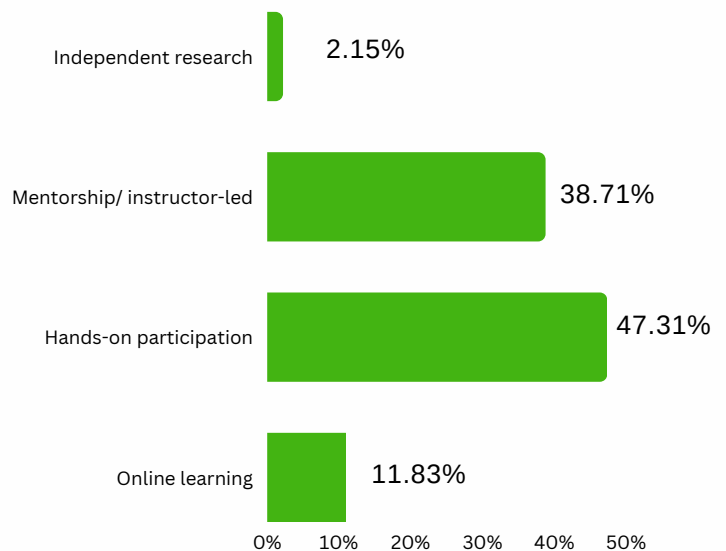


Figure 9: Most impactful component

During the group discussions, the responses from the participants varied greatly as their preference spread across all the components. For P. I from University of Ibadan, it was a hard decision to choose but ultimately revealed that the residential training for him was the best part.

“ It is hard to pick actually but I would say so far, I think I have enjoyed the physical sessions more. Besides the fact that network tries to misbehave, it goes on and off and I miss somethings. It made me lose interest occasionally in the online session. But physically, being amongst people, it is a lot more interesting for me and I prefer physical interactions to online interactions”

P.I, Male

Another debater, Y.T had another fascinating view on the components of which she shared how helpful the virtual live sessions were for her.

“ Mine was the online sessions we had. Being on a zoom call for two hours and not bulge, you do not move from the phone and you jot as if you are in a real class, has never been me. Its either I’m late to the call or I do not follow through from the beginning to the end. LEAP Africa’s online sessions were so good that I would literally set my alarm that I need to be here at 11am and I’m there with my book and my pen because there was so much value that was being delivered”

Y.T, Female

There were others that preferred the coaching sessions like G.E;

We had a variety of training and all of them were wonderful. From the live session classes, the WhatsApp group, the courses etc. But the one that stood out for me was the coaching session. Our coach was everything. We learnt and now I know a lot because since I am medically inclined, I do not flow with things of politics. But he taught us from scratch, made us know some certain things, he gave us assignments and he made us face our challenges. In fact, he made a great impact on us”

G.E, Female

Although the rating of the VCOP on the survey as seen in figure 8 appeared not to be encouraging by the semi-finalists, this resulted different reasons which were elaborated upon from discussions and provided context to the results from the survey. For some of the debaters like Y.T, they expressed that there was poor communication of scheduled meetings on the group.

“ The first gap I noticed was the communication on WhatsApp. I feel like many of the meetings were too impromptu. I could have something scheduled for tomorrow and I could be told to come back at 11am for a meeting. It was too impromptu”

Y.T, Female

However, when this question was posed generally to other debaters who were on the group, they expressed a different view as analyzed data revealed that about 84% of them felt the group supported them with relevant information to encourage their participation in political processes.

