

**CLOSING REMARKS OF MRS. MARY DANABIA AT THE INTERNATIONAL
VOLUNTEER SERVICE EXCHANGE CONFERENCE ON TUESDAY 13TH OCTOBER
2015 AT THE CNCC BEIJING CHINA.**

Our nation will succeed or fail to the degree that all of us -- citizens and businesses alike -- are active participants in building strong, sustainable and enriching communities - Arnold Hiatt

“If our hopes of building a better and safer world are to become more than wishful thinking, we will need the engagement of volunteers more than ever.”

“Let us remember the large numbers of citizens who, day in and day out, through acts of volunteerism large and small, bring hope to so many of the world's disadvantaged. Let us ensure that this wonderful resource, available in abundance to every nation, is recognized and supported as it works towards a more prosperous and peaceful world.” Kofi Anan

Though government has an important role to play in meeting the many challenges that remain before us, we are coming to understand that no organization, including government, will fully succeed without the active participation of each of us. Volunteers are vital to enabling this country to live up to the true promise of its heritage - Bill Clinton

No matter how big and powerful government gets, and the many services it provides, it can never take the place of volunteers. –

Ronald Reagan

Volunteering creates a national character in which the community and the nation take on a spirit of compassion, comradeship and confidence. Brian O'Connell

ABOUT VOLUNTEERING FOR DEVELOPMENT

Development is a collective responsibility. The concept of volunteerism though as old as mankind, has undergone transformation and is acknowledged as a development strategy that offers all and sundry the exciting opportunity to contribute to nation building and sustainable development with enormous socioeconomic benefits to the volunteers, the communities and the nation.



There is however, a prevailing apparent lull in volunteer activities in Nigeria especially in the youth sector arising from the general lack of awareness about the enormous benefits of volunteerism to nation building and sustainable development much as there is a dearth of innovative volunteer programmes and opportunities for positive youth engagement.

Youth volunteering is globally acknowledged as the best practice in positive youth engagement and development. Youth volunteering is a Positive Youth Development Strategy which cuts across boundaries of all human endeavours and engages young men and women in a broad range of activities that enhances youth participation and positively harnesses their energies, vigour and innovation to contribute to the achievement of national and global development goals.

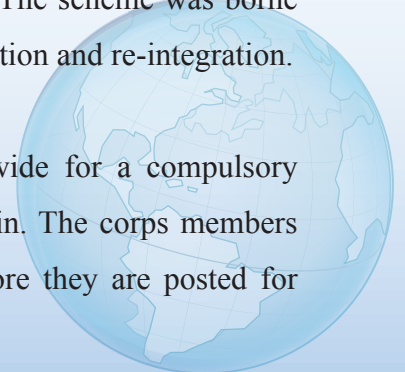
Attempting to address the many challenges of youth empowerment through volunteering is a win-win situation for young adults with enormous benefits to the youth, their communities and the nation.

Youth Volunteering is a marvellous way to explore possible career options. Youth Volunteering is relatively risk-free in that young adult can sample a work field or setting without making a long-term commitment to it. This allows them to discover whether or not they like the work or are good at it and if they discover it is not for them, they can move on.

Youth Volunteerism is acknowledged as a youth development programme that address youth related challenges such as reintegrating and reconnecting the youth with their communities, promoting training for self discovery, confidence building and self actualization, develop capacity for self or paid employment and an orientation for citizenship, patriotism and leadership development.

It is with this paradigm in perspective that we introduce the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), a statutory body of the Federal Government of Nigeria began with the mission to promote 7 strategic objectives amongst which are national unity and integration, dignity of labour and self-reliance in the Nigerian youth through entrepreneurial development and skill acquisition.. The scheme was borne out of the exigencies and post Nigeria Civil war for reconstruction, rehabilitation and re-integration.

Under the scheme, young graduates are mobilized and deployed nationwide for a compulsory one-year service. They are deployed to states other than their state of origin. The corps members undergo basic orientation programme including para-military training before they are posted for primary assignment.



The NYSC with presence (infrastructure & personnel) in all the 774 LGAs of Nigeria is probably one organization that is strategically positioned to play a significant role in mitigating the devastating impact of youth restiveness and other vices as the scheme is one of the best available entry points for reaching hard to reach areas and indigent grass root people in any field of endeavour or program at the most minimal cost.

The NYSC has the potential and capacity to contribute to a National Youth Volunteer Development Programme. The scheme basically has 4 cardinal programmes namely; Orientation, Primary Assignment, Community Development Service and Winding up/Passing out ceremony

Evidence abound that lack of employment opportunities coupled with a sense of hopelessness make the youth susceptible to violence, crime and terrorism. With the global economic meltdown and other economic vicissitudes, the fortunes of many nations have taken a turn for the worse. Nigeria is not more favoured. Besides the effect of unemployment on productivity, it is also a threat to national security. There are clear indications of this already, given the role of youth in fomenting violence and the increasing incidence of religious extremism. The situation further portends a grave danger of escalation, at a high political, economic, social and security cost to Nigeria, thereby necessitating urgent and bold action.

