



JABU International Journal of Social and Management Sciences

Volume 4/Number 1/October, 2012

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NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS SCHEME AND THE QUEST FOR NATIONAL UNITY AND DEVELOPMENT: A PUBLIC RELATIONS PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Doubts have shrouded the essence of the National Youth Service Corps scheme. While some sections question its relevance, others uphold that the scheme which has lasted for almost four decades contribute in no small measure to unity, peace and progress. Triggered by the opinion impasse, the study seeks to establish the scheme's relevance and the possibility of improving on it using the public relations approach. Consequently, a survey was carried out in Kaiama and Baruten local government areas all in Kwara State, Nigeria. Findings from the 193 respondents reveal that the NYSC scheme is still relevant. It, therefore, concludes that the structures of the scheme be maintained. The study, therefore, recommends rigorous implementation and routine evaluation of the scheme to make it more productive.

Keywords: *Scheme, National Unity, Development, Public Relations, Resources*

Background Information

By every conceivable standard, Nigeria is a country that is richly blessed in human and material resources. Like many other African states, Nigeria's human endowment is a conglomeration of different ethnic groups. Uwechue (2004:15) identifies the larger groups as "Hausa, Fulani, Tiv, Kanuri, and Nupe in the Northern parts; the Yoruba, Edo, Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw in the Western parts; the Ibo, Ibibio and Efik in the Eastern parts". It has an estimated population of 158.4 million people (World Bank, 2010). Apart from its immense mineral wealth, of which its oil and gas resources are currently the most prominent, the country is also endowed with rich agricultural lands capable of sustaining a wide variety of crops across the savannah and forest zones (IIDEA, 2000: 89).

The need for peaceful co-existence and perhaps, sustainable development among these diverse cultures prompted the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1914. While Obayori (2002:25) outrightly debunked the position that it was meant to "serve the exploitative aim of British", Ekwueme (2000:31) and Ajayi (2000:72) however, view the amalgamation as an act by the colonial overlord to bail the North out of its perpetual deficit, translated to mean that "customs revenue could be shared between Southern Nigeria with a coastline and the landlocked Northern Nigeria". In contention of this, Okonta (2000:7) insists that such utterances are promoted by Southerners to portray their Northern counterpart in a negative light as he remarks that before 1914 "all Hausa cities were well sufficient in food and other necessities. Kano was one of the greatest market centres in Africa and had trade links with Egypt and the Mediterranean World".

Independence marked the beginning of self rule. From that time successful administrations have come up with various policies and schemes to put to rest the issue of political, economic and socio-cultural imbalance among the multiple cultures which, Amana (1997:110) estimate to be more than 400. In view of the overt disagreement over salient issues like the 1963 national headcount and the general elections, Nigeria was plunged into a civil strife which began "on 6th July, 1967" (Uwechue, 2004:7) and lasted till 1970. In the spirit of post war reconstruction, rehabilitation, reconciliation, and to foster the spirit of oneness the Gowon regime, in 1973, introduced the National Youth Service Corps Scheme. Going by the objectives as clearly spelt out in Decree No.51 of 16th June 1993, it was established with a view of proper encouragement and development of common ties and promotion of national unity among youths. And one of the expectations of the programme is that corps members should be posted to cities or villages and states far from home and states of origin, where they are expected to mix with people of other tribes, social and family backgrounds where they could learn the culture of the indigenes in the place they are posted to (<http://www.nysc.gov.ng/history2.php>).

The one-year mandatory scheme in Nigeria is only for those who are below 30 years old. Those eligible are posted to states distinct from their states of origin and typically work in sectors that urgently require graduate expertise like in rural farms, hospitals, and schools just to mention three. This is not peculiar to Nigeria. Civilian national services of this type have been instituted globally for similar reasons. Examples include Canada's Katimavik, New Zealand's Conservation Corps, the United Kingdom's Community Service Volunteers, the United States' Conservation Corps, the Gambia's National Youth Service Scheme and the National Youth Service (Zimbabwe) among others (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/national_youth_service_corps).

In Nigeria, there is hardly, any aspect of the economic, social and cultural life that the NYSC scheme has failed to contribute meaningfully. Specifically:

...this national service ... offers many graduates an entry point into the labour market. Many dedicated corps members have been offered employment in their places of primary assignment. These are graduates who would ordinarily have roamed the streets unemployed and ignorant of the opportunities that exist in other parts of the country (www.thisdayonline.com/archive).

