



## **The Gambia's NYSS Partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM): Some Lessons for Nigeria's NYSC**

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### **Abstract:**

*The paper examines the dynamics of The Gambian National Youth Service Scheme (NYSS) founded in 1996 through the efforts of Nigeria's National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme. Though modeled after the NYSC, it has ventured into things NYSC has not. One of these was its most recent partnership with the IOM to curb recurrent illicit migration of The Gambian youths. The questions are, has this aspect of Nigeria-The Gambia history been documented? Has Nigerian Scheme gone into partnership with the IOM in the enterprise like The Gambian counterpart? Since establishment, how many times has NYSC adjusted to changing realities? In what theoretical contexts could one frame the argument of NYSS/ IOM partnership and what lessons does that holds for NYSC and similar youths' services in Africa in the century? In addressing the problematic, the paper adopts qualitative method of historical research and gleans on evidences from diverse sources. It foregrounds its argument on the ideas of the National Youth Service as "Moral Equivalent of War", "Service- Learning" and "A Way of Strengthening Ties among the People of the World" espoused by William James, John Dewey and Rosenstock-Huussy. It concludes by charging NYSC and similar services to adjust to meet the current challenges of African youth and society.*

### **Keywords:**

*Underdevelopment, Liberalism and Poverty, Government Policies, International Laws*

## Introduction:

Migration is one of the three components of population change. It is a fundamental factor in the growth of a country or state population and a major composition of its labour force. When one talks of African migration it portrays the image of people taken to other land forcefully as a result of the popular slave trade. No doubt several serious academic works have been done on the trade and its consequences on various independent African states from the historical perspective. As a result, attention is concentrated on African youth and contemporary African migration focusing on The Gambia. The argument is that, while the slave trade, “the first wave” of African emigration was forceful, the “second wave”, since the end of colonial rule was a consequence of internal political, economic and social problems confronting independent African States without exception. The pertinent question remains, what effort has the Government of The Gambia done in ensuring the safe return of illegal migrant youths and as well as reducing the rate at which the youths engage in irregular international movement? It is within the context of this question the NYSS/IOM partnership in ensuring the safe returns and engaging of the returnees in learning trades or handworks comes into sharp focus. The choice of the research constituencies is informed by the paternalistic role NYSC played in the founding of the Gambia National Youth Service Scheme and more so that both countries were British former colonies in the sub-Saharan region with similar foreign policy and national interest. For convenience the paper is divided into the following sections, introduction which is ongoing, conceptual clarifications and theoretical frameworks, history, trends and patterns of The Gambian migration, the founding of NYSS, NYSS/IOM partnership and lessons to NYSC and finally, the conclusion.

### Conceptual clarifications

Concepts such as Youth and National Services which concerned the paper are well conceptualized and well handled (Odeh, 2018, Odeh, 2020, Sanda, 1994). As a result, the concepts may not be given much attention as expected, but attention would be on migration as it concerns the paper. The concept of migration attracts diverse definitions like many other concepts in humanities. Thus, scholars situate its meaning within the context of what they seek to

address. Migration has been defined as relocation of residence for a specific duration for various reasons (Hossain cited in Nwoke, 2016). The conception sees migration as an evolving trend involving movements of people from one place to another, but do not point up whether the said movement is within or across international borders. It connotes going abroad to work (Tyldum, 2015). This fits into the discourse, but do not equally tell the nature of the movement; forced or voluntary. Migration as used in the paper connotes combination of forced and voluntary movement of people across national boundaries. Like other social movements in history, the phenomenon is triggered by push and pull factors (centrifugal and centripetal forces). What make international migration special are the chain reactions/ connections it constructs. It has been argued that:

Once migration foothold is established, family members join successful migrants, remittances link communities across great distances, and established immigrant groups help the newly arrived find work and negotiate seemingly alien ways and practices. Migration itself then becomes a new connection between nations, evolving into a social process that is increasingly sustained by factors that are largely beyond the realm of government action or the economic impulses that originally generated it (Meissner, Hormats, Walker, and Ogata cited in Oche, 1998, p.14).

The above showed migration as a process that generates actions and reactions. It is on the basis of these finds cases where legitimate entrance of a relative provide opportunity to facilitate the entrance of additional migrants. This may explain why some Gambians are like nationals of other states of the globe are found in Americas, Asia and Europe.

On the other hands, NYSS and NYSC Scheme are variants of National Youth Service (NYS). Thus, instead of conceptualizing NYSC and NYSC, NYS is being put into perspective. National Service may be put as:

An organized period of substantial "engagement" and "contribution" to local, national, or world community, recognized and valued by society, with minimal monetary compensation to the participant (Michael Sherraden, cited in Odeh, 2020, p.)

