
**CIVIC EDUCATION AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
THROUGH THE NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS AS
PATHWAYS TO ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
GOALS (SDGs) IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This research investigated the concept of civic education and youth participation in the National Youth Service Corps as ways of realizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in Osun State, Nigeria. The research was anchored on four objectives that considered issues related to civic education awareness, forms of youth participation in community development activities, the contribution of NYSC towards SDGs achievement, and challenges that hinder effective participation. A mixed-method research design was employed in this research, which used both descriptive survey and qualitative methods for a better understanding of the subject matter. The population of this research consisted of the corps members who served in Osun State, from which a sample size of 200 was drawn using a multistage sampling technique (a technique involving purposive and proportional sampling procedures was adopted).

Data were obtained using a structured questionnaire with a reliability of 0.81, together with an interview guide. Quantitative data analysis techniques that were employed included descriptive statistics, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, Simple Linear Regression, and Multiple Regression Analysis, while thematic analysis was used for analyzing qualitative data. Pearson correlation ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$) revealed a significant positive relationship between civic education awareness and youth engagement. Community development participation was also shown to have a significant impact on SDG achievements, contributing to 34% of the variation in outcomes, whereas challenges faced contributed to 50% of the variation in the effectiveness of civic engagement. From the qualitative data, it can be concluded that corps members were found to be making a contribution in terms of education, health, and environmental sustainability programmes; however, their efforts are hampered by several issues such as lack of funds, poor logistics, and institutional barriers. Recommendations have been made for improving civic education training, ensuring proper funding, enhancing logistics, institutional collaboration, and the motivation of youths.

Keywords: Civic Education, Community development service (CDS); Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Youth engagement

Introduction

Sustainable development has become one of the most pressing issues in the modern world, especially after the introduction of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, which address various global concerns, including poverty, inequality, unemployment, and environmental problems. The implementation of the SDGs in developing nations such as Nigeria requires the involvement of citizens, including youths, who form a substantial

percentage of the population. Engagement of youths has been identified as one of the main catalysts of sustainable development because the young generation has the energy, creativity, and innovative mindset necessary for societal change and development. Civic education becomes one of the crucial tools to educate the populace about democratic values, civic responsibilities, and participatory skills needed for societal development. According to experts such as Akinyemi and Olatunji (2021) and Adeyemi (2020), civic education not only involves political literacy but also focuses on the promotion of critical thinking skills and civic consciousness. In Africa, where there are many governance problems, civic education has become essential in developing civic consciousness among youths. As Gyimah-Boadi (2021) explains, civic education encourages youths to become more politically conscious and actively involved in civic activities.

One of the most important institutional strategies employed to fill this gap in Nigeria is the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), whose aim is the promotion of national unity, civic engagement, and youth development among Nigerian graduates. By using its various initiatives, such as the Community Development Service (CDS), the NYSC has provided youth with platforms to participate in educational services, health campaigns, environmental sanitation, and other developmental activities that are directly associated with sustainable development goals. Research has shown that youth involvement plays a major role in achieving poverty eradication, environmental sustainability, and social development (Chukwuemeka & Ezenwakwelu, 2021; Bello & Afolabi, 2023). Even international institutions such as the United Nations Development Programme (2022) and the World Bank (2021) have recognized the contributions that youths make in the process of sustainable development. This makes the activities of the NYSC more practical applications of civic engagement within the community. Nevertheless, these efforts still encounter various obstacles such as lack of institutional support, inadequate financial resources, poor policy coordination, and inadequate consideration with regard to sustainable development goals (Salami & Adebayo, 2021; African Development Bank, 2022; Oyetunde & Ogunyemi, 2022; UNESCO, 2023; Eze & Nwankwo,

2023). While some prior research findings indicate that incorporating civic education into youth development programs can result in better developmental results (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2022; Ajayi & Oladipo, 2024), no adequate empirical evidence exists on how civic education in the context of NYSC impacts youth involvement and sustainable development. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the effect of civic education on youth involvement via NYSC as a pathway to sustainable development, with particular attention paid to Osun State. The study seeks to:

- i. examine the level of civic education awareness among members of the National Youth Service Corps in Osun State;
- ii. assess the forms and intensity of youth engagement in community development activities by corps members in Osun State;
- iii. analyze the contributions of NYSC activities to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in Osun State; and
- iv. identify the challenges limiting effective civic participation and development impact among corps members in the study area.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of civic education awareness among NYSC members in Osun State?
2. How do corps members participate in community development and civic engagement activities in Osun State?
3. In what ways do NYSC activities contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in Osun State?
4. What challenges affect the effectiveness of civic education and youth engagement among corps members in Osun State?