In addition, there are communities that have benefited from the scheme through services rendered by corps members, some of which may not have been provided by government or private intervention. The same is the case in urban centres where financial institutions, industries and the petroleum sector also tap from their expertise.

Despite the invaluable gains reaped from the scheme, corps members face trying periods due to factors which include, but not limited to rejection, attack by hoodlums, lack of accommodation, potable water, and cultural intolerance. Added to these is the fact that the effectiveness of the programme has been thwarted by activities of some corrupt civil servants and government cronies most of whom are incidentally, employees of the scheme. Seyi (2009) is apt about this that, "every year inflated contracts worth billions of Naira are awarded to government cronies for the supply of clothing, food etc. While the value of contract has been increasing at an exponential rate, the quality and quantity of products supplied have been decreasing steadily." It is this unfortunate development that makes Nigerians to arguably, consider the NYSC scheme journey in achieving development as only half way made. Hence, the needs to reposition or even scrap the scheme.

In the words of Todaro and Smith (2009:820) development is a process of harnessing all available human and material resources of a society for national growth in a way that ensures equality, liberty and freedom. Premised from exposition in the above paragraph certain problems, however, impede

the development drive in Nigeria. These range from lack of focus to mismanagement of resources. To meet the challenges of development in society, Edema (2007:15) observes that there is need to determine what to do, how to do it, who are those concerned with the doings, where to do it, when to do it and why especially, should it be done. This is where public relations has to avail itself to fill the void.

Public relations, we should note, is the actions of a corporation, individual, government and its agencies in promoting goodwill between itself and the community, employees, customers, citizens and other stakeholders. The Mexican declaration of 1978 (cited in Nwosu, 1996:5) is more elaborate on public relations when it looks at it as "the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisation leaders, and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisations and public interest". Seitel (2007) adds that public relations provides an organisation or individual exposure to their audiences. It is the publics that are always important to government and all her agencies since her existence largely depends on these publics.

In the case of the NYSC scheme, parents, host communities, employees who are corps members and staffers as well as employers both in the private and public sectors, constitute these publics. With this in mind Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman and Toth (2009:11) aver that alert public relations practitioners communicate with these groups regularly to surmount resentment. "By doing this they reconcile strategic plans at the highest organisational levels with the interest and concerns of groups whose support is needed, whether those groups are inside the organisation, in the community, or even elsewhere..." (Lattimore *et al*, 2009:11). A fundamental technique used in public relations is to identify the target audience, and to tailor every message to appeal to that audience using the appropriate tools.

There are various tools that can be used in the practice of public relations. Traditional tools include press releases and media kits which are sent out to generate positive press on behalf of the organisation or government as in our case. Other widely used tools include brochures, newsletters and annual reports. The advent of social media has made advanced societies in particular to utilise interactive social media outlets in their public relations campaigns. One notable advantage of using this platform is that unlike the traditional tools which allowed for only one-way communication, social media outlets allow the organisation to engage in two-way communication, and receive immediate feedback from their various stakeholders. All these are orchestrated by the public relations manager.

Since effective liaison with all the stake holders in the scheme requires a participatory flow of information, Abdulbaqi (2009:62) emphasises that "it should not be limited to the top-down but, as a matter of necessity pay particular attention to down-top flow, with input from all strata of the society..." After all modern public relations manager in any organisation is at the centre of information generation and communication with all the publics of the organisation. The public relations manager advises management on the many issues and ensures smooth relations with all the relevant publics that relate with the organisation in one way or the other (Nwosu, 1990:252). The effort here, according to Edema (2007:17), is to ensure that the scheme can continue to maintain its present status beyond immediacy into the future so as to offer even better benefits to on-coming generations with the aim of not bequeathing to them an unfelt history. Consequently, series of ideas about what projects, programmes, events and schemes are born and streamlined accordingly.

From the fore going, it is evident that public relations has the fundamental role of sensitizing and creating public consciousness in the authority that formulates policies which impact on the remote and immediate environments of authority. Okeowo (2009:15) rationalises this that "the success or

failure of any government largely depends on the extent to which its policies and programmes are acceptable to its publics". As a continuous process, public relations involves appraisal of current trends, formulations, and interpretation of policies for positive results. The application of the four phases of public relations, which include research, action, communication and evaluation by the NYSC is, therefore, germane.