Issues raised by the conception are as follows; first, no systematic contradistinction is made regarding the mandatory and voluntary nature of the exercise as both are collapsed together. This may be against the backdrop of the way and manner different nations view its NYS Scheme; formal or informal; voluntary like The Gambia model or mandatory like Nigeria NYSC. Of interest to the paper is the concept of “engagement” and “contribution” of youths which if seriously taken care of, would go a long way checking African youth’s vices in the society, even illicit migration.

An Emeritus Director of the American National Service Secretariat in Washington, DC sees National Service in the following ways:

- (a) way to make military draft more equitable;
- (b) way to ease the problem of youth employment;
- (c) citizen responsibility; and,
- (d) form of experiential education (Eberly, 1994, pp.2-7; Sofoluwe, 1994, p.6).

The above aptly captured the aim of National Youth Service. The inability to handle some of the problems related to the above explains the “why” of the wave of African youth’s migration to Europe and America. This shall be expanded later.

NYSC Scheme is an organized programme was created by the Federal Military Government in 1973 after the civil war to mobilize graduates who are within the age limit of thirty (30) years old with the aim of national unity and accelerated national development (Oluwami 2014). From Nigerian perspective the age limit of 30 would help in the clarification of the concept of youths as contradistinguished from the concept of adulthood. As an institution and a programme, NYSC Scheme operates under the Federal Ministry of Sports and Youth Development. The programme is mandatory for Nigerian graduates as noted and lasts for a period of one year (12 months). It is structured into phases, namely; Orientation, Primary Assignment, Community Development Services, and Passing Out Parade (POP). Since inception in 1973, it has mobilized over four million Nigerian graduates (Field, 2018).

The NYSS, on the other hand, operates under the Ministry of Youth and Sports; it has no age barrier like the NYSC, though targeted at secondary school drop-outs and leavers with the sole aim of skills

acquisition for national development (C. Nnaocha, personal communication, March, 20, 2018). However, in The Gambia, youths are humans between the ages of 17 and 35, while in the Zambia ages of 15 to 25 years; Ghana adopts ages 18 to 40, Botswana 18 to 30; South Africa ages 18 and 35; Zimbabwe 18 to 35; the UK do not adopt European Union ages between 15 to 25, but her national policy sees youth between ages 18 and 19, while her community and voluntary services adopts 25 years (Mendy ,2017, Field,2018, Field, 2020, Langer and Oshodi, n.d.). In short, the Nigeria National Youth Policy 2009 puts the age bracket at 18 and 35 years, among others to do away with adults masquerading as youths (National Youth Policy, 2019). Given that The Gambia adopts ages 17 and 35 and NYSC puts the limit at 30, while the nations’ constitution puts 18 as eligibility to vote, the paper adopts the African Youth Policy of 2006 which put youth between ages 15 and 35 (National Youth Policy, 2019) for proper coverage of the research constituencies as people the usually involved in the illicit international migration are within the said age bracket.

Be that as it may examples of National Youth Service programme in West Africa sub-region other than NYSC and NYSS are, Ghana National Youth Service founded in 1973, Senegalese National Youth Civic Service founded in 1997, Burkina Faso National Volunteer Programme founded in 2005, Liberia National Youth Volunteers Service Programme founded in 2007, Cote d'Ivoire National Civic Service Programme founded in 2007, Niger National Volunteer Programme founded in 2007, Mali National Center for Promotion of Volunteering founded in 2009, Promotion Programme of National Volunteering in Togo founded in 2011 (Odeh, 2018; Odeh, 2020). The duration and objectives of the programmes varies from country to country, but the common denominator that compromises their differences as said earlier is productivity and national development. To achieve its NYS across nations must be framed within certain idea. A discourse of the ideas is the crux of the consequent part of the paper.

### **Theoretical frameworks**

The section considers ideas or perspectives on the operations of national youth service which is crucial to the argument of the discourse. Argument along the mechanics of National Service must be situated

within the contexts of the postulations of William James, John Dewey and Rosenstock-Huessy, who laid the foundational ideas of National Service. First on the line, William James in 1906 in his “Moral Equivalent of War” speech proposed military conscription instead of conscription of the whole youth population into constructive labour for a duration of time arising from the enormous energy young people exercises (Eberly, 1994; Odeh, 2021). The essence of this was to shift youthful energy from destructive ventures such as gangsterism and hooliganism to productive engagements such as building, mining, fishing, farming and other tangible projects. Shakespeare and the famous Italian Mazzini, appear to have similar view with William James. Against the background of the enormous energy of youths, Shakespeare cited in Chikendu, opined thus:

...Then a soldier, (i.e., the youth), full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard. Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel, seeking the bubble reputation. Even in the cannon’s mouth (Chikendu, 2004, p.7).

