1. Introduction
In many countries, a person is considered a youth from the age at which the person is given equal treatment under the law – often referred to as the ‘age of majority’. This age is often 18 in many countries, and once a person passes this age, he is considered to be an adult. However, the operational definition and nuances of the term ‘youth’ often vary from country to country, depending on the specific socio-cultural, institutional, economic and political factors (UNDP 2000). In Nigeria, for example, it is taken to include the age bracket of 18-30 which is the benchmark of the National Youth Service Corps. In this paper, there is a temptation not to align to any age boundary in the definition of the youth. The raison de tat is simple, as it is generally known, youthfulness is a question of the mind. Nevertheless as a working tool, I have considered the people between the ages of 18-35 as forming core part of our subject matter - the youth. Going by these definitions, one thing is common- the youth constitutes the most energetic, dynamic, resourceful, active (Aja 2008) and yet the most volatile segment of any society.

According to the Lexicon, to change is to pass or make something pass from one state to another (Oxford Dictionary 2004); to become different and behave in a different way, either propelled by circumstances or by obedience to natural laws and circumstances. On the other hand, the environment, in our context, comprises the sum total of the external factors that affect or modify the relationship between, man and nature. The social environment therefore, is the place and condition that affects the behaviour and development of man and how he responds to phenomenon within and outside his control. Hence, the social environment is essentially where we live, develop, interact and respond to societal evolutions and changes.

The term nation building is used here to refers to a constructive process of engaging all citizens in building social engineering, social cohesion, economic prosperity and political stability in an inclusive and democratic way (The Point 2007). It is a process through which all people have access to, and control of, structures and mechanisms that govern their lives. According to The Point (2007), the vision sounds unattainable and lofty for two reasons. Firstly, few societies have found adequate ways to ensure that all adults fully participate in the political process; and secondly, even fewer have found adequate ways to ensure that the youth share in the burdens and benefits of citizenship.

2. Growing societal complexity and need for youth empowerment
While some accept change in good faith, many are averse to change. However, whether one is averse to change or not, we cannot help but to accept change because change is the only phenomenon we cannot change. Change is one thing that is permanent in nature. Frederick Engels a renowned exponent of social laws noted that ‘nothing remains what, where and as it was, but everything moves, comes into being and passes out of existence’ (Wiley 1990). The ‘real world’ noted John Wiley ‘consists of transition and flux’. The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead pointed out that, change is inherent in the very nature of things, every phenomenon of which we are aware – from galaxies to electrons, from humans to amoeba, from societies to families- all exists in a state of continual becoming (Wiley 1990). There are therefore no fixed entities or code of behaviour. Even if they were, no code of behaviour can universally be enforceable for all citizens or groups at all times.

From the biblical times, most of the dramatis personae who acted in the theatre of building and rebuiting their nations were the youth, people like Moses, Joseph, David, Sampson, Gideon, Japhthath, Paul, Timothy and Our Lord Jesus Christ were youths. Similarly, in ancient history, Alexander the Great, Odysseus, Achilles and the like were youths that wrote the names of not only their nations, but also their dynasties and empires in Gold. In contemporary history, Martin Luther King, the black pimperel (Nelson Mandela), Dr Nnamdi Azikwe, Kwame Nkuruma, Diaio Theli, Amilca Cabra and others almost single-handedly changed the destiny of their nations in the days of their youth (Omaka 2008).

To the contrary, there appeared to be general liturgy and apathy on the part of the youths, or is it, lack of empowerment for today’s youth. Gerontocracy has taken over most societies, especially in Africa.
That is why people like Paul Biya Robert Mugabe are still leaders of their counties even above their 70th and 80th birthdays. It is probably at the sordid picture of this state of affairs that the youth in Cameroon and Kenya are asking questions concerning the life leadership of their countries by these Gerontocrats. It is also due to the abject neglect of the voice of the youth that young men in the Niger Delta have risen up in arms to ask questions over the resources taken from their land. Militancy has taken over the entire South South region and other parts of the country where resource are being exploited without considering the relevance and future of the youths. The youth today are no longer completely docile, helpless and hapless. Youths of today are no longer the completely illiterate stock. The seeming apathy of the youth of the immediate past has changed. Today’s youth, just like their predecessors in the historical past are asking questions. Their voices are crying for audience. This is the voice of change. It is time they are heard for the youth are joint partners with elders for nation building in a changed socio-political environment.