Statement of the Problem

The problems confronting Nigeria are legion. These include political instability, religious intolerance, lack of patriotism, ethnic chauvinism, and corruption with the cumulative effect of retarded growth and development. Not surprisingly, various administrations recognised these and have, over the years, evolved several programmes, policies, development plans, schemes, and even organised seminars and workshops with a view to achieving sustainable development some of which have no appreciable result. Among them is the National Youth Service Corps scheme which came on board in 1973. It has the name plate, unity in diversity as a gate-way to an enduring development. But the question is how has the scheme fared? Are Nigerians satisfied with its services? If not, why? Should it be scrapped or improved? What has been the role of public relations managers in fostering confidence in the scheme? It is on the basis of these questions that the researchers sought to assess the performance of the 39-year old scheme.

Objectives

The researchers sought to:

1. Identify the major areas the NYSC scheme has impacted positively on Nigeria.
2. Determine the level of integration among Nigerians.
3. Identify areas of weakness of the NYSC.
4. Determine how public relations can be used to improve the scheme

Research Questions

1. In what major areas has the NYSC scheme impacted on Nigeria?
2. Is there any significant relationship between the NYSC scheme and national integration among peoples of Nigeria?
3. What are the likely factors that militate against the performance of the NYSC scheme?
4. In what ways can the NYSC scheme be improved on using the Public Relations approach?

Significance of the Study

1. It is expected that this study will serve as a means of re-orientation particularly to those under illusion that the scheme is an avenue for them to simply suck from the national treasury, rather than responding to the call for service to nation building.
2. Also, all stakeholders, will appreciate if corps members invaluablely contribute to nation building with a view to providing them with the enabling environment to satisfactorily discharge their duties wherever they find themselves.
3. Government will be better informed on whether to overhaul or re-organise the scheme for optimal benefit or not.
4. As one of the rare works in recent time, researchers will generate interest to build on the existing one or undertake similar research in the same field with a view to contributing to knowledge and also offer solutions to challenges confronting the scheme.

Theoretical Framework

This study is built on the systems theory. According to McNeill and Freiburger (1993:22) it was originally formulated by a biologist, Ludwig von Bertalanffy as a broad, multi-disciplinary approach to knowledge and was popularized by Lotfi Zadeh, an electrical engineer. The bottom line of this

theory is that individuals, organisations and governments and its agencies do not function in isolation. Scholars like Mattelart and Mattelart (1998), Littlejohn and Foss (2005), Lattimore, Baskin, Helman, Toth and Leunven (2004) tried in their respective works to illuminate the systems theory. According to them just like the different parts of the body function for the well being of an individual so do different agencies depend on one another. Grunig, Grunig and Dozier are cited in Lattimore *et al*, (2004:47) as saying that the systems perspective emphasises the interdependence of organizations with their environments, both internal and external to the organisation. Like families, all systems are, therefore, unique wholes characterised by a pattern of relationship. On this note, Littlejohn and Foss (2005:40) maintain that "Any part of the system, therefore, is always constrained by its dependence on other parts, and this pattern of interdependence organizes the system itself". As an offshoot of the cybernetic tradition Mattelart and Mattelart (1998:44) leave no one in doubt how a wide variety of physical, biological, social, and behavioural processes work.

Irrespective of whether it is open or closed systems, feedback plays a vital role. Feedback enables systems to make adjustments and adapt to their goals and structures. For instance, public criticism of any programme or policy prompts the powers that be to change the headship, or restructure the programme or policy. This finds expression in the words of Littlejohn as cited in Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006:183) thus:

Feedback can be classified as positive or negative, depending on the way the system responds to it. Negative feedback is an error message indicating deviation, and the system adjusts by reducing or counteracting the deviation. Negative feedback is important for balance because it maintains a steady state. A system can also respond by amplifying or maintaining deviation, in which case the feedback is positive. This kind of interaction is important to morphogenesis, or system growth such as learning... [T]he response to negative feedback is "cut back, slow down, discontinue." Response to positive feedback is "increase, maintain, keep going."

The implication of this is that choices, among alternative adaptive strategies are made on the basis of which ones are most effective in helping the system maintain or achieve system goals. The key ideas of systems theory that people together create the realities of their social groups, organisations and cultures are amazingly coherent. Thus they have a major impact on many fields, including government and its agencies (Littlejohn and Foss (2005:45), which the NYSC scheme is one of them.