Mazzini cited in Odeh, on the other hands, buttresses this in the following words:

Place the youth at the head of insurgent multitude; you know not the secret of the power hidden in those youthful hearts nor the magic influence exercised on the masses by the voice of the youth. You find among the youth a host of apostles of the new religion (Odeh, 2012, p.57).

Given the inherent potentials in youths, Mazzini severally appealed they to be fully engaged in the battle for the unification of Italy to rescue it from the claws of imperialism. To William James, military training and orientation would eliminate elements of childishness in youths and transforms them into healthier citizens. Attempt to inculcate sense of discipline may have form and informed the paramilitary package in NYSC three weeks orientation period as well as activities of it. National youth services of The Gambia, Germany, Zambia, Zimbabwe, among others has military orientation too.

James Dewey on the other hands advocates for “Service- Learning” anchored on practical experience and orientation (Eberly, 1994). This appears to have found expression in the activities of

NYSC in the area of teaching instruction package during orientation camp, primary assignment in schools, Community Development Services and the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development that took off fully on the 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2012 (NYSC 2013). Instances of similar schemes elsewhere like The Gambia’s completely devoted to skills acquisitions, handwork and what seems like internships and apprenticeships reinforces Dewey’s proposition.

The third theoretical exposition is the idea of “National Service as A Way of Strengthening Ties among the People of the World” proposed by Rosenstock-Huessy, a refugee from Hitler’s Germany (Eberly, 1994). He suggested civilian youth service for Germany in 1912 and advocated for youth mobilization for national productivity and global wellness. Though the entire idea of national service originally appears local or national in outlook, the emergence of Overseas Service Corps, global interactions of youth organizations in form of visits, conferences, technical assistance as one could see the operations of NYSC in The Gambia, among others supports the currency of his position (NYSC 2013; Olisa, 1995; Imienwarin, 1996; Enegwea, 1995). More so that, national youth service schemes are parts of institutions that naturally have intercourse with others as underpinned by the doctrine of interdependence of States.

From the foregoing, contextualizing the debate of the paper within the frameworks of military exigencies, service-learning and international intercourse as espoused by William James, John Dewey and Rosenstock-Huessy are consistent with the idea of the paper, because the proposition of it would go a long way to curbing illicit flow of African youth across international borders. Having laid the theoretical foundation of the study, history, trends and patterns of Gambians migration would be considered in the subsequent part of the paper.

### **The Root, Trends and Patterns of The Gambians Migration**

The west coast of Africa the Gambia is situated has a tradition of migration due to its strategic setting, which attracted international trade, war, conflict and conquest throughout its recorded history. Between 1796 and 1797, Mongo Park in strategic term described the region between Gambia and Senegal rivers as a place of great resort

(Oloruntimehin, 1984). In short, the Senegambia area was a major player and point of transit during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade between the 15<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, in which millions of Africans were forced to the Americas and Europe. Opinions are divided over the estimated of slave outflow from the Senegambia region. Philip Curtin puts the figure at 3, 04330 per year between 1681 and 1810, while Barry Boubarcarr, estimated 6000 per year throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Kebbeh n.d.). Western scholars estimates is usually based on those that survived the middle passage to the new world and survived, without accounting for those that died in the process on the high sea and those that died immediately on landing the new world. It is therefore probable that 5000 slaves left Senegambia region per year.

The above trend and pattern of the Gambian international migration changed with the conquest and colonization Africa that followed the abolition of the slave trade. Before political independence in 1965, a lot of Gambian youth migrated to the United Kingdom for study and work purposes. After independence, the country began to face acute economic challenge in the area of agriculture which is the mainstay of the people. This was aggravated by deforestation and its attendant consequence of erosion that affected the price of peanut in international market, the main agricultural staple in 1970s and 1980s during the administration of the late Dawda Kairaba Jawara, who was the prime minister from 1962 to 1970 and, president from 1970 to 1994 (Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, <https://www.britannica.com>; Kebbeh n. d.). The centrifugal and centripetal forces during the period were the economic woe, poor health facilities and job security in The Gambia on the one hand, and opportunities for studies, job prospects and better standard of living in Europe and Americas on the other hands.