3. **Rights of young persons under the law**

Most countries of the world are populated mainly by children and young persons (the youth). In Nigeria, reputed to be the most populous black nation in the world with a population of about 150 million, for example, 64 percent are the youth (Omaka 2007). The Geneva Declaration (1924) on the Rights of the Child, and the UN General Assembly Declaration on the Rights of a Child (1959) were precursors to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (1989). The Declaration set out lofty standards on the treatment of children and young persons. Similarly, the African Charter (1990) provided copiously on the rights, treatment, privileges and roles of young persons in all states (Ayua and Okagbue 1996). In Nigeria, the Constitution of the Federal Republic (1999) and the Child Rights Act (2003) jointly defined what and what are due to the Nigerian Youth and children.

The welfare of the youth was first statutorily recognised in 1943, through the Children and Young Persons Ordinance (1943). This later became chapter 31 of Laws of Nigeria as revised in 1948. This provision was retained as chapter 32 of Laws of the Federation of Nigeria as revised in 1958. On the adoption of a state structure in 1967, many states enacted their own Young Peoples Laws, which were almost identical to the original federal legislation. The Children and Young Person Laws (1986) of Anambra State for example, provides that young person have a right to education, social welfare, freedom of thought and conscience, right to a voice and to be heard, and right not to be maligned or ill-treated among others. In like manner Articles 19, 32, 34 and 35 of the UN Convention States provides that states are obliged to take legislative, social and educative measures to protect the youth or young persons from:

- Physical or mental violence
- Hazardous employment or one that can interfere with their education
- Sexual exploitation

Nwazuoke (2006) captured this provision this way;

“Work that is essentially exploitative and injurious to the physical, social, cognitive and moral development of the young person...occurs when they are exposed to long hours of work in dangerous or unhealthy environment, with too much responsibility for their age and at the expense of their school and other welfare”

It is worthy of addition that any youth recruited for political thuggery, or used as Alaye, Agboro, Egbesu, Area-boy or the like offends the provision of this Law, since there are all inimical to youth development as major stakeholders to nation building.

4. **Youths and nation building**

According to Okpara (2004), in the Farm House Dialogue, Obasanjo and Mabogunje characterised youths as people likely to show the following traits: a strong desire to move the social ladder, a tendency to be idealistic as a result of values passed into them at earlier ages by role models in society; an eagerness to live up to these models; frequent frustrations and anxieties as this idealism confronts the cold reality of daily existence that do not conform to these utopian standards. The youth are full of energy and don’t easily give up even in the face of daunting challenges. the youth are those whose rebellious attitude to enthrone their own authority is common; who are disturbed by what the future holds in stock for them;
whose behaviour is full of exuberance and are mostly extroverts. They have the best dreams and visions for the nation. While pursuing such visions, the best form of youthful exertion is that which is moderated with humility, honesty of purpose, fairness, vision, patriotism, integrity and conviviality (Okpara 2004). from the foregoing it is clear that youthful period is a period of laying strong foundation, not only for old age, but also for the future of the a would-be virile nation.