Literature Review

The motto of the Nigerian coat of arms is "Unity, Peace and Progress". It is in this context that we would like to see if the cherished slogan has actually translated to harmonious co-existence and development or not, based on some literature. Unity is of Latin origin, "unitatem" which stands for oneness, sameness or agreement. Unity is the state of being undivided. It is unfashionable to state that national unity creates the favourable climate in which growth and development become possible as it enables citizens to play their part in the nation. Unfortunately, as Dare (1992:92) has observed "there is so much cynicism in the air. You can actually feel it. Values seem to be in retreat everywhere. Nearly everyone knows the price of every policy or innovation; very few know or care about the value of anything. Nigerians have lost or are losing faith in themselves and in their institutions."

The current state of the NYSC, according to many, is a demonstration of government failure. "The programme has lost its value due to failure of successive governments to provide adequate funding. Some of the orientation camps lack basic facilities such as water, functional sewage system, electricity, etc. The living conditions in some of these camps, are not any different from that of a 'refugee camp'" (healnigeria.blogspot.com). Those who are of the view that the NYSC scheme is yet

to fully achieve its aims and objectives claim that "...the cankerworm of ethnicism, regionalism and intolerance continue to fire religious and ethnic violence across the country" resulting in irreplaceable deaths of corps members nationwide (www.thisdayonline.com/archive). Typical examples, according to Amarachi (2009) are:

... Akande Oluwaleke, Akinyobi Ibukun and Odusote Adetola who died in Jos, Plateau State during the religious cum political upheavals of November 27, 2008, Anthonia Amarachi, declared missing on December 19, at Ilawe community, Ekiti South-West Local Government Council, Ekiti State... the raping and subsequent dastardly murder of Grace Adei in Maiduguri, Borno State on September 26.

Conversely some have opinions that there is virtually no aspect of the Nigerian life that the scheme has not touched positively. "The greatest contribution of the scheme is in the area of education. As a matter of fact, no less than 60 per cent of its members, serve in institutions" (www.onlinenigeria.com). That is not all. Ademowo (2007) who sees the NYSC as an opportunity to explore Nigeria's unique diversities, and with a view to building bridges across ethno-religious differences remarks:

I served among the Kuteb people of Ussa Local Government Area of Taraba State... Kpambo, the village where I served... was without electricity, pipe borne water, good road network, no hospitals...teaching English Language...I make bold to say that till date, am still in touch with countless persons I met during my service year: Abershi, Rimamskep, Uruku, Ajinus, James, Tunde (Kwesati), Tunde (Fikyu), Adeola (Rufu)...

This is putting to perspective the aspect of national integration. Subscribing to the same reasoning, Sanda (2009) recalls a youth corps member from Taraba State who served with honour and distinction in Rivers State by winning the National Honours Award in 1992. To cap it all, his service was appreciated by his host community who consented to his marriage to one of their daughters. She concludes that "The year I spent serving my country as a rural physician remains my most productive and my greatest contribution to a country that subsidised my education and provided social amenities that neighbouring countries like Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Benin are dreaming of".

In a bid to promote the scheme some state governors go extra mile to adopt public relations strategies and tactics to mobilise and motivate corps members to respond to the clarion call. The erstwhile NYSC Director-General, Maharazu Tsiga affirms that "For instance, in Benue State, government arranged for the corps members to be in a particular sector, and members are paid #15,000 for accepting rural posting. Rivers State government also pays an extra #10,000 to the corps members (allafrica.com). Similarly, Bwala, Azeez, Usigbe and Oyetimi (2011) note that in view of security situation in Borno, Plateau and Bauchi States corps members had to be redeployed for safety reasons. Indeed, these actions have public relations undertone where employees are motivated for optimal productivity; what Egan (2001) refers to in marketing parlance as internal marketing.

