

"BEST METHODS FOR EFFECTIVE & SUSTAINABLE ENGAGEMENT OF THE 21ST CENTURY YOUTH:

By

Owanaemi Emmanuel Deinbo, Esq.

Introduction

The fact that the youth constitute a large majority of the population of nearly every society cannot be overemphasized. As members of the society, youth share in virtually every conceivable concern - socio-economic, political, technological, educational, and so on, of the society. Besides, youth may be considered a veritable source of human resources for every Community. It will therefore, not be unexpected for the society to tap into the wealth of contribution potentially resident in the youth especially and particularly in matters related to the youth themselves. Obviously, it is through youth engagement that the society can derive the full benefits of the youth.

However, it seems logical to assert that to properly harness the potentials in the youth requires identifying some measures which must be considered effective and sustainable in the process engaging the youth. This is moreso, in view of the fact that the 21st century youth have become extremely poised, sophisticated and smart by reason mostly of advanced technology. It is in this respect that this research considers some best approaches for effective and sustainable engagement of the 21st century youth. It is however considered pivotal to attempt to answer the question- what is youth engagement?

What is Youth Engagement?

In the Youth Engagement Measurement Guide, Youth Power cited the Youth Power Learning Community of Practice on Youth Engagement developed comprehensive definition of meaningful youth engagement in the following words;

“Meaningful youth engagement is an inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful partnership between youth and adults whereby power is shared, respective

contributions are valued, and young people's ideas, perspectives, skills and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms and organizations that affect their lives and their communities, countries and globally. Meaningful youth engagement recognizes and seeks to change the power structures that prevent young people from being considered experts in regard to their own needs and priorities, while also building their leadership capacities. Youth includes a full spectrum of the population aged 10-29 regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic identity, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, political affiliation, or physical location.”(<https://www.youthpower.org/youth-engagement-guide>)

The Youth Engagement Tool kit (eecd_YETOOL_E.pdf), appears to agree with the above approach when it relied on the definition provided by The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement which says of youth engagement as;

"the sustained and meaningful involvement of a young person in an activity focused outside of themselves.

The Tool Kit went further to observe that:

"A closer look at this definition provides important hints for effective activities and practices:

1. Sustained: Youth engagement that endures over time leads to positive outcomes. However, short and intense engagement experiences can also be effective if they satisfy the rest of the definition. Intense experiences often motivate sustained ones.

2. Meaningful: The engagement activities and topics are relevant to young people – this can be assured if youth are asked to contribute to the development of the engagement activity.

3. A focus outside the self: Youth are engaged when they feel connected and/or are contributing to something larger than themselves."

This third point seems to be very keen. The engagement must be such as is outside the youth, and create that sense or feeling of connectedness to or contribution to something

larger than themselves. This therefore brings to mind again, the idea of the society, that which is larger than the youth themselves. Is youth engagement therefore, important?

Importance of Youth Engagement

“Youth know what is meaningful and valuable to their community. Even if you are just a few years removed, you will not understand their reality like they do.”- Lynn Ann Duffley, NB

It seems like every progressive minded society ought to pay great attention to youth engagement. This simple understanding appears to underscore the need for youth engagement. Resultantly, for the Youth Engagement Tool Kit (above),;

"It's simple. Youth engagement (YE) can and does change lives... Youth engagement recognizes young people's right to participate in decisions that impact them and acknowledges the great skills and strengths they bring to the table. It injects young people as valued stakeholders into creating effective and inclusive policies, programs and environments."

It is further admittedly argued:

"Effective youth engagement leads to positive outcomes for young people at three levels:

1. **The Individual level:** e.g. increased personal skills, healthy choices, and sense of identity.
2. **The social level:** e.g. stronger positive connections with friends and adults, and a larger support network.
3. **The system level:** e.g. greater civic engagement, policies and programs responsive to the needs of young people, and new creative ways to govern." (Youth Engagement Tool Kit)

In the Better Together, A Practical Guide to Effective Engagement with Young People (Final-Better-Together-Youth-Engagement-Guide-V3-2016-02-09.pdf), the importance of youth engagement is again, summarized in these words;

"Young people are best placed to suggest solutions to government about the issues that affect them and their communities. Young people have a range of experiences, thoughts, ideas and perspectives that can enrich decision making processes and lead to more relevant and whole of community decisions, projects, policies, programs, use of resources and outcomes."

Indeed, as noted earlier, a progressive minded society ought necessarily to pay serious attention to youth engagement. Its importance, as can be gleaned from the above is conspicuously encapsulated in its benefits to society. Its benefits are too far obvious to ignore. It ought to, and should be an integral part of the basic processes of every society. What then can we say about youth engagement methods?

