

Funding and Youth Ecosystem: The Nigeria Youth Futures Funds (NYFF)

Approach

By

Kamaldeen Afolabi



Picture Source: NYFF Southwest Visioning Exercise in Ibadan

It is widely known that youth-led or youth-focused organizations in the development ecosystem have limited access to funds for effective implementation of their evident-based programmes, initiatives and projects. While funding for this purpose has been a challenge over the years, the Nigeria Youth Futures Fund (NYFF) emerged to provide solace. NYFF is an offshoot of the different social movements and activism championed by young people in recent years. Lessons from these strong national movements informed the decision of MacArthur and Ford Foundation in collaboration with LEAP Africa to launch the NYFF Project, for inclusive resourcing of the Youth oriented projects. The world has evolved beyond shaving people's heads without their consent. Inclusive intervention which is the bane of the NYFF project, proves to be the most potent route in project implementation, and it has made community engagement to be profound

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in recent times. Further to the usual practices of assessing the needs alone prior to the project implementation, the new pattern of intervention 'for you and by you' tends to increase the sense of belonging, awareness of one's issue, cohesion among the cohort, and result-oriented activities.

The NYFF project was officially inaugurated in 2021 and has been running for almost 24 months. Undisputedly, the manifestation of the idea is becoming visible. The first grant cycle was launched last year in November, 2022 where 130 grantees (Individuals and Organizations) were selected across the 36 states of the country. The grantees have different projects which cut across the major issues young people experience considering their community peculiarities. To support this and in alignment with inclusive intervention, regional hubs were selected across the six geo-political zones in Nigeria to catalyze the activities of other grantees. To align with the founding essence of the NYFF project, the grantees were encouraged to mainstream civic participation into the entire project, to connect social intervention to the strengthening of youth activism in the civic space.

A total of 3607 Grant applications were submitted via the NYFF application portal. The secretariat alongside other external individuals and organizations ensured that each application went through rigorous screening, looking beyond the usual programmes in the ecosystem, and giving priorities to organizations with limited or no access to funds. In addition, the selection process was very inclusive, providing technical support to those that could not produce the best of proposals. They were absorbed and guided accordingly, provided their ideas are innovative and capable of social change in the community. This technical support provided opportunities for learning among young people with great ideas in the ecosystem but struggling to articulate their thoughts and present their ideas. It strengthened the sense of belonging for the underserved, widened the ecosystem reach and provided an opportunity for emerging Youth activists.

The inclusiveness of the NYFF project has fetched the milestone achieved in just a few months of project implementation; the project encouraged unregistered Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to merge and work collaboratively with registered CBOs. Most of the grantees are implementing their project in partnership with other relevant organizations, forming

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chains of partnership. Hence, increasing collaboration among the Youth ecosystem players at different levels while reducing unhealthy competitions. It is obvious that effective partnership and collaboration can make the efforts of the Youth ecosystem actors grow wider and be greatly felt.

NYFF's inclusive resourcing approach has proven to be a rescuer for the decaying ecosystem activism by providing access and hope to the underserved and marginalized youths. The statistics of the first cohort of the NYFF grantees show that 65 of the beneficiaries have not received any grant before (Source: 2022/2023 NYFF Grantees Data). For most of them, funding source for their projects/programmes is through personal funds and community support. This approach is impactful in unexpected communities, funded projects such as the reorientation of the hardened shilla boys & Youths in the prison in Yola and Osun state, transformation of sex workers to community change agent, engagement of thousands' Youth champions across the country, production of election violence monitoring tools, to mention but a few.

The lessons over the period of implementation show that there is much to be done to improve the capacity of the Youth ecosystem players to fully explore the potential of the sector. It is also important for ongoing and prospective projects/interventions to leverage available knowledge products/resources from the ecosystem in their projects for inclusive intervention. An example of such resources is the Nigeria We Want report recently produced by NYFF. This report aggregated the vision and agenda of the youths, as such their interventions/project would be evidence based, prioritize present needs, be more inclusive and properly attend to present realities of the young people in Nigeria.