Whether serving in cities or village, the overall impact of the scheme manifests in every sphere. Besides cottage works such as building of bridges, market stalls, bus stops and literacy campaigns, the scheme also "cultivates a minimum of 100 hectares of land in each of the states of the federation. In this way, the scheme has been able to turn out large tonnage of food items, feed the nation...Notable here are Rice Mill in Enugu and Sokoto States. Feed Mill in Lagos State, Garri Processing Factory in Kwara State and Garment Factory in Niger State" via design of simple technology implements. On this account, the NYSC scheme has become a model to other countries. A pioneer corps member, the

first Administrator/National Adviser, Gambian National Youth Service Scheme, and one time Director of the scheme in Nigeria claims that:

In her discussion with me on January 15, 1996, the Minister of Youth and Sports in the Gambia, Mrs. Aminah Faal-Sonko told me with glee, "that members of The Gambian Study Team that visited America, Europe, the Middle East and a number of African countries in search of a model Youth Service Scheme for The Gambia, were unanimous in their report that 'the NYSC in Nigeria is the best organised Youth Service programme in the world'" (www.thisdayonline.com/archive).

Whether the assertion is true or false, it is pertinent to note that the survival of a scheme of this nature depends on how it impacts positively on the publics.

The Role of Public Relations

According to Okeowo (2009:16) there is always the need to ascertain the rating of the current situations by the publics to be able to determine an appropriate step and intervention by government or management. The means to ascertaining public attitude may be through survey or interview which is the basic role of research and fact finding. This is the background to which we can appreciate the relevance of public relations in fulfilling the aims of a programme.

In the case of the NYSC scheme public relations have a crucial role to play in achieving the objectives of the scheme especially now that there is general apprehension in the wake of post election (2011 presidential) attack on NYSC members in the North. As a planned and deliberate effort of understanding and earning public goodwill, public relations officers in the scheme have helped government to device relevant strategies and tactics towards achieving desirable goal. This manifests in the deployment of corps members from the politically volatile northern parts of the country. By so doing, Adegoke (2009:46) admits, they would be sensitising the people of the need to be alive of their responsibilities and obligations to the government and society. Public relations manager traditionally has this mandate to sensitise and create consciousness in authority to tailor the scheme to meet the mutual needs of the government and the governed. This is because the success or failure of government depends largely on the extent to which its programmes are acceptable to its publics.

It is instructive to note that in for the NYSC to realise its objectives it has to clearly and constantly define its publics. This is necessary because as Baines, Egan and Jeffkins (2004:114) put, "public relations departments are rarely concerned with the 'general public' *per se*, but with a range of communities made up of individuals or groups with some particular interest or some other connection." The publics of the scheme include corps members, staff of NYSC, employers (financial institutions, companies, proprietors of schools of learning, government departments and agencies etc) and parents. An understanding of these publics facilitates posting of corps members to where they are most needed. Besides, it is when the varying publics are defined that government can mobilise and inform people to accept the programme using the appropriate channels and messages. This affirms the mission of the public relations function which is to build working relationships with all of the organisation's publics (Center and Jackson, 2003). The best strategy of doing this is to adopt persuasive communication. Irrespective of media adopted, the form of communication has to be two-way in nature so as to penetrate the public to provide feedback.

It will suffice to reinstate that the need for peace, unity and development in Nigeria is the cardinal objective of the scheme. Decisions on how to run the scheme have public relations implications as long as such decisions deal with people. With public relations government can stimulate mutual trust and confidence among all stakeholders by incorporating them in taking sensitive decisions. This

serves as an opportunity for people to determine their needs which should be catered for. It is on the basis of this Ihimodu (2008) concludes that, "...gone were the days when leaders and development workers would sit in their offices to determine what is good for people. Today, the people themselves who know their needs and interest must be allowed to take over the driver's seat..." This liberal stance creates a sense of belonging and responsibility among people. They conjure a feeling of making input in government decisions and programmes since they are involved.

Methodology

Using the judgemental approach, a survey was carried out in the 2011 service year involving two local governments, Kaiama and Baruten both in Kwara State, Nigeria. The questionnaire which served as instrument of data collection was structured to reflect demography, attitude of corps members to work, condition of service, level of integration and challenges. Simple random sampling technique was then used to measure the opinion of 200 respondents on quota basis of 100 respondents per local government council. With the aid of two assistants, the entire exercise was carried out in two days.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Out of the 200 copies of the questionnaire administered only 193 questionnaires representing 96.5 percent response were finally computed and expressed in simple percentage as the remaining seven were not returned. Data showed that Kaiama and Baruten local government areas recorded the response rate of 94 (48.7%) and 99 (51.3%) respectively.

Research Question 1:

In what major areas has the NYSC scheme impacted on Nigeria?