The 1994 military coup that brought Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh to power terminated The Gambia's First Republic. The terror of the military regime and the despotic leadership style of Jammeh made many to seek asylum in the United Kingdom and other European countries. Quite a number of Gambian youths within the period embarked on legal and illegal migration. Since then, the number of Gambian nationals engaging in international

migration continued to maintain upward trajectory, from 35,000 in the year 2000 to 65,000 in 2010. In 2012, Spain was the leading destination of The Gambians accounting for hosting about 22,000 of its nationals; other countries in order of significance included the United States, Nigeria, Senegal, United Kingdom and Germany (Jallow, 2016; Kebbeh, n.d.).

In 2013, The Gambia occupied the tenth migrant nation in Africa. In 2014, after an attempted coup, Jammeh repressiveness and despotism worsened giving further serious impetus to external migration. In 2015 Jammeh arrested his strongest political opponents, Ousaanu Darboe, imprisoned and tortured several members of the opposition party leading to the death of Solo Sandeng in custody (Zanker and Altrogge, 2017). In 2015, most migrants that arrived Italy by the sea came from Eritrea (39,162) and Nigeria (22,237), followed by Somalia (12,433), Sudan (8,932), The Gambia (8,454), Syria (7,448) and Mali (5,307) (Migration Analysis Center, 2015). Considering the population strength of the above-mentioned countries, The Gambia may be said to have topped the list in African international migration index. The emigration from these countries apart from economic hardship in the case of The Gambia, were essentially triggered by conflicts, insurgency and terrorism.

Yahya Jammeh's refusal to accept defeat and handover to Adama Barrow in 2016 intensified the rate of emigration. In 2016, there were 16,015 Gambian seeking asylums in Italy and Germany (Zanker and Altrogge, 2017). Due to the impending political impasse many including foreigners fled the country, a development that greatly affected the tourism sector which the nation is heavily dependent on, which had the highest GDP in 2016. The significance of tourism is linked to the infamous Gambia sex industry, which youths are the key player. It is noted that:

For "bumsters" (a term to described young Gambian men who seek out relationships with Westerners), "Babylon"-the *emic* name for the "West", is a dream destination flowing with milk, honey, prosperity and wealth. This highly fantasized wealth forms the core of the young men's aspirations to travel abroad. Bemusing and

sexual activity with a *toubab* (a Westerner) is believed to be the ticket out of Africa and its inherent scarcity (Nyanza *et.al.* Zanker and Altrogge, 2017, p.14).

The country sex industry powered by tourism led to voluntary migration of youths to Europe, Americas and other parts of the world. Though the country is believed to be losing its labour force on the one hand, on the other hands it was gaining through remittance. In The Gambia, remittances account for considerable proportion of the GDP. In 2014, remittances account for 22 per cent of the GDP and was the third highest in the continent as it amounted to \$181 million compared to \$10.6 million Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) of the said year (Zanker and Altrogge, 2017). Against the background of the economic and social benefits which migration promises, it may be stressed that tourism sector which had developed since 1970s played critical role in the emigration of The Gambian youth. The sector has over the years enhanced Euro-African interactions, businesses, friendship, families and international movements.

Between 1990s and up to early 2000s, The Gambia emigrants made their way to Spain through the Canary Islands. The fame of the route reached its peak between 2006 and 2012. Consequently, the route witnessed a sharp decrease in the volume of migrant flow from The Gambia as a result of Operation Seahorse, made up of the combined forces of West African and European countries which consistently clamp on migrants. Consequently too, there was a later popular route through Senegal, Mali and Niger into Algeria or Libya, from where the migrants journeyed to Italy and other parts of Europe (Zanker and Altrogge, 2017). However, through the efforts of IOM several migrants safely returned and were engaged through its partnership with the NYSS. The supports of NYSC to the founding of NYSS that contributed to the return of the youths and their rehabilitation shall be the focus of the subsequent part of the paper.

### **The founding of Gambia National Youth Service Scheme**

The NYSC is the founding father of the NYSS. A brief history may be necessary here for one to appreciate Nigeria's role. Initial attempt at mobilizing the Gambian youths was made in 1960s in the Gambia-Ghana ties discussion of Nkrumah's

influence on the Banjul youths. Between 1961 and 1966 over one hundred (100) Gambian youths between the ages of 11 and 21 were taken to Ghana under scholarship packaged by the famous Garba Jahumpa. His aim was for the youths to be trained at the Nkruma Young Pioneers School to study Nkrumahism that was to enable them join the militant corps of his party, the Democratic Congress Alliance (DCA) which was to put The Gambia on the road of Ghana and Nkruma's progressive trajectory (Ceesay, 2018). Some of the youths stayed to acquire skills, while others completed their high school education, but never made serious impact on The Gambian society.