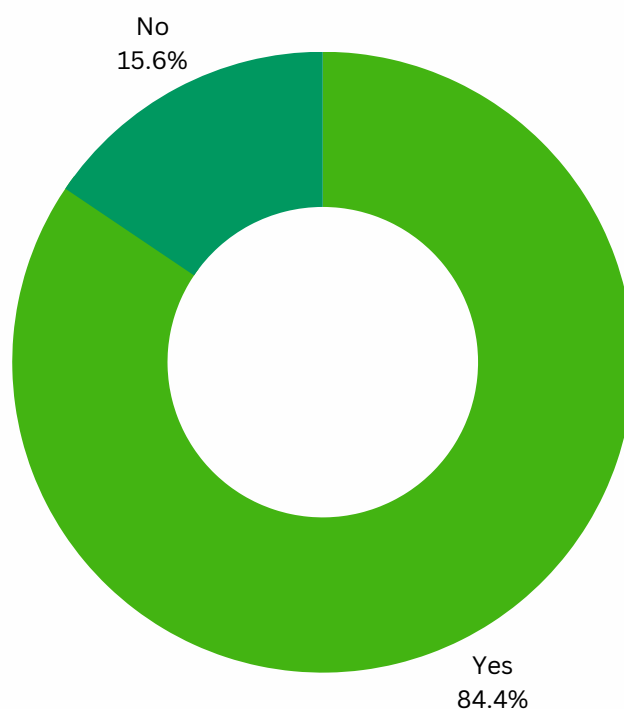


Figure 10: Level of support achieved from the VCOP group

Essentially, all the components of the programme were targeted at developing the skills and knowledge of all the debaters so they could advocate from a point of knowledge. The debaters were taught on topics ranging from public speaking, effective communication, public policy, public administration, research, leadership, ethics and values and creating public value. When asked about what specific skills they gained on the programme, 24% of the respondents indicated they had gained and honed effective communication skills. 22%, 21%, 15%, 9% and 9% chose public speaking skills, research skills, team work and leadership.

ACQUIRED SKILLS N=45



Figure 11: Skills acquired by participant from capacity building activities

Surprisingly, with the understanding that many of the participants had experience debating, the analyzed data revealed that the most acquired skills revolved around the act of effectively communicating and public speaking. This indication further provides an interesting and emerging insight on how useful the programme was in refining and sharpening the communication skills of the debaters. However, some of the debaters highlighted on how they have been able to learn more about the need to research. This was heavily discussed during the focus group discussion as some of them shared how the debate forced them to research deeply into their given topics which exposed them to valuable information and knowledge they did not possess before the programme

“ The topics gave me a reason to do more research to better understand things about the country. With it being tied to Nigeria and the important decision we are about to make; the debate has helped me to be more informed about Nigeria’s issues and the change and decisions I want to see going forward especially in the next elections”.

Y.T, Female

Gleaned insights from figure 11 also show that 9% of the participants shared that they had acquired leadership skills on the programme. This may also be a reflection from the below average completion rate of the courses on the LMS which was heavily focused on courses on leadership.

■ Total Enrollments

106

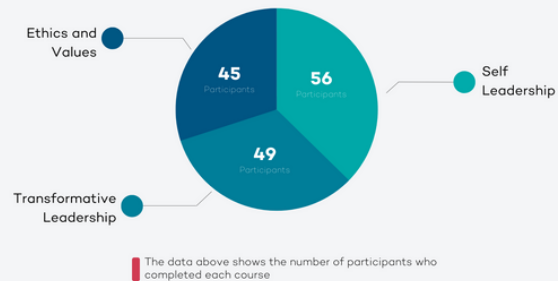
■ Unique Students

66

Our data shows 66 students were 98% active on the platform.

■ **45**
Participants had 100% completion rate

■ Completion Rate by Course



Avg. of Percent Completed

47.17%

Figure 12: Analytics from the LEAP Africa learning management system

Although this competency was quite low compared to others, debaters who undertook the leadership modules on the learning management system (LMS) expressed how they experienced significant changes in their mindset regarding leadership and other core values.

“It began with a review of our core values, who our favorite self-leader is... It brought the entire lecture into context. This course makes me not only want to be a better person, but to consciously put in the work to get there”

J.A, Male

Generally, exposure to these learning experiences and skills acquisition was intended for the participants to develop leadership capabilities and increase their sense of responsibilities towards fostering youth activism across an array of political discussions. It aimed to not only develop the participants, but to harness their agency to call others to action.

As seen in figure 13, about 93% of the total participants who responded at the end of the programme were in agreement with the fact that the programme indeed helped them to develop their leadership qualities along with the ability to use their voices to call others to actions. This data, culminates relevant indication to the effectiveness in the capacity building activities incorporated into the programme. More than that, it revealed how far the participants are willing to go beyond just acquiring these skills, to utilizing their strengths to advocating and mobilizing others for social causes. This was demonstrated from their responses to the question on what they were going to do differently after the programme. .