Tables 1 and 2 below were used to establish the contribution of the scheme to national development. Data on table one show that as many as 147 (76.1%) of the respondents were in teaching and non in Banking or Financial organisations. While 2 (1.04%) respondents said they were serving in Medical, 44 (22.8%) were engaged in other activities like counselling, field officers, laboratory scientists, and other office work.

Table 1: Major areas of respondents' contribution to Nigeria

Response	Frequency
Teaching	76.1% (n=147)
Banking/Financial sector	Nil
Medical	1.04% (n=2)
Others	22.8% (n=44)
Total	100% (N=193)

Source: Field Survey (2011)

On community development projects, 65 (33.7%) respondents attested to the fact that they had embarked on community development projects as against the 128 (66.3%) who did not.

Table 2: Respondents who embarked on community development projects

Response	Frequency
Agree	33.7% (n=65)
Disagree	66.3% (n=128)
Undecided	Nil
Total	100% (N=193)

Source: Field Survey (2011)

Research Question 2:

Is there any significant relationship between the NYSC scheme and integration among peoples of Nigeria?

Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 below have to do with the level of integration of corps members where they were posted to. Accordingly, 101 (52.3%) did not attend cultural ceremonies as against 60 (31.1%). The remaining 32 (16.6%) were neutral.

Table 3: Those who attend cultural ceremonies

Response	Frequency
Agree	31.1% (n=60)
Disagree	52.3% (n=101)
Undecided	16.6% (n=32)
Total	100% (N=193)

Source: Field Survey (2011)

Interestingly, however, 123 (63.7%) respondents refused that cultural practices or ceremonies of the host community restrict their movement. On the contrary 42 (21.8%) admitted that cultural practices restrict their movement while 28 (14.5) respondents were neutral as presented on table 4 below.

Table 4: Whether or not cultural practices inhibit movement of respondents

Response	Frequency
Agree	21.8% (n=42)
Disagree	63.7% (n=123)
Undecided	14.5% (n=28)
Total	100% (N=193)

Source: Field Survey (2011)

In the case of making friendship with members of the host community by respondents, Table 5 below shows that 124 (64.2%) agreed that they had friends, while 67 (34.7%) disagreed that they had no friends. The remaining 2 (1.0) were neutral.

Table 5: Respondents with friends

Response	Frequency
Agree	64.2% (n=124)
Disagree	34.7% (n=67)
Undecided	1.0% (n=2)
Total	100% (N=193)

Source: Field Survey (2011)

As regard posting, while 10 (5.2) respondents admitted that they were posted to their state of origin majority of them totalling 183 (94.8) said they were not posted to their state of origin as presented on table 6 below.

Table 6: State posted to

Response	Frequency
Agree	5.2% (n=10)
Disagree	94.8% (n=183)
Undecided	Nil
Total	100% (N=193)

Source: Field Survey (2011)

Research Question 3:

What are the likely factors that militate against the performance of the NYSC scheme?

Table 7 below sought to find out if corps members were rejected to where they were posted. As 27 (14%) respondents admitted that they were rejected, majority of them numbering 166 (86%) said they did not suffer rejection.

Table 7: Respondents that were rejected

Response	Frequency
Agree	14% (n=27)
Disagree	86% (n=166)
Undecided	Nil
Total	100% (N=193)

Source: Field Survey (2011)

In the case of those offered residential accommodation 104 (53.9%) responded in the affirmative that they were provided with accommodation as opposed to the remaining 89 (46.1%) who said they were not offered accommodation as presented on table eight below.

Table 8: Respondents with residential accommodation provided by employers

Response	Frequency
Agree	53.9% (n=104)
Disagree	46.1% (n=89)
Undecided	Nil
Total	100% (N=193)

Source: Field Survey (2011)

Research Question 4:

In what ways can the NYSC scheme be improved on?

On how to tackle the few cases of rejection of corps members by employers, 115 (59.6%) respondents suggested that posting should be on demand. While 69 (35.8%) of them suggested that employers should be encouraged to always accept corps members, the remaining 9 (4.7%) were of the opinion that if corps members demonstrate positive attitudes towards the scheme employers would have more confidence in them and the issue of rejection will become a thing of the past as presented on table 9 below.