Be that as it may, the idea of founding a NYS in The Gambia was first envisaged in the first national youth policy of 1989, during Dawda Kairaba Jawara's government. Consequently, after a pilot survey, the first batch of fifty corps participants was mobilized in 1990. In 1993, the second batch of one hundred youths was recruited. The trend was interrupted in 1994 by the military coup (M. Mbaye, personal communication, August, 30, 2018). The Gambia national youth programme at the time was more like Boy Scout activities, aimed at job creation and leadership training. During the period the popularity of NYSC had reached The Gambia following the development at the first Youth Global Conference of 1992, in which Nigeria was booked to host the second edition in 1994 that was hosted in Abuja. The Gambian delegates were led by Mrs. Amina Faal-Sonko, the then Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture of The Gambia.

The communiqué of the 1994 Conference called on nations without a standing national youth service to do so without hesitations. Consequently, the military government of The Gambia in 1995 directed the Ministry of Youth and Sports to come up with a proposal (M. Mbaye, personal communication, August, 30, 2018). Prior to this, the Zambia had tried to help established national youth service for The Gambia, but failed because their model has no comprehensive structure compared to NYSC. The outcome of the proposal led to the setting up of a task force and a study team which travelled across the globe searching for a suitable national youth service. At the end of the search tour, the team discovered NYSC to be the best. Aminah Faal-Sonko, cited in Enegwea notes 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 organized Youth Service Programme in the world (Enegwea, 2000, p.341).

Following this discovery, The Gambian authorities in 1995 put forward a request to NYSC through the Directorate of Technical Aid Corps, under the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The request for the founding of NYSS may be broadly categorized into two, namely; training and personnel. The requests with regard to training are basically two, namely:

- a. Short term attachments and
- b. Study tours (Olorunnisomo, Ozoma and Kobani, 1995, p.3).

The requests for personnel on the other hands are also two:

- a. One Administrator and
- b. Five Field Coordinators (Olorunnisomo, Ozoma, Kobani, p.3).

Consequent upon the consideration and approval of the requests, Chief Gregory Kas Enegwea was sent to The Gambia on two months preliminary studies. The exercise that led to the structure and emergence of the NYSS is put, thus:

At the course of the preliminary studies, I discovered that Zambia had tried to help establish a national youth service scheme for The Gambia, but failed because theirs have no structure. So, what I did was to conceive a scheme modeled after Nigerian NYSC and to borrowed idea from Ghana national youth service, (which have two sets; one for degree graduate and another for non-graduates) and *TireloSetshaba* of Lesotho (*should be Botswana going by the name...Emphasis Added*). Thus, I set up a scheme for The Gambia focusing on school dropouts and WASSC holders, because when I and my team members went there, there was no University in The Gambia before one could talk of establishing a scheme that could mobilize graduate youths. More so, it is the young school dropouts which poses the greatest challenge to the society that The

Gambian authorities want to engage in skill acquisition through NYSS (G. K. Enegwea, personal communication, September, 5, 2018).

Upon completion, The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme was officially launched on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1996 by the then chairman of the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC), Captain Yaya A.J.J. Jammeh (NYSS Handbook 2021).

On the whole of the exercise, four batches of NYSC Technical Experts were deployed to The Gambia between 1996 and 2004. The first batch, (1996-1998), was made up of Experts, namely; Gregory Kas Enegwea now retired, Mr. Anthony A. Enweonwu of the blessed memory, Mr. E.E. Akinola, Mr. Nuhu S. Kwaghe, Solomon O. Ochim now retired and Mrs. Victoria Ango. The second batch deployed to The Gambia (1998-2000), was made up of three staff namely: Gabriel Ojo Alonge now retired, Habibu O. Kurawa and the late Miss. Dorothy Ogbudu (H.O. Kurawa, personal communication, June, 8 2018). Gabriel Ojo Alonge was the leader of the team. The third batch (2000-2002), was equally made up of three NYSC staff just like the second batch. The constituents of the team are; Miss. Funke Eniola O. Ambekemo, Chief Gregory Anya and Mr. Adamu Emmanuel (A.E. Funke, G.F. Anyia, personal communications, September 20, 2018; April, 29, 2018). Miss. Funke Eniola O. Ambekemo. The fourth batch (2002 to January, 2005), which was the last was made up of two Experts namely, Mr. Aloysius O. Idoga and Miss. Tete Ukpong (A. O. Idoga, personal communication, June, 7, 2018).