Many of the respondents revealed that they were looking at driving awareness campaigns, engage in active citizenship through lending their voices and volunteering and also, become actively involved in leadership and political avenues

Did the programme help you develop leadership qualities and challenge you to utilised your voice to mobilize others to action N=45

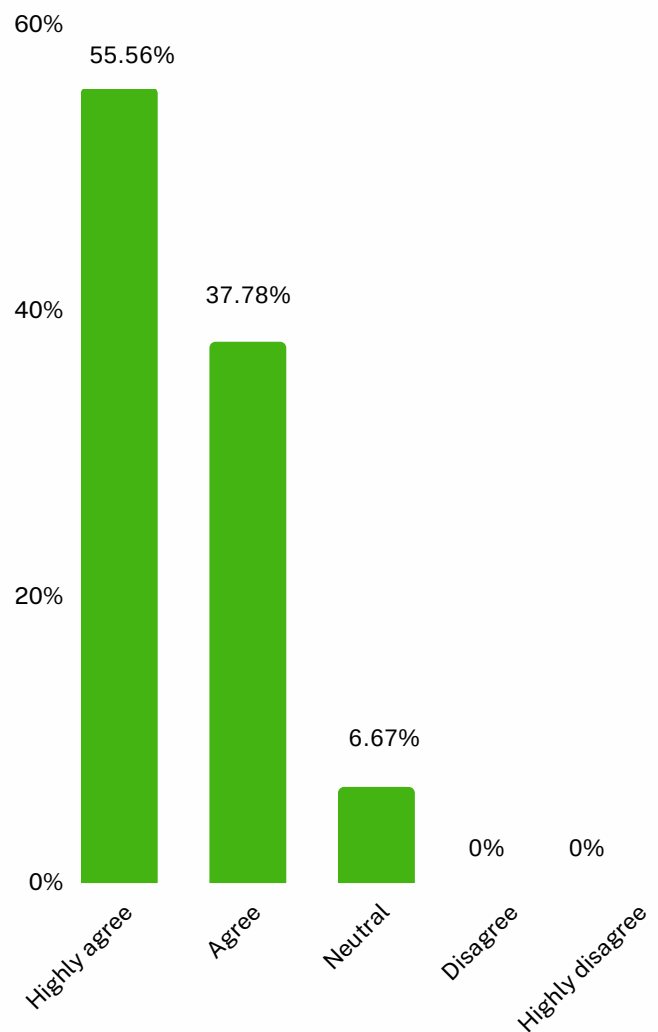


Figure 13: Level of leadership development



DISCUSSION

The study set out to answer pertinent questions regarding the validity of utilizing debates to project youth voices as well the importance of capacity building elements to further motivate the debaters to engage in active citizenship and leadership. Interestingly, outcomes and learnings from the programme revealed key insights into the debate platform and beyond.

The findings of the study revealed that the debate platform was to a large extent, useful for youth expression. The participants shared expressly on how the opportunity provided a platform for young people to speak on critical issues centered on challenges young people face in the economy. This was evident from the observation of the passion by which they lent their voices to speak on fundamental national issues in the country. However, in the focus group discussions, the debaters did highlight the need to expand the goal of the platform to supersede just speaking on the

present issues, to undertaking more actionable demonstrations to solve the problems. They added that doing so could potentially increase the reach of the platform and the impact of their voice.

Another key learning from the study revealed and agrees with the narrative that young people are indeed solution providers in the real sense of it. There is no doubt that young people offer a unique perspective to certain matters thus the current advocacy for the inclusion of young people in demystifying and designing plans to improve the state of the country. However, observations of the participants during the residential physical training revealed a tinge of fear and confusion towards the extent by which they could speak deeply and publicly on each topic given to them. This may be closely linked with the low sense of security and fear of retribution which speaks to the narratives being propagated in the country. Nevertheless, the need for adopting this participatory approach and including young people in utilizing their agency through their voices has never been more imminent in these times.