In line with these important roles for nation building, youths are assiduously asserting their authority (most times militantly) as main stakeholders of the every nation. In our country, we can see the major numbers of youths are participating in politics, social developments, economic developments and all the sectors as well. Youths are involving in social service, politics, media, civil societies and business communities etc. But, in all the fields they have been used only as the form of employee who has to work as according to the direction of others and have no rights to participate in the decision making. The most noteworthy fact is that today’s youth are the upcoming future of the nation and the youth should be empowered for the future of the country. So, this is the time for the youths to make their future secure and happy and this is the very critical time to prove themselves as one of the major stakeholders of the country. Now, they have to initiate from the every sectors of the society to remove all the misunderstandings and to transform all kinds of the conflicts (Yahoo Articles 2007). The time has come to stand united for making the country stable and the secure future. In a nutshell, the under listed is a brief chronicle of the current changing trends negatively affecting youth development in Nigeria.

1) In most decision making process today, youths ideas are frequently not valued because of their assumed lack of experiences and junior in age, education and etc.
2) Youths are taken advantage of as unpaid volunteers and interns.
3) Youth problems are often treated by short-term solutions.
4) Lack of practical educational programmes in peace-building, politics, economics and development issues to the youths.
5) Youths are often not able to attend such seminars and activities in various issues because of their conflicting schedules.
6) Youths aren’t involved in any policy making, decision making, fund raising and the decisions related to their future.
7) They are shadowed in all types of development issues (Omaka 2008).

5. Youths as major stakeholder of the nation

The major power and the main wealth of every nation are youths. They are the strong pillars and the sweet future of every nation. But, in Nigeria, as highlighted above, it seems that the youths are only being played for the fulfilment of ones’ need. They have not been given any major responsibilities regarding their future for the development of the nation. It can be seen clearly while looking back to our history that all struggles which have succeeded either it was against the military or fight to have one politician or the other in power, the large numbers of participants were youths. Even in the latest political development, it is evident that most of participants were youths either in Government security personnel, or a protective political militia or in the protest programmes of political parties. Later, when the need of them is finished, there are no better opportunities and programmes for them to build-up their strength, personalities and their career. If the only use of youth is in protest programmes or in conflict and politics, the future of the nation may worsen because the creativity and the talent which is most necessary for the development of the nation is being destroyed and there is no further programmes to secure their position (Yahoo Articles 2007).

In addition to the earlier adumbrated facts, and even at the risk of being repetitive, there are three frequently cited reasons for why the youth are excluded from political participation.

1) The youth are perceived as lacking the skills and qualities
2) The youth are not afforded the opportunities to share power with adults, and
3) The youth are portrayed as lacking the motivation

The youth are often viewed as lacking the skills needed to become part of the political process. These perceptions are often backed by popular theories on childhood development and adolescence, many
of which define youth as social group that is in the stage of becoming adults, and hence think like children. Consequently, there is “justifiable” reason for them to be systematically excluded from the scheme of things (Omaka 2008).

Similarly, the youth are not afforded the opportunities to share power with adults in part because they are viewed as lacking the requisite skills. An average adult look at youth sharing discussion table as a threat to adult power, hence the popularly slogan, wait for your turn. Rather than work with the youth to build the skills, adults either abdicate power or work to control it. This tendency to exclude the youth has been well-substantiated in internationally.

Therefore youthfulness has become a major justification for excluding the youth from decision making. It is also important to emphasize that these ideas are also present all major social institutions; from the family, the school, the community; religious institutions etc. It is not a surprise that there are not expectations and processes that facilitate the political participation of the youth within their communities as well as at the national level (Yahoo Articles 2007).

One of the more frequently used justifications excluding the youth is the entrenched myth of youth apathy - the youth are frequently portrayed as lacking motivation to become involved. This myth is captured most aptly in the media hype about Generation X syndrome which describes the youth as a socially inert, self-absorbed group with little or no interest in the political process.

However, recent research reveals that the youth are far from apathetic. It is true, for instance, that many young Americans over 18 do not vote or show interest in the conventional modes of political expression via political parties. Yet in that society, the youth shows great interest in political issues and are constantly searching for different ways of expressing themselves. In Nigeria, the youth is the hub of political activity.