The structure and objectives of NYSS are not so much different from NYSC because the NYSS modeled after the later. For instance, the objectives of NYSS include the following, among others:

- (a) To inculcate discipline in Gambian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work and loyal service to The Gambia in any situation they may find themselves;
- (b) To develop common ties among The Gambian youths, promote national unity and integration;
- (c) To remove prejudices, eliminate ignorance and confirm at first hand many similarities among Gambians of all ethnic group;

- (d) To develop a sense of corporate existence and common destiny of the people of The Gambia;
- (e) To learn about higher ideals of national achievement and social and cultural improvement;
- (f) To expose youths to mode of living of people in different part of The Gambia;
- (g) To encourage religious tolerance through the accommodation of each other's religious affinity;
- (h) To impart skills and Knowledge to the youths and prepare them for employment and or self – employment in the world of work;
- (i) To encourage, train and guide young people for active participation in the social, economic, cultural, and political development of The Gambia (NYSS Brochure, n.d. p.9).

NYSC objectives on the other hands are as follows:

- (a) To inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work and of patriotic and loyal service to the Nation in any situation they may find themselves;
- (b) To raise the moral tone of the Nigerian youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement;
- (c) To develop in the Nigerian youths, attitudes of mind, acquired through shared experience and suitable training, which will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest;
- (d) To develop common ties among our youths and promote national unity by ensuring that:
  - i. As far as possible, youths are assigned to job in the states other than their states of origin;
  - ii. Each group, assigned to work together, is a representative of the country as possible;
  - iii. The youths are exposed to the mode of living of the people in different parts of the country with a view to removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance and confirming at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups;

- (e) To encourage members of the corps to seek, at the end of their corps service, career employment all over the country, thus promoting free movement of labour;
- (f) To induce employers, partly through their experience with corps members, to employ more readily qualified Nigerians irrespective of their states of origin; and
- (g) To enable our youths to acquire the spirit of self- reliance (NYSC, 2013).

A critical survey of the objectives of the schemes buttresses the fact they are not entirely different as noted. However, the design of NYSS programme is different in nature.

The Gambian government is responsible for the funding of NYSS. Its secretariat conducts and supervises all the administrative activities of the scheme and is headed by an Executive Director. The first Executive Director of the Scheme was Chief Gregory Kas Enegwea of Nigeria, while the first indigenous head was Sheriff Gomez and later, Sabestine Njie, of the blessed memory (M. Mbaye, personal communication, 2018). The Scheme coordinates the training of the corps members in specialized skills such as plumbing, welding, auto-mechanic, hair dressing, among others. The service commences with orientation, which last for twenty-two months. During this period corps participants are exposed to military training, physical exercise, leadership skills and lectures on various subjects. These are line with the propositions of William James, John Dewey and Rosenstock-Huessy. But, unlike Nigeria, NYSS corps members do not provide services per say; but acquire skills for self-sustenance within the period of orientation. However, the operation of the duo (NYSS and NYSC) followed the postulations of William James, John Dewey and Rosenstock-Huessy.

At formation the non-tertiary institution graduates' youths of The Gambia between the ages of 17 and 35 years stood about 200,000 (Mendy, 2017). It is this groups that later constitutes the bulk of The Gambian migrants. Educational qualification and age criteria sharply contrasted NYSS with NYSC. Though the original focus of NYSS was not on migration issues, it quickly adjusted itself to partner with IOM in an attempt to address national and global challenges.



## **NYSS/IOM Partnership: Some lessons for Nigeria**

Generally, returns do occur and many European countries encouraged that through return packages. However, it is difficult to establish the extent and trend of return due to unstable migration policies and regulations. Sub Saharan Africa is documented to have an estimated number of 100 and 200 returns per annum between 2002 and 2006, including asylum and non-asylum seekers (Bruno, Marie-Laurence, Djamila, Cris, Valentina and Papa, n.d.). The Gambian migrants are not included in this figure due to the country's woes and Yahya Jammeh's despotism. In 2016, out of 16,015 Gambians seeking asylum in Italy and Germany, 11, 929 arrived the former (Zanker and Altrogge, 2017).

With the victory of Adama Barrow, there was a good move towards return in The Gambia both on the part of the migrants and the European Union that has been spearheading the enterprise. The European Union New Partnership Framework launched in 2016 was to facilitate the return of illegal migrants to countries of origins. To achieve success, a framework titled "A Working Party on Integration, Migration and Expulsion" that was inaugurated met the European Council to fine-tune agreement on return issues between the European Union and The Gambia Government. Upon the conclusion of the agreement, the European Union used the United Nation Migration Agency, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to ensuring safe returns of migrants and their reintegration into the society. In collaboration with The Gambian government, 144 migrants were assisted and returned in January, 2018 (IOM <https://reliefweb.int>). These were among the 1,155 migrants rescued and flown out of Libya. On their arrival, immediate medical care, food and hygiene were offered. This was followed by registration, profiling by IOM staff to detect reason(s) for departure, routes and living condition in the host or stock country. Since May 2017, 1,128 Gambian migrants mainly youths were safely returned from Libya (IOM <https://reliefweb.int>).