This was evident as the debaters vibrantly proffered inimitable and strategic plans to solve a myriad of existing issues plaguing the country.

It was also discovered that the capacity building component also played a huge role in reigniting and strengthening the skills and intellectual capacity of the participants relevant to governance. Given the statistics that young people especially in Africa are hardly engaged in political activities and governance related discussions[1], the debate truly provided an opportunity to educate not only the audience, but the participants themselves. A significant number of the debaters also agreed that the debate not only required them to speak, but also forced them to hone different skills they learnt on the programme such as the ability to research deeply to amass critical information to speak from a depth of knowledge.

Also, the debaters demonstrated enthusiasm regarding utilizing the leadership knowledge and skills they had gotten from the programme to mobilize others to action as their next steps after the programme.

There were also unexpected findings realized from the programme. One of which was the potential effect of the ASUU strike which affected the

university institutions in Nigeria within the time the programme was carried out. It was assumed that the strike would pose as a stumbling block that would greatly affect the participation of students in the programme. Conversely, some debaters shared that the strike was actually a contributory factor to their increased motivation to register and participate in the programme. They expressed that the free time posed as an excellent opportunity to engage themselves to avoid being idle at home.

Another unexpected finding was the discovery of the extent of influence from family, friends and teachers in guiding the decisions of young people. In the course of extensive discussions, four out of six of the discussants were actually motivated by their teachers and friends to participate in the competition. More than that, some of the debaters shared that they began speaking on issues when their teachers and friends highlighted their potentials regarding speaking and further encouraged them to utilize their voices on different platform including the debate

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The concept of youth voice entails more than just the projection of sounds but indeed, an action dedicated towards instigating change at various levels in the country. Truly, as time and events have shown, there is a high level of potential resident in young people seeking to be harnessed in different ways. By enabling and including youth in political avenues, existing barriers hindering youth participation in political activities are removed to a large extent. Platforms such as the debate have proven that young people, when actively and positively engaged are quite internally motivated to utilize their agency collectively to hold government accountable in their own right.

Insights from the youth leadership debate programme indicates that personal development of the debaters was evidently one of the major positive outcomes. More than that, in a much broader context, while speaking about current issues and proffering solutions to existing issues, there is a greater need to reconcile the ideas regarding social change with actionable steps.

So, it is pertinent to ensure that the voice of the youth is not stifled in any way, as the effects could be quite tragic.

To further support and enable youth voice, Government should create an enabling environment where young people feel safe enough to air substantial opinions on different cases. This will serve to open honest dialogs on issues that ordinarily would have been ignored or cast aside without infringing on their freedom rights. Through this, more young people will be motivated and inspired to engage in using their voices to contribute to policies and interventions that promote national development.

Also, increasing awareness and access to platforms that project the voices of young people cannot be overemphasized. Advocacy groups, unions, local forums are viable opportunities where young people can engage in and contribute their efforts towards collectively propagating their voices.

More importantly, it is essential that young people have the right access to adequate information on governance structures and political processes. Government, schools and civil societies need to collaborate to find ways to increase access to learning opportunities regarding governance, history and political topics. For instance, incorporating compulsory courses on governance up till tertiary level, improving access to learning management systems at low cost or even for free. This in turn, will greatly expand the knowledge and skills of young people which would be instrumental in helping them advocate from a point of knowledge. With the population of young people having a higher stake in the larger population, synergy between political actors and youth must be achieved through seamless collaboration. With that, social development and national change would go beyond just an idea, to become a reality.

LIMITATIONS

This research study was not without its limitations. One of such was the difficulty in carrying out more focus group discussions and even interviews with the participants. This may have resulted from the fact that the programme was mostly conducted online as more qualitative data would likely have been recorded if there were more physical sessions.

Also, there was significant attrition at the endline which recorded a reduction in responses at the end of the programme when compared to the baseline. While the study originally planned to compare information at baseline to endline, the constraints from the attrition made it difficult to do so at the end. This was likely a consequence of the reduced interest from the participants who were unable to qualify for the final competition. In that regard, more findings from a larger sample size should be taken into consideration as more future research is conducted in this area of study.