Table 9: Solutions to the problem of Rejection

Response	Frequency
Posting on demand	59.6% (n=115)
Encourage employers	35.8% (n=69)
Develop positive attitude	4.7% (n=9)
Others	Nil
Total	100% (N=193)

Source: Field Survey (2011)

Discussion of Findings

Findings derived from the study were revealing. In the realm of NYSC scheme's contribution to productivity and ultimately development, data on table two show that only 33.7% respondents embarked on community development projects of different kind as against the majority of 66.3%. This portends that they either lack awareness on gains of community development projects which makes them indisposed or are never accorded the necessary cooperation by the appropriate authorities. On this note Keghku (2005:76) underscores the importance of constant communication that "governing is managing and managing is making things happen. Without information being

communicated down to the people, it will be difficult for government to manage the affairs of that particular country". Table one, however, revealed that respondents are greatly used for imparting knowledge unto pupils and students in different institutions of learning as 76.1% attest to that. As an inconsequential number of two respondents admitted working in medical line the remaining 22.8% were engaged in other sectors. This is not surprising considering the remoteness of the two local government councils whose predominant industry is education.

In line with the expectation of the NYSC scheme almost all the corps members were not posted to their state of origin. Table six clearly shows that unlike 5.2% respondents who were posted to their local government areas, 94.8% did not enjoy the privilege. Even those who were posted to their places were either on health ground or the female married ones. Sanda (2009) corroborates this when she avers that as a medical doctor, the NYSC posted me there (Taraba State) against my wish but my personal inconvenience probably saved hundreds of lives. This is consistent with what Lloyd (1980) alluded to that the public relations officer does not necessarily need to convince the people that the activities and actions of the government are right, but to ensure that people are kept abreast of what government does on any issue of public interest so that they are not misled. Interestingly too, most of them integrated themselves where they were posted by making friends not only with their colleagues in service but also with members of the host community. This is explicitly presented on table five where 64.2% responded in the affirmative that they had friends while a negligible number of 34.7% did not have.

On the contrary, most of the respondents did not take delight in attending cultural ceremonies. This is in spite of the fact that these ceremonies did not restrict their movement. Table three shows that while 31.1% respondents attended cultural ceremonies of the host communities, 52.3% did not attend such occasions. Similarly, movement of 63.7% respondents was not being restricted by the cultural practices of the host communities as opposed to 21.8% who admitted that their movement was restricted. On cases of rejection, only a minute number of respondents (14%) affirmed that they suffered rejection temporarily. Three quarter of the respondents (86%) were not rejected as presented on table seven.

Another daunting challenge the scheme encounters is that of residential accommodation. Nevertheless more than half the total respondents (53.9%) admitted that they were provided residential accommodation by their respective employers. This points out to the fact that efforts are being made by stakeholders to make the scheme attractive.

Three suggestions were advanced as possible solutions to the problem of rejection of corps members by various employers. Table nine has it that posting of corps members be made on demand as 59.6% respondents suggested. While 35.8% suggested that operators of the scheme should encourage employers to accept corps members, 4.7% of total respondents were of the view that corps members on their part should discard negative behaviour and attitude towards the scheme. This is possible with open channels of communication between the NYSC and its various publics so as to give employers more confidence to tap their potential skills and knowledge.

Conclusion

The NYSC scheme has come to stay. Despite some shortcomings associated with the scheme, its relevance outweighs the limitations. This is evident in scores of social, economic and political activities it involves in. For example corps members as well as their staff are regularly invited to participate in the conduct of such sensitive national assignments as it is currently done by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) where they are being used as ad-hoc staff for elections. These landmark achievements can be more discernible if public relations managers are accorded their respectful vantage positions to play their advisory role that must be acted upon.

Recommendations

Regular research, diligent implementation of planned programmes, effective communication of success achieved by scheme as well as evaluation which are the hallmark of public relations should be of top priority to the NYSC scheme so as to ascertain emerging challenges and map out strategies to surmount them.

Security of corps members should be top on the agenda. Cases of individuals or groups who perpetrate the act of extra judicial killing of corps members be revisited and those involved in the ignoble act be brought to book. This will engender confidence even to parents believing that their children or wards would have a successful service year.

Adequate funding should be made available by operators of the scheme to provide requisite logistics and facilities that can sustain the scheme.

As a corollary to the above, government should entrench a mechanism to ascertain the capacity and needs of each state before corps members are posted to them.

Corps members should be accorded due cooperation and direction to carry out quality community development projects which will complement government's efforts.

Corps members should resist the temptation to serve only in 'choice' places like the Federal Capital Territory, state capitals, NNPC and CBN that are almost always saturated to the detriment of other sectors.

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