In any society at all, I make bold to say that it is a grave mistake to assume that the youth are politically apathetic. To properly harness youth resource for nation building, there are innumerable activities that could be initiated, not only to mobilize the youth politically, but also to empower them in neighbourhoods and cities across the nation. Examples include: organizing the youth in their communities; educating the youth to use the democratic process; advocating for and training the youth to be part of governance structures of civil society organizations and through local government; monitoring and advocating for changes in political participation age, and many other such areas. The youth should be encouraged to play a central role in the determination and execution of policies for nation building.

Many agree that this rich tapestry of localized youth action holds the promise of expanding the possibility for the youth as equal and active stakeholders in the process of nation building. Even when in place, such initiatives tend to be limited to the micro level and rarely transcend the neighbourhood and city level. The idea of tackling this subject arose at the International Development Conference: Global Meeting of Generations held in Washington DC in January 1999. At this forum, the youth from across the world grappled with the role the youth should play in the governance process of their societies as well as international bodies such as the United Nations (Yahoo Articles 2007).

The youth are a crucial segment of a nation’s development. Their contribution therefore is highly needed. The youth are social actors of change and as the saying goes "youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but also the partners of today. Similarly, have stated, "time is not evaluated by what has been harvested, but what has been planted". The government and society at large have equal responsibility to provide the youth with suitable grounds and thereby bringing about a matured and responsible population for the coming generation to lead a better life.

The establishment of the a Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development, or Ministry of Youths and Sports and the establishment of National Youth Service Scheme are changes in the right direction. However, there is need for a separate and independent Ministry of Youth Affairs, constitution of a National Youth Council and also the development of a comprehensive National Youth Policy for effective youth mobilization for nation building. Meanwhile, it is good to make these changes and have the structures in place but if the youths do not make the best use of them no beneficial result will be realized.
6. **Dangers of not involving the youth in nation building**

Unarguably, the political and social landscape of yesterday and today are not the same, there is a changing trend in the scheme of things vis-à-vis the role of the youth. There is political and ideological thuggery and gangsterism involving the youth. In a nation where the young people are not empowered with positive and virtuous skills and attitudes, the rich will not be able to sleep, cultism and gangsterism will be the order of the day, the Police will likely go on strike - not for salary reasons, but to campaign against crime rate - and the ministry of justice will spend more on overtime.

7. **Strategising for youth participation in nation building**

1) The youths, themselves have to recognize their responsibilities towards the nation.

2) They have to sincerely study and properly analyze the situation of the country for there to be meaningful participation in nation building.

3) They should organize and sensitize others for this unavoidable task.

4) They must study about the role which the youth had played or have been playing in other nations such as South Africa, Northern Ireland, US etc for nation building and political transition.

5) They have to analyze the root cause of all the conflicts going on in the country and its present status.

6) They have to find out the common problems and the possible solutions and such solution should be in favour of the whole nation.

7) They should act responsibly for developing good environment for dialogue among all conflicting parties, especially in the Niger Delta, and develop a long term plan for political stability and sustainable peace.

8) They should prove themselves as a responsible group and a major stakeholder of the country by involving in versatile activities related to the development of the country.

9) Youths should have to watch all the political developments sincerely and should stand strongly to question in the mistakes of those in governance.

8. **Changing international efforts at repositioning the youth**

In 1998, Portugal (in cooperation with the United Nations) hosted some of the world’s youths in Braga, Portugal. It was the third session of the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System (Sesan 2002).

In January 1999 the youth from across the globe gathered in Washington DC to consider and define the role the youth should play in the governance process of their societies as well as international bodies such as the United Nations, under an international conference tagged. International Development Conference: Global Meeting of Generations.

The fourth session of the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System held in Dakar, Senegal between August 6 and 10 2001. According to Sesan (2002), in these meetings, they discussed Youth Empowerment under such topics as Education & ICT; Employment; Health & Population; Capacity building; Hunger, Poverty & Debt; Youth Policy, Participation & Rights; etc.