REFERENCES

1. Status of African Youth Report (SoAYR).2019. Accessed at <https://www.prb.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Status-of-African-Youth-SPEC.pdf>
2. Washington Youth Voice Handbook (2006). The what, who, why, where, when, and how youth voice happens. Accessed at http://buildingpublicunderstanding.org/assets/files/engage/youth_voice_handbook.pdf
3. Zeldin.S., Gurtner.J., Chapa.B.(2018). Act for Youth. Preparing for Youth Engagement: Youth Voice, Youth-Adult Partnership, Youth Organizing. Accessed at https://actforyouth.net/resources/pm/pm_preparing-youth-engagement_0818.pdf
4. Hurd, Amber T., "Focus on Youth: Awakening Youth Voice & Engagement in Community Heritage through the Implementation of a Youth Participatory Empowerment Model" (2020). Dissertations. 923. Accessed at <https://irl.umsl.edu/dissertation/923>
5. African Union. A study on the roles and contributions of youth to peace and security in Africa. Accessed at <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/a-study-on-the-roles-and-contributions-of-youth-to-peace-and-security-in-africa-17-sept-2020.pdf>
6. Owens, P. E., La Rochelle, M., Nelson, A. A., & Montgomery-Block, K. F. (2011). Youth voices influencing local and regional change. *Children Youth and Environments*, 21(1), 253-274. Accessed at https://www.academia.edu/21425916/Youth_Voices_Influencing_Local_and_Regional_Change
7. Mphamba, D., Solomon, F. R., Nyairo, G., Kim, C. J., Krishnamoorthi, M., Edem, B., ... & Sarnquist, C. C. (2022). Youth voices from an informal settlement of Nairobi, Kenya: Engaging adolescent perspectives on violence to inform prevention. *Global public health*, 1-14. Accessed at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17441692.2022.2076895?journalCode=rgph20>
8. Umar, B. B., Krauss, S. E., Samah, A. A., & Hamid, J. A. (2017). Youth voice in Nigerian school-based management committees. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 5(1), 86-93. Accessed at <http://www.journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/IJELS/article/view/3142/2750>

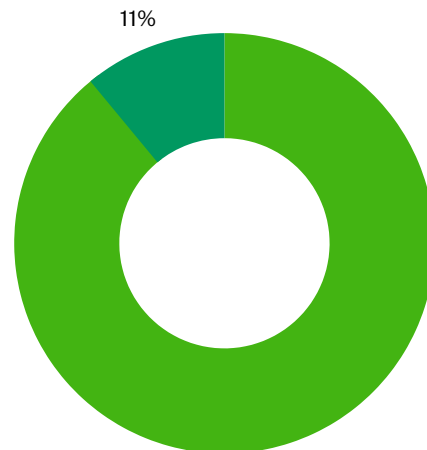
9. Richard, A. N., & Rika, O. N. An Appraisal of the Use of New Media in the Projection of Nigeria Dream By Eleme Youths. Accessed at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349924644_An_Appraisal_of_the_Use_of_New_Media_in_the_Projection_of_Nigeria_Dream_By_Eleme_Youths
10. International Socialism. (2022). More than a moment: what did Black Lives Matter achieve? Accessed at <http://isj.org.uk/what-did-blm-achieve/>
11. Sahara Reporters.(2022). Accessed at <https://saharareporters.com/2022/10/16/human-rights-violations-police-brutality-sparked-endsars-protest-still-persist-2-years>
12. Democracy works foundation. Working paper: African Youth Participation is crucial to building democratic societies. Accessed at <https://www.democracyworks.org.za/african-youth-participation-is-crucial-to-building-democratic-societies/>
13. Ibezim. E.A. African Journal Online. The Philosophy of Youth inclusion in Nigerian Politics: Trends, Challenges and Prospects. Accessed at <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jrhr/article/view/190041>
14. Umar, Bashiru & Krauss, Steven & Ahrari, Seyedali & Abu Samah, Asnarulkhadi & Abdul Hamid, Jamaliah. (2021). Socio-Cultural Barriers to Youth Voice in Nigerian School-Based Management Committees: A Multi-Case Analysis. *Pertanika Journal of Science and Technology*. 29. 10.47836/pjssh.29.s1.19. Accessed at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350902477_Socio-Cultural_Barriers_to_Youth_Voice_in_Nigerian_School-Based_Management_Committees_A_Multi-Case_Analysis
15. British Council. Next Generation Nigeria.(2020). Accessed at https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/next_generation_nigeria_report_final_digital_web_copy_0.pdf
16. World Movement for Democracy. Youth Against Fear: Cases of Young Political Prisoners. Accessed at <https://www.movedemocracy.org/youth-fear-cases-young-political-prisoners>
17. British Council. Next Generation-Youth Voices in Tanzania. (2016). Accessed at https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/tanzania_the_next_generation_report.pdf