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT METHODS

"Young people have worked hard to neutralise or minimise negative trends, but from a long-term perspective, engagement practices are not sustainable, and ultimately they result in the dis-empowerment of youth."

The above statement taken from Best Practices in Youth Engagement with IGOs.pdf is very instructive. Where the youth engagement practices are not sustainable, the ultimate results become negative and consequently, the youth become disempowered. This in essence, harps the place of the sustainability element in the youth engagement methods.

Sustainability is the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level. It is the avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance. Implicit in this approach to the youth engagement mantras is that the processes must be such that do not bring about any form negative consequences. Such unpleasant outcomes in most cases have widespread effects. This underscores the need for thoughtfulness in the choice of youth engagement methods.

To relate the concept of sustainability to youth engagement, we may need to know the expected qualities of the 21st century youth. This is necessary to ensure that the engagement practices enhance and engender the fundamental features of the 21st century youth.

The 21st Century Youth

As human nature continues to progress, everything appears to become complex. In this respect, the youth of the 21st century seem to be exposed to a rather complex environment, issues and policies, to mention but a few. It is therefore, no doubt that the youth are either already possessed with or expected to possess certain qualities which are akin to the contemporary times. It is in this regard that "The Essential Qualities for our Youth for the 21st Century" (<https://mgiep.unesco.org/article/the-essential-qualities-for-our-youth-for-the-21st-century>), has the essential qualities of the 21st century youth thus;

"Youth need to have the ability and courage to question, assess and evaluate issues to arrive at the most peaceful and optimal solutions. To do so they require skills not only of critical inquiry but also socio-emotional competencies. They need to be mindful of the global environment and its intercultural diversity."

From the above, we may pick out some of the qualities of the 21st century youth as follows;

1. Ability and courage to question, assess and evaluate issues.
2. Ability to arrive at the most peaceful and optional solutions.
3. Possession of skills of critical inquiry.
4. Possession of of socio-emotional competencies.
5. Global environmental and intercultural diversity consciousness.

Given the above, it would appear that for any youth engagement strategy to be sustainable, it must be seen as enhancing these qualities of the 21st century youth. In this wise, we may identify some sustainable youth engagement methods.

Sustainable Youth Engagement Methods

The Best Practices in Youth Engagement above, three basic methods of youth engagement are captured as follows:

1. Strengthen youth civil society through:

- empowerment activities such as capacity building and capacity development, knowledge management and experience sharing;
- investment in youth structures – both mid-term and long-term – to improve the sustainability of youth initiatives, build resilience in youth and create an enabling environment for innovations;
- monitoring and evaluation of youth engagement, especially through documenting challenges, experiences, lessons learnt and best practices. Special attention should be given to the quality and outcomes of youth participation.

2. Advance a legal and policy framework on youth by:

- ensuring a human rights-based approach to youth and youth issues, and recognising the specific rights of youth;
- developing political and administrative capacities to engage with youth through capacity development and activities focused on addressing institutional and structural inequalities faced by youth;
- conducting reforms based on research and evidence, particularly with regard to access to information and participation opportunities;
- adjusting institutional arrangements to be youth friendly³⁰ and efficient in responding to the rights and needs of youth.

3. Build partnerships with youth, including:

- partnerships for fostering innovations and supporting youth leadership. Additionally, efforts should be made to pilot innovative programmes and activities;
- using non-traditional means of engagement, such as ICTs;
- the creation of an enabling environment for continuous and constant engagement of youth in law and policy, development, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

In the UN Youth Strategy (Youth 2030, Working with and for Young People), the United Nations has also stipulated some priorities amongst which are the following methods for youth engagement;

1. Promote an enabling environment
2. Promote youth participation in formal
peace processes
3. Promote safe public spaces
4. Convene and buttress partnerships
5. Foster continuous dialogue
6. Reinforce capacity
7. Expand opportunities
8. Protect and support youth in humanitarian settings

It is thus, suggested here that these and many other sustainable strategies would lead to effective engagement of the contemporary youth and may therefore, be considered as some best Methods for sustainable development of the 21st century youth.

Conclusion

Youth Engagement is considered an important aspect of the organization of every society. The strategies for youth engagement must be sustainable in order to yield the desired results. Where youth engagement strategies are not sustainable, the result may be youth dis-empowerment which may lead to other social vices.

Thank You.

Barr. Owanaemi Emmanuel Deinbo