



# THE BIG IDEAS PODIUM (BIP)

**Theme:** Post #EndSARS Protest: Rethinking Nigerian Youth and Government Policies

## REPORT

Held on 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2020

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## **1.0 Introduction**

Following the aftermath of the #ENDSARS protest in Nigeria, African Heritage Institution organized virtual big ideas podium on December 1, 2020 with the theme: "Post #ENDSARS Protest: Re-thinking Nigerian Youth and Government Policies" to deliberate on issues surrounding the protest and the way forward for the Nigerian youth. The virtual event kicked off at 10am.

### **1.1 Welcome Remarks by the Executive Director (ED) - Professor Ufo Okeke-Uzodike**

The Executive Director of African Heritage Institution, Prof Ufo Okeke-Uzodike while welcoming the participants appreciated them for their time and interest in contributing to the debates focused on having a better Nigeria. He stated that the covid-19 pandemic propelled the new normal of virtual events. He also acknowledged that youth and government policies are not new, rather their implementation was the major crux as highlighted in the #ENDSARS protest. He juxtaposed youth potentials with the growth and development of Nigeria and Africa at large, and pointed out that youth involvement is the key to political, economic and social stability. He espoused that although the media have discussed the #ENDSARS, it was still sacrosanct to deliberate pertinent questions such as:

- a. What strategies and policies should the government put in place to circumvent future youth agitations?
- b. What are the weaknesses/challenges of youth policies/programs?
- c. How can the weaknesses/challenges of youth policies/programs be addressed?
- d. What policies should be introduced to curb youth abuses that turn them into thugs and social misfits?
- e. What policies should be introduced to ensure positive youth inclusion in governance?

In concluding his remarks, Prof. Okeke-Uzodike noted that the discussants for the Big Ideas Podium were seasoned academics/professionals and young politicians carefully selected to speak on the theme.

## **2.0 Introduction of the first Panelist by the Moderator, Mr Uche Gabriel**

The moderator welcomed participants once again. After he decried the neglect, denial and counter-denial that encapsulated the #EndSARS protest, the moderator introduced the first panelist – Prof. Chinyere Stella Okunna. Prof.

Okunna is a professor of mass communication at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. She is the chairperson, Anambra State Chapter of Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), the Director of UNIZIK 94.1FM Campus/Community Radio Station and also the Chair, Sensitization and Publicity sub-committee of the task force on COVID-19 in Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

### **2.1 Presentation by Prof. Chinyere Stella Okunna**

As an introduction, Prof. Okunna stated that the youth is one of the greatest assets any nation can have and they are legitimately regarded as future leaders. She noted that Nigeria should be top in taking youth policies seriously due to its dynamic population. She also raised the age classification of youth in Nigeria, ranging from 15-29 years as an issue. According to her, at that age most of the youths are either in school or just completing their university education. However, she explained that the underlying problem was not in making youth policies but with its maximum implementation. According to her, protests are universal, and so the #ENDSARS protest was not peculiar to Nigeria. She explained that peaceful protests propel governments to 'sit-up' to their duties. She commended the government's effort in developing the National Youth Policy 2019 document and highlighted the following objectives as prescribed in the 2019 Youth Policy document:

- i. Expand employment opportunities through diversification of the economy;
- ii. Increase access of youth entrepreneurs to assets and supportive services;
- iii. Put in place an environment where Nigerian youth can aspire to prosperity;
- iv. Improve the quality of youth-related health care services;
- v. Strengthen the platform and capacity for youth engagement and participation;
- vi. Foster an enabling environment for youth engagement with the political processes at all levels; and
- vii. Develop and enforce gender-sensitive laws and policies that promote and protect the human rights of all youths.

In justifying the grievances of the #EndSARS Protest, she decried government's inability to achieve any of the listed objectives of the National Youth Policy, which resulted to the protest. She gave a practical example with her life experience as

a final year student and after NYSC. Then, there were numerous job opportunities and high probability that an individual will get job upon graduation from school. Presently, such opportunities are non-existent, instead what we have is continuous increase of unemployment rate, poor social amenities, incessant ASUU strike and declining quality of our educational system. While, she noted that in their own days as youths, there were gaps and need for growth, she bemoaned the big difference between then and now; and wondered what will happen in the future if it is left unchecked. For instance, while the university system was relatively stable with certainty that a student would graduate at the expected time, it is no longer the case now. She noted that the over 8-month long ASUU strike and the school feeding programme during covid-19 lockdown were indications of lack of seriousness of government in handling youth development. She also pointed out the issue of declining budgetary allocation to education in the last five years; and comparing Nigeria with other small African countries shows that we are not making investment in our youths in Nigeria. Even in political activities, only an insignificant percentage of the youths are involved. Many of the youths are not encouraged or supported to participate, except in cases where they were engaged as political thugs. In conclusion, she noted that the narrative has to change and the youths have a vital role to play in the process.