Some few weeks after the Dakar meeting, young people from 49 countries in Africa gathered in Johannesburg, South Africa (through a Fellowship programme sponsored by the International Telecommunications Union – a United Nations agency) to discuss the development of Africa’s Information and Communications Technologies industry (Africatommorrow 2008). In 2007, 25 young people met in Lagos, to discuss the role of the youth in an IT age for national development.

On March 11 2002, the youth in Zambia marked the Youth Day celebrations and their “untapped potential and subsequent empowerment” was on the agenda for Government and other concerned authorities. The celebration’s theme, Youth Empowerment through Participation, was declared as another trumpet sound, a wake-up call for the youth to be a part of the solutions to their woes. AllAfrica.com (2007) had this to say about the meeting:

> “Like a hot knife searing through butter, the Zambian youth are expected to cut through the various stumbling blocks affecting them in one way or another and 
steer past the setbacks. Among these challenges are unemployment, poverty, sexually transmitted diseases and the HIV/AIDS pandemic which has taken a grim toll on their lives.”

Similar meetings held in Hong Kong in December 2002, Argentina in February 2003 and Geneva in October 2003 to accommodate the changing role of the youth in nation building.

All these meetings point to four important points that we must not miss:

➢ The whole world is beginning to (better) appreciate the place of Youth Empowerment in the development of nations, regions and people-groups

➢ Young people are beginning to understand that we must begin to take action now if we want to experience a stable and enjoyable tomorrow

➢ Again, from the proceedings of these meetings and obvious trends in the society, each young person is beginning to appreciate the age-long saying, “The young shall grow … young people are the leaders of tomorrow.” A sense of responsibility, for the individual, his/her immediate environment, his/her family and his/her nation begins to rest on his/her shoulder.

➢ If you’re still one of those youth who only want to mind their own businesses without much concern about what happens to their nation, you need to have a change of attitude (Omaka 2008).

9. Education as youth tool for nation building

The youth are undoubtedly the custodians of the future of any nation, and therefore have a responsibility to ensure that they are comprehensively prepared for future leadership roles. This preparation can be effected through increasing the intellectual backbone of the youth and orientating them to be progressive, forward-looking, creative, humble, patriotic and hard-working. This can only be attained through an intellectual revolution, where the consciousness of the youth is scientifically advanced to the highest form of mental maturity (Marwala 2008).

Education is one of the tools that can assist the vibrant youth sector to transcend the gross inequalities inherited from the past. It is through education that the youth can develop a mature theoretical technical training that is the backbone of our economic growth. Many writers in the past have professed the importance of the most advanced theory as guidance to the practice for achievement of the desired outcomes of any developmental undertaking. According to Marwala (2008), Antonio Gramsci put it very well in his prison notebooks when he said:

In the modern world, technical education, closely bound to industrial labour even at the most primitive and unqualified level, must form the basis of the new type of intellectual.

Access to education for the youth of this country is critical to develop the most advanced level of intellectualism in our society.

10. Need for youth entrepreneurship

There need to emphasize here that emigrating to US, Canada, and Europe, especially by illegal mean, does not serve as a solution for youths. Nigeria has lost a lot of able-bodied men over the past few years for this reason. The rural urban migration and the seeking for pasture to the Western countries through fatal means has had a serious implication on the agricultural sector and the country’s economy. No foreign aid would develop this country for us; we must therefore work to develop our nation.

As the youth we must be ready and willing to take advantage of any opportunity that comes our way. The youth should embrace and adhere to the call made by the President Yar Adua for youths to go back to the land to restore agriculture as the mainstay of Nigeria’s country s economy. The bitter truth that must be told is that we can’t all work in offices; therefore some would have to train to be welders, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, craftsmen, farmers and so on.