Methods

This research employed a mixed-method approach to explore how civic education and youth empowerment through the National Youth Service Corps can serve as a means to meet UN Sustainable Development Goals in Osun State. A descriptive survey design was applied in the quantitative study, while structured interviews were

used to explore the qualitative side of corps members' experience and difficulties. The target population involved corps members serving in Osun State during the 2025 service year, out of whom the sample size of 200 respondents was chosen using the stratified and proportionate sampling techniques. Information was gathered by means of a structured questionnaire and an interview guide designed in compliance with the study purpose. Pilot testing conducted in another location revealed that the reliability coefficient reached 0.81. During the information-gathering process, ethical concerns like confidentiality and voluntarism were considered. Quantitative data were statistically analyzed employing descriptive statistics, Pearson Correlation, Simple Linear Regression, and Multiple Regression analyses.

Results

Research Question 1: Examine the level of civic education awareness among members of the National Youth Service Corps in Osun State.

Table 1: Civic Education Awareness among NYSC Members in Osun State

S/N	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	I understand the principles of civic responsibility taught during NYSC orientation.	3.42	0.81	Agreed
2	I am aware of the role of NYSC in promoting national development values.	3.58	0.76	Agreed
3	I have received adequate civic education on my rights and duties as a citizen during NYSC	3.21	0.88	Agreed
4	NYSC programmes have Improved my knowledge of national unity and development.	3.65	0.74	Agreed
	Sectional Mean	3.47	0.80	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From the results presented in Table 1, it is evident that there is a very high awareness of civic education among members of the National Youth Service Corps in Osun State. This is because all item means were above the acceptance point. From the sectional mean of 3.47, it can be concluded that the respondents believed that NYSC orientation improves their knowledge on civic duty and national values.

Interview Guide Question 1: How would you describe your understanding of civic education as it was taught or experienced during your NYSC orientation and service year, and how has it influenced your sense of civic responsibility?

Response on **Research Question 1:** “How would you describe your understanding of civic education as it was taught or experienced during your NYSC orientation and service year, and how has it influenced your sense of civic responsibility”?

The answers provided by the respondents show that the majority have a high level of knowledge regarding civic education, especially the one taught to them during the orientation and service period at the NYSC. Most of the corps members reported that civic education training helped them know about their civic rights and duties in terms of national unity and development. The other thing is that the orientation camp provided lessons on patriotism, discipline, and community services. It is also noteworthy that most of the respondents said that the civic education training lessons were not theoretical but rather practical since they were required to practice the civic education principles in their daily activities within their communities. Through this kind of exposure, they developed a sense of civic responsibility towards the development of society.

Research Question 2: How do corps members participate in community development and civic engagement activities in Osun State?

Table 2: Youth Engagement in Community Development Activities

S/N	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
5	I actively participate in Community Development Service (CDS) activities in my place of primary assignment.	3.61	0.73	Agreed
6	NYSC encourages me to engage in community-based development projects.	3.74	0.69	Agreed
7	I have contributed to at least one community development initiative during my service year.	3.48	0.82	Agreed
8	My participation in NYSC activities has positively impacted my host community.	3.56	0.77	Agreed
	Sectional Mean	3.60	0.75	Agreed

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*

From Table 2, there is high youth involvement in community development programs from the members of the National Youth Service Corps in Osun State, where all item means are above the acceptance criteria. A sectional mean of 3.60 shows that members of the National Youth Service Corps are actively participating in Community Development Service (CDS) and other civic activities. It can be seen that the NYSC structure offers a platform that allows the youths to participate in community development programs and initiatives.

Interview Guide Question 2: In what ways have you participated in community development or CDS activities during your service year, and what factors influenced your level of involvement?

Response on **Research Question 2:** On what ways have they NYSC members participated in community development or CDS activities during your service year, and what factors influenced your level of involvement

S/N	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
9	NYSC activities contribute to improving education, health, and environmental conditions in my community.	3.69	0.71	Agreed
10	My participation in NYSC programmes aligns with the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.	3.52	0.79	Agreed
11	NYSC has helped promote awareness of development goals among rural communities.	3.44	0.83	Agreed
12	Community projects carried out by corps members support long -term development goals.	3.60	0.76	Agreed
Sectional Mean		3.56	0.77	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2025

As can be seen from the result presented in Table 3 above, there is an apparent perception of the significant contribution of activities of the National Youth Service Corps towards the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in Osun State. The sectional mean of 3.56 shows that participants agree that activities carried out by the NYSC positively impact educational, health, and environmental outcomes in host communities. This means that there is a substantial role played by the corps members in ensuring that sustainable development goals are achieved locally.

Interview Guide Question 3: From your experience, how do NYSC activities contribute to improving development outcomes such as education, health, or environmental sustainability in your host community?

Response on Research Question: That is from their experience, how

NYSC activities contribute to improving development outcomes such as education, health, or environmental sustainability in your host community?

It is evident from the answers provided that the corps members see the activities of the National Youth Service Corps as contributing positively to development results in the host communities. The corps members mentioned that the participation in school support programs, health outreaches, and environmental sanitation programs has been beneficial in ensuring access to basic services, especially in the rural communities. It was also stated by some corps members that the campaigns carried out on hygiene, education, and public health have positively impacted behavioral aspects in the communities. Some corps members further added that the impact of such activities, though minor at times, plays an important role in developing a stronger development program in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This is because the community members benefit from the programs implemented by the corps members, especially in education reinforcement and health sensitization programs.