18. Sylwia.B., Stavros.E.D., Patrick L., Ornella.M.(2020). Good Practices of Youth Participation. Accessed at https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/eu_regional_and_urban_development/topics/documents/youth_for_a_just_transition_mid-term_deliverable_report_final.pdf
19. Beyond Youth Custody. (2014). Young People and Resettlement: Participatory Approaches. Accessed at <http://www.beyondyouthcustody.net/wp-content/uploads/Participatory-approaches-for-young-people-in-resettlement-a-practitioner%E2%80%99s-guide.pdf>
20. Ace Project. Youth and Elections. Accessed at <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/yt/yt10/yt240/a-continuum-of-youth-participation>
21. United Nations Youth. (2013). Youth, Political Participation and Decision making. Accessed at <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-political-participation.pdf>
22. UNFPA. (2018). Guidance on enhancing youth participation in East and Southern Africa. Accessed at <https://esaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/GUIDANCE%20ON%20ENHANCING%20YOUTH%20PARTICIPATION%20IN%20ESA.pdf>
23. Arnstein, Sherry. (2019). A Ladder of Citizen Participation. Journal of the American Planning Association. 85. 24-34. 10.1080/01944363.2018.1559388. https://www.miguelangelmartinez.net/IMG/pdf/1969_Arnstein_participation_ladder_AJP.pdf

APPENDIX

At the start of the programme, 104 students registered for the debate competition. Out of the total number of participants, 93 filled the baseline survey which was used to assess their perceptions as well as mindset on certain topics and themes revolving around governance, civic participation and involvement in political decision making. At endline, there was a decrease in the number of participants who filled the endline survey as only 45 responses were recorded.

Percentage of participants who did not fill the baseline survey



Percentage of participants who filled the baseline survey
89%

Figure 14: Baseline survey responses

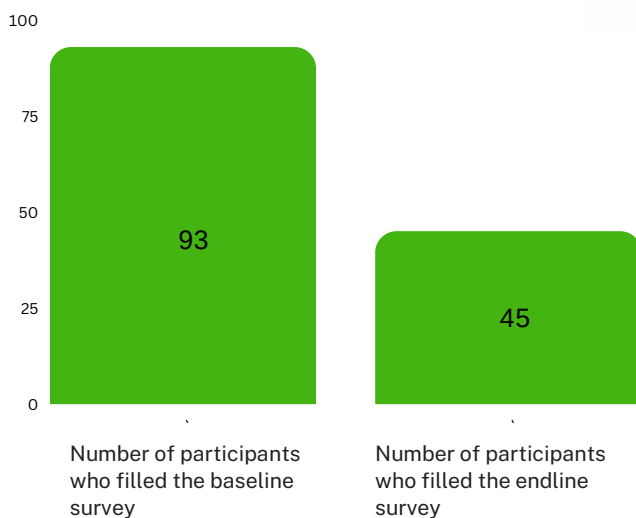


Figure 15: Number of participants who filled the survey at baseline and endline

Copyright © LEAP Africa 2023

Report Design and Concept: Evi Michael

Research Team:

Evi Michael,
Rasheed Ajao,
Hope Obamwonyi,
Terhemem Agabo
Pamela Uzoma

When using this work, please attribute the credit to LEAP Africa using the following statement:

LEAP Africa(2023). Youth Voice in Africa: A Case Study of Young Nigerians Changing the Narratives