The drive of President Adama Barrow's government to note the age bracket of the returnees and the need to integrate them into the society through skill acquisition thereby making them useful to themselves and to contribute to the

economy of The Gambia made the Ministry of Youths and Sports stepped into the exercise. NYSS as one of the satellite institutions under the Ministry of Youth and Sports, saddled with the responsibility of youth development and empowerment took a center stage and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the International Organization for Migration leading to the first intake of NYSS/IOM skill enhancement project training programme in August, 2018. In the training one see the operation allocation of William James, John Dewey and Rosenstock-Huessy thesis (Field, 2018).

The NYSS/IOM partnership is for the first instance of two years (2018 to 2020) and subject to renewal. The essence of the project is aptly captured thus:

...This project is intended to mitigate youth unemployment with focus on returnee migrants. Over the past few years, a lot of you have embarked on the Back-way journey through the Mediterranean Sea to Europe and many of you got stuck in Libya and countries and could not proceed. The IOM being very supportive to The Gambia Government and Gambian in general facilitated your voluntary return. Upon your return, The Gambian National Youth Service Scheme (NYSS) sign an MOU which emphasized self-reliance and aim to discourage irregular migration to Europe. Following your technical and vocational training, you will be provided with a start-up capital to help kick-start your business... (Ngum, 2018, pp.2-3).

The first intake in 2018 engaged 102 migrant returnees into skills and training such as carpentry, plumbing, tailoring, welding, auto-mechanic, hair dressing, among others offered by NYSS (F. Njie, personal communication, August, 27, 2018). The 102 returnees are all male gender. In 2019, about 163 returnees were engaged bringing the total number of returnees to 265 (Field, 2018). Consequent upon the end of training the returnees were provided with toolkits and capitals to startup businesses. Those on tailoring skill were given three sewing machines each; likewise with others trades. NYSS has continued to monitor the returnees in their various businesses; while some are doing well, other are slow due to low patronage. Through this, the NYSS and IOM were able to rehabilitate the

returnees thereby checking their possibility of making further attempt on licit travel to Europe and elsewhere in the world.

The operations of NYSS no doubt have gone a long way in checking the waves of Gambian youth's engagement in international migration. Since inception, over 2,000 youths have been engaged in vocational activities and skills offered by NYSS (Field, 2018). During orientation corps members are given lectures on youths and migration, civic education, role of young people in national development, leadership, conduct and discipline, career guidance and counseling, youth and tourism, among others (Mendy, 2017). Those over the years engaged by NYSS and has become employers of labour would have been victims of illegal migration. Public awareness offered by NYSS and The Gambia National Youth Council (GNYC) at regional level with community radios helps in educating the youths about the danger of illegal migration.

However, despite the efforts through NYSS/ IOM partnership a very tragic incidence occurred when a boat carrying 150 people departed the coast of The Gambia on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 2019 had an accident in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of the Mauritania on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 2019, in which about 60 migrants mainly Gambian youths lost their lives and many were injured (Field, 2019). This appears to be a call on The Gambia Ministry of Youths and Sport, NYSS, IOM and stakeholders to further strengthen synergies and operations in checking the aggressive rate of emigration than rehabilitating the returnees. This becomes compelling and fundamental because returnees in need of engagement through NYSS/IOM were first of all migrants and it therefore, sufficed to theorize, no migrants, no returnees.

The question that readily to come mind at this point is what lessons there are for Nigeria and NYSC to learn as founder of NYSS and given the similar challenges the country is facing. The following may serve as useful lessons: one, the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports and NYSC should expand their role by going into relevant international cooperation and partnership. The paper is aware of NYSC partnerships with the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), John Hopkins University, Ea-net Africa, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United

States Agency for International Development (USAID), with many others that are eager to keying into the various development projects of the Scheme (ABC of CDS n.d. [www.nysc.gov.ng/dept/cds/php](http://www.nysc.gov.ng/dept/cds/php)). While this is commendable, it is good that such partnerships are not just an orthodox one in the name of partnership, but one based on the current reality of Nigerian State and youths related challenges. This was what The Gambia Ministry of Youth and Sports and NYSS did differently from the NYSC. The international partnership narrative is in tandem with Rosenstock-Huessy's postulation.