Research Question 4: What challenges affect the effectiveness of civic education and youth engagement among corps members in Osun State?

Table 4: Challenges Affecting Civic Education and Youth Engagement

S/N	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
13	Lack of adequate funding limits the effectiveness of NYSC community development activities.	3.71	0.68	Agreed

S/N	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
14	Poor logistical support affects corps members' participation in civic engagement programmes.	3.63	0.74	Agreed
15	Insufficient institutional support reduces the impact of NYSC civic education initiatives.	3.55	0.79	Agreed
16	Low motivation among corps members affects the success of community development activities.	3.49	0.81	Agreed
Sectional Mean		3.60	0.76	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From Table 4, it is clear that respondents agreed that lack of funding, ineffective logistics, lack of institutional support, and low levels of motivation are some of the problems that face the effectiveness of civic education and youth involvement within the National Youth Service Corps in Osun State. The sectional mean of 3.60 further reinforces that these problems significantly impact the efficacy of community development programs and civic participation programs. Generally, the results imply that institutional and financial support should be improved to enhance program efficacy.

Interview Guide Question 4: What challenges have you experienced or observed that limit effective civic education and youth engagement during your NYSC service year, and how do these challenges affect outcomes?

Response on Research Question 4: On challenges NYSC member have experienced or observed that limit effective civic education and their engagement during your NYSC service year, and how these challenges affect outcomes

These responses indicate that the corps members encountered various challenges that hinder effective civic education and youth engagement in their service

year under the National Youth Service Corps. These challenges include insufficient funding for community projects, lack of adequate logistical support, and insufficient institutional support from some host organizations, which tend to curtail civic education efforts. The respondents further indicated that these challenges lower the levels of motivation and participation among corps members. These challenges tend to result in the delay, poor implementation, and even abandonment of civic projects by the corps members. From these responses, it is clear that these structural and resource-based challenges negatively affect the success of civic education and youth engagement outcomes in the study area.

Discussions

Firstly, from the results presented, it can be observed that the National Youth Service Corps members within Osun State have a good knowledge of civic education, especially about civic responsibility, national unity, and community service. It can therefore be concluded that civic education provided to members of the NYSC during orientation and service positively influenced their knowledge of their rights and responsibilities concerning national development. The results of the study concur with the opinion put forward by Akinyemi and Olatunji (2021), who contend that civic education improves democratic consciousness among youths as well as helps to instill civic responsibility and active citizenship. According to Ogunleye and Adesina (2022), civic learning increases the capacity of youths to participate in societal development processes because of their social responsibility and participatory skills gained during the process. From the interviews conducted, it appears that the civic education in the National Youth Service Corps scheme is practically applied through civic principles learned through personal interactions within communities. In essence, civic education within the scheme has positive implications since it enables young graduates to develop nation-building skills through civic orientation programmes.

The research also indicated that the corps members were active participants in various forms of community development and civic participation activities like health campaigns, literacy programs, environmental sanitation, and social awareness programs within their assigned communities. Another finding from the study was that NYSC activities significantly help in the achievement of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, especially those concerned with education, health, and environmental sustainability goals. This particular finding is corroborated by Chukwuemeka and Ezenwakwelu (2021) when they mentioned that youth participation in community development helps in improving social welfare and contributing towards sustainable development goals. Furthermore, the findings are also supported by Salami and Adebayo (2021) when they asserted that apart from being an instrument of national unity, the NYSC is now used as a powerful tool of grassroots development and youth empowerment. The study pointed out that despite its usefulness, there are various limitations regarding the role of NYSC as a tool for civic participation and sustainable development. Some of these limitations include lack of funding, poor logistics, institutional support, and insufficient motivation of corps members to actively engage in civic activities.

Conclusion

In this study, civic education and youth engagement as approaches for meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals were investigated using the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). From the results obtained, it was evident that corps members are highly aware of civic education concepts. Furthermore, it was discovered that youth engagement in NYSC plays an important role in contributing towards local development in areas like education, health, and environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, the research equally highlights some of the limitations that exist in this regard, including funding, logistical problems, institutional constraints, and motivational factors. In conclusion, it can be said that although NYSC is an important tool for realizing civic education goals and objectives, there is still room for improvement in order to maximize the potential benefits.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, there is a need for the National Youth Service Corps administration to strengthen civic education training during orientation programmes to deepen corps members' understanding of civic responsibility and national development values. Government and relevant stakeholders should also improve monitoring mechanisms, institutional support, and funding for Community Development Service (CDS) activities, particularly projects relating to education, health, and environmental sustainability. In addition, adequate logistics such as transportation and communication facilities should be provided to enhance effective participation in community projects. The study further recommends stronger collaboration between corps members, host communities, and public institutions to improve the impact of grassroots development initiatives. Finally, motivational strategies, including incentives, recognition, and reward systems, should be introduced to encourage sustained youth participation in civic engagement and community development activities aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

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