The NYSC with its youth focused developmental programmes vis-a-viz the orientation/primary assignment/CDS and other activities such as the Skill Acquisition, volunteer work through the HIV/AIDS prevention, care & support project awareness/sensitization, MDG/SDG, family & community life campaigns; mobilize, sensitize, create awareness as well as build capacity of the youths to achieve its objectives. We also collaborate with the VSO in the advancement of education in the rural areas. NYSC also participate in Election and census duties, Polio eradication

Some accomplishments of the NYSC:

Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development:

Within the last 3 years, the skill Acquisition programme has trained over 500,000 youths on entrepreneurship development to become wealth creators rather than job seekers. Over 2,000 have set up their businesses as entrepreneurs.



The HIV/AIDS Project

- The project has the broad aim of empowering young Nigerians with Sexual and Reproductive Health knowledge and skills as means of reducing the spread of HIV & AIDS through the peer education concept of training young people to reach their peers.
- The project is also aimed at mobilizing young people for HIV Counseling and Testing (HCT) for prevention and impact mitigation of the epidemic. In alignment with the National Strategic Framework.
- Over the years the project has recorded significant progress from providing the right knowledge on HIV/AIDS during a one day orientation seminar to corps members in the camp, to a six day training of Peer Educators Trainers (PETs) to be deployed to secondary schools and HCT training for PETs and HCT services in the camps to the development of a work place policy and the training of peer influencers to implement the policy.
- Anecdotal evidence from monitoring and supervision and the evaluation of the project revealed that the process of implementation of the project is making impact among corp members and young persons. The beneficiaries have demonstrated significant increase in knowledge of Sexual Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS issues among other outcomes in the community.
- Over the past 9 years, the project has recorded huge successes among which are;
 - i. Able to reach over 40 million young people in and out of school has been reached by the project
 - ii. The skills acquired by this corps members and young people not only guarantee a HIV free generation, but has also provided career and income generating opportunities to corps members after service
 - iii. Project was referenced and identified as a cheap and effective means of HIV prevention by Mr. President at the UN high level meeting general assembly special session in June 2011, in New York.
 - iv. Since implementation began 13 years ago, close to 150,000 graduates have volunteered and participated in this programme



- v. Evaluation and other reports on project shows that the beneficiaries have demonstrated significant increase in knowledge of Sexual Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS issues and young people reached by the project are better off than their peers among other outcomes in the community.
- vi. NYSC project was adjudged the biggest Peer Education project in the world and a world best practice in HIV/AIDS prevention as a result of the numerous achievements of the project.

My personal contribution through the CESDI to promote value reorientation among communities working with teachers, volunteers/facilitators to train students in positive character development, values and work ethics

Having said this much, we therefore call for the support of the distinguished participants at this conference to use their good network/reach to galvanise the required resources to endorse the NYSC as a platform for the promotion and sustenance of the spirit, culture and practice of volunteerism and community service among young people thereby scaling up volunteer activism across board through innovative and impactful programme development and implementation aimed at youth mobilisation, orientation, organisation, and coordination primarily to foster, develop and sustain volunteerism in the country against the background of the apparent lull in volunteer activities in Nigeria especially in the youth sector arising from **the general lack of awareness about the enormous benefits of volunteerism to nation building and sustainable development much as there is a gross dearth of innovative volunteer programmes and opportunities for positive youth mobilisation, orientation and engagement as active participants in the task of nation building.**

The support would transform the NYSC into an innovative youth sector volunteer development and national action platform for the **mobilisation of the enormous redundant labour force (youth), orientation, social reintegration, positive engagement and active participation** in innovative community and sustainable development programmes.

In the light of the new UN agenda for sustainable development, especially employment creation for the youths we make a strong appeal for technical assistance to redesign the NYSC to become responsive to volunteer service. Volunteerism has the capacity to address socio-economic challenges in the health sector, governance, infrastructure deployment, employment generation, agriculture value chain enhancement, disaster risk management, sports, entertainment and social media as well as value reorientation.



The south-south cooperation agenda should focus largely on agricultural practices development and ICT integration processes for medium and low level income countries.

We identify with the laudable efforts of volunteer programmes such as the white Helmets, Red Cross & Red Crescent, UNV and BVF and the benefits of their activities to youth development and socio-economic transformation. We equally thank the organizers and the United Nation Volunteer Programme for extending invitation to us to attend this conference. We look forward to the next steps and probably a new frontier in partnership to achieve our collective desire for peace, stability, value reorientation and sustainable development in the near future.

Thank you and God bless