## **2.2 Introduction of the second panelist by the moderator**

After the first presentation, the moderator introduced the second panelist, Hon. Ibenaku Onoh. Hon. Onoh is the youngest serving member of the Enugu State House of Assembly representing Enugu North Constituency.

## **2.3 Presentation by Hon. Ibenaku Onoh**

Hon. Onoh started by first, appreciating the first presenter – Prof. Okunna. Alluding to most of the issues raised by Prof. Okunna, Hon. Onoh described how difficult it is being a young person in Nigeria. He highlighted many of the challenges the youths are facing in Nigeria, especially the wanton killings by members of the police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and other related inhumane treatment and brutality by members of the Nigerian Police Force. The level of insecurity faced in Nigeria particularly by the young men and women led to the #ENDSARS protest; whose objective was to seek government intervention. The #EndSARS protest was the pointer of bad governance, corruption, police brutality, etc. The youths were tired of governance in Nigeria and the #EndSARS protest created the opportunity for them to vent the anger

and let the world hear them, and fortunately for them the protest eventually caught the attention of the international community. He emphasized the need for the #ENDSARS protest to be properly managed, if not, it could be the beginning of future youth agitations in the country.

He pointed out that the National Policy 2019 document was a “beautiful document” that lacks back-up actions. According to him, the Nigerian youths are industrious and can thrive if the country was working. He noted that Nigeria continually failed the youths and that is the reason for the continuous youth migration to other countries to seek greener pastures and opportunities to achieve the purpose of their being. In conclusion, he emphasized the need for the government to begin to address the issues of governance as well as other issues bothering on youth development as this will not only improve the economic activities in Nigeria but will also reduce the number of young people leaving the country for survival abroad.

#### **2.4 Introduction of the third panelist by the moderator**

At the end of Hon. Onoh’s presentation, the moderator introduced the third panelist, Hon. Nonso Smart Okafor. Hon. Okafor is a serving member of the Anambra State House of Assembly representing Nnewi North Constituency.

#### **2.5 Presentation by Hon. Nonso Smart Okafor**

Hon. Okafor appreciated the submissions of earlier discussants whilst affirming that #ENDSARS protest was not just about police brutality but a holistic approach to end bad governance in Nigeria. He explained that no ‘sane’ nation will allow migration of youths in droves because it impacts negatively on development of the economy. He, however, did not blame the migrated youth because he described the Nigerian environment as unstable and frustrating.

To buttress his point, he narrated a personal experience with his mother; the inability to get diagnosis/surgery in government hospitals with multiple referrals to private hospitals due to lack of equipment. He mentioned the mirage of constant power supply, the deep-seated corruption in the police force, and numerous taxes on businesses amongst other ‘pathetic’ situations in Nigeria. He further emphasized the importance of having a conducive and business friendly environment as the way forward for Nigeria in reducing youth unemployment and restiveness. He imagined a time, when Nigerian citizens living overseas will be attracted to come back home because they are convinced that the

environment has improved and become safe for businesses to thrive and that they would receive the needed support to achieve their potentials as individuals.

He also decried the amount of money being wasted by government to woo foreign investors, noting that investment is not charity venture and so if the business environment is enhanced there will be no need for the Ministry of People in Diaspora or Nigerians in Diaspora Commission, because Nigerians in diaspora will come back home. He concluded that all-round infrastructural development of Nigeria will go a long way to assuage the youths.

### **3.0 Comments, Questions and Contributions**

After all the panelists have made their presentations, the moderator opened the floor for comments, questions and contributions at about 11:35am. The following are some of the questions, comments and contributions by participants:

- It has become clear that Nigeria is a retrogressive society. The youths should keep making concerted efforts to change the situation.
- Business taxations should be reviewed to encourage small and medium businesses owned by the youths.
- How can AfriHeritage partner with the public to implement policies?
- There should be continuous engagement with government to implement policies.
- The razzmatazz attached to government offices should be reduced; that way, government officials will be reminded that they were called to serve.
- The Nigerian media has a responsibility to call out Nigerian leaders when they perform below expectations.

### **4.0 Responses and Recommendations by the panelists**

The panelists responded to the contributions and questions and also made the following recommendations for rethinking Nigerian government and youth policies:

- i. Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Civil-society organizations (CSOs), Faith-based Organizations should all work together to put pressure on government to deliver good governance to Nigerians.
- ii. Government should continue payment after NYSC for another 12 to 34 months to give the youths a soft landing.

- iii. In addition to grants/loans being given to some of the youths, government should make provision for consultancy/consultants that train the youths on the rudiments of business and entrepreneurship to ensure that the grants are properly applied.
- iv. Conscientious efforts should be made by the government to provide constant power supply.

## **5.0 End of Event**

The online event ended at about 12:17pm after the vote of thanks by Prof. Ufo Okeke-Uzodike - the Executive Director of African Heritage Institution.