11. Who will empower the youth for nation building?

The place of Youth Empowerment in a nation’s development is not subject to any debate and so the more necessary question is, who empowers the youth? The most common answer to give is obviously the
government. But if you ask devoid of sentiments; based on the realities on the ground, particularly in Nigeria, the obvious answer will be an unpopular one - you are the best person to empower you. In fact those who eventually help in nation building are those who have built a successful life, or at least have discovered what exactly they want to carve out of their lives and existence? Really, everything comes back to you. To build the nation, you must be empowered. In view of the present realities you will do the job of empowering you.

There’s so much truth in the statement, “the whole world stands aside for a man who knows where he’s going”. And that brings me to the question I’ve asked myself so often: What exactly do you want to do in life? Put another way, what is your Career Objective: Cultism or intellectualism? There is no gain reiterating here that cultism is the greatest bane to youth contribution to national development.

So, the ball is in your court. We need to build the nation, but in what area do you need empowerment for so doing? A man who will empower himself will identify the information that is potent enough to empower him. And there is so much information flying around – on websites, in old journals, in newspapers, on the notice boards, in books, in current journals, etc. Such will give you an edge and help you with Personal Development, Career Growth, and of course, help you take a stand as a Global Citizen and not one coloured guy from a Third World country! (Sesan 2002)

Today, people attach so much luck to those who know what they really want to do with their lives. The harder they work at that discovery, the luckier they get! Maybe that explains why Thomas Jefferson said that, “I find that the harder I work, the more luck I seem to have”. William Shakespeare helped capture the essence of what we are talking about in one of his writings, “This life is like a stage, we all come to play our part and we depart...” Some come on stage and are forgotten even before they bow out but some seem to be present on the stage long after their lines have been delivered. Why? The former came just like that but the latter came on to the stage only after deciding what exactly he will do when he gets to the stage. And then, after much rehearsal, he enters and captures the whole audience – because he came prepared (Sesan 2002). How prepared is today’s youth in today’s changing environment?

12. Recommendations for positive change

1) Establish separate youth ministry and development bodies in various levels.
2) Youth participation at various conferences and consultations is very important, because it gives voice to the youth.
3) Feedback on youth impact as volunteers would encourage further participation.
4) Youth should be asked their opinion as major section of the society and future of the nation, in every policy making, decision making, fund raising and so on issues, since they themselves are involved in such activities.
5) Youth problems should be taken sincerely and seriously and it should be solved because they are the future of the nation.
6) Peace building and various development academic programs should receive more funding and support and more youths should be benefited form it.
7) Every stakeholder: Political Parties, Media, Civil Society, Government, Business Circle have to provide more opportunities to build up and show talents and creativity to the youths.
8) Age shouldn’t be included in the definition of youth because one will become old from his feelings not from his age.

13. Conclusion

To prepare the youth for future leadership roles, they need to be orientated to be progressive, forward-looking, creative, humble, patriotic and hard-working, writes Lufuno Marwala. It is generally said that youths are the future of the nation. For that future to be meaningful, they must be responsible and sincere towards their future as well as the future of the nation. They have to put their acts together, first. Secondly, if the enabling environment is not conducive for their contribution to nation building, they should fight in peaceful manner and make their voice loud to be heard. And all stakeholders should listen and accept them.
as one of the important part of the nation which can’t be shadowed. Again, in today’s changing socio-political environment, all the political, economic and social development decisions should be made in consultation with the youth. Consider these words:

A country where all citizens, young and old, are informed about and engaged in all major issues that affect their lives. A place where adults and young people are together at the table; debating, grappling with problems, crafting solutions and jointly deciding on how resources should be allocated. A robust democracy where all people, including youth, exercise their right to select those who should speak and act on their behalf and hold them accountable; where young people have an equal opportunity to have a sustainable livelihood. Imagine adults and young people working together to build a thriving society from the ground up contributing to nation building from the community level up to the national level. Herein lies the power behind the potential role of youth as nation builders...

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