Two, NYSC has come of age to have two arms something similar to the Ghana National Youth Service, which appeared to operate graduate and non-degree sections. This will enable the scheme to be more relevant and have more impact and on the youths. It was recently that the NYSS started thinking of having a graduate section. It is advisable that the University graduates are separated from graduates of the polytechnics and colleges of Education. While graduates of Polytechnic and College of Education and non-graduate youths should serve together to enable them learn and improve on their practical experiences like skill acquisition programme as espoused by John Dewey. This is not to discriminate, but necessary because trainings received from polytechnic and college of Education are practical oriented than Nigerian universities environment. In short, this will make the Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneur packages of NYSC have more impact on the Nigerian youths. After all, the skill acquisition programme though has long history in the activities of the NYSC its current resurgence appears to have been inspired by the activities of NYSS.

Three, Charity Services and Gender group of NYSC Community Development Service, made up of National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) which has been campaigning against human trafficking having child abuse as its objective (ABC of CDS 2014) should be reorganized and brought into the mainstream of NYSC and incorporate issues of return and reintegration of migrants into the Nigerian society. Had it not for the foot note position the said Community Service unit over the years occupied in the campaign against irregular migration a lot would have been achieved. This would boost the relevance

of the Scheme in the era of mass migration of youth across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.

Finally, but not limited to, is the need for NYSC Scheme to adjust and respond to global and national challenges at all times. This was what NYSS did by signing MOU with IOM to engaging the migrant returnees to enable them earn a living thereby contributing to the economy of The Gambia. NYSC too though have responded to emergency too particularly in the areas of global health challenges and national floods and environmental disasters. On the international illegal migration plank Nigerian returnees over the years are left without been engaged in profitable skills. NYSC should step forward, market and demonstrate the relevance of its skills and entrepreneurship in this context by checking unemployment that is at the front burner of the causes of irregular migration. It is pathetic that between January and May 2017, not fewer than 10,000 Nigerians particularly the youths died while illegally migrating to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea and deserts to escape challenges of unemployment and poverty (if you like state collapse). Out of the figure, 4,900 were established to have died in the sea in the process, while the rest died in the desert (Adejokun, n.d.). In November 2017, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) revealed that Nigerians were sold at the rate of \$400 per head in Libya, while male migrants worked in the farms and mines; the females were used as sex toys and labourers (Adejokun, n.d.). It is right the government decentralizes its activities and make more funds available to NYSC in this enterprise. Patriotic individual, charity organizations (local and international) and companies too are to invest in this human capital development project. In The Gambia, IOM through the UNO financed the migrant project; the same should apply to Nigeria as what is good for goose is good for the gander. The author recalled the response of the IOM staff during the field work thus: “go and tell Nigeria the good work you see here in The Gambia” (Field, 2018). Nigeria and NYSC are to learn from the developments going on in NYSS/IOM partnership since August, 2018.

### **Conclusion**

By a way of conclusion, four epochs are discernible in the history of The Gambia international migration namely; the era of the

transatlantic slave trade and contemporary eras of Dawda Jawara administration, (1965-1994), Yahya Jammeh military regime and civilian administration, (1994-2016) and Adama Barrow, ongoing administration since 2017. The paper notes that the transatlantic slave experience was a forced migration, while the contemporary ones though forced, were triggered by centripetal and centrifugal forces revolving round unfavorable economic and political climates at home and the promising greener pasture abroad. On the basis of its findings the paper makes bold to say that, while Dawud Jawara and Yahya Jammeh era were periods of Gambians exodus to Europe, Americas and other promising parts of the world, Adama Barrow’s ongoing era seems to be a time of zionistic return to The Gambia, though with some challenges that are yet to be fixed in the country.

The paper has taken care of the conceptual and theoretical issues that concerned it. Trends and patterns of The Gambia migration has been explored, the founding of NYSS and its partnership with IOM has been considered and lessons for Nigeria NYSC drawn. It further notes that though NYSC remain the founding father of NYSS, it has a lot to learn from the latter given the way it adjusted itself and responded to the prevailing national and international developments of the illegal or backdoor international migration of the youths. It does appear NYSS/IOM still has a long way to go in stemming the ugly and aggressive tides of African youth’s migration. However, the cases, there are lessons of the partnership for NYSC and other similar youth organizations in African states to learn. They should venture into profitable affiliation with relevant international agencies with corresponding support of the government and all stakeholders to make the engagement more achievement-oriented to addressing the challenges of the youth development in the twenty first century. The paper concludes that to achieve successes in youth development engineering enterprise in the century, nations must fashion NYS and walk along the ideas of the National Youth Service as Moral “Equivalent of War”, “Service- Learning” and “A Way of Strengthening Ties among the People of the World” laid by William James, John Dewey and Rosenstock-Huessy.

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