



# Next Generation

Nigeria – November 2020

**Executive summary**

**The British Council commissioned the M&C Saatchi World Services' Research, Insight and Evaluation (RIE) Team to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the lives, attitudes and aspirations of young Nigerians aged 18 to 35 today.**

Next Generation is a global flagship research series aimed at listening to and engaging with young people, in order to understand the conditions that support them to become creative, fulfilled and active citizens in their countries. It does so, moreover, by focusing on young people in countries experiencing a period of significant change, to consider how these changes are affecting young people and to ensure that their voices are heard and their interests represented in decisions that will have lasting implications for their lives.



This report, published in the year of Nigeria's 60th anniversary of independence, presents the findings from a year-long programme of research that began in September 2019 and has subsequently spanned a period of unprecedented global tumult in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The research was guided from the outset by the three core objectives of the Next Generation research series:

1. to understand youth attitudes and aspirations
2. to amplify youth voice
3. to support better youth policymaking.

In response to the first of these objectives, the research investigates which values are most important to young Nigerians. Values refer to what people think is important to them in life, with people making judgements and choosing courses of action depending on the extent to which certain behaviours, policies and events align or disagree with the values that are most important to them. As such, they offer fundamental insights for helping to understand the goals, beliefs and attitudes that drive young Nigerians today.

The research finds that the value of security – manifested, for example, by personal goals such as safety, financial security, good health and a sense of belonging – is the most important and widespread of all basic human values for young Nigerians. It also pinpoints a number of other important values, including being kind to and supporting others (benevolence); achieving independence and following their own goals (self-direction); respecting family and meeting social expectations (conformity); and being committed to and preserving religious traditions and practices (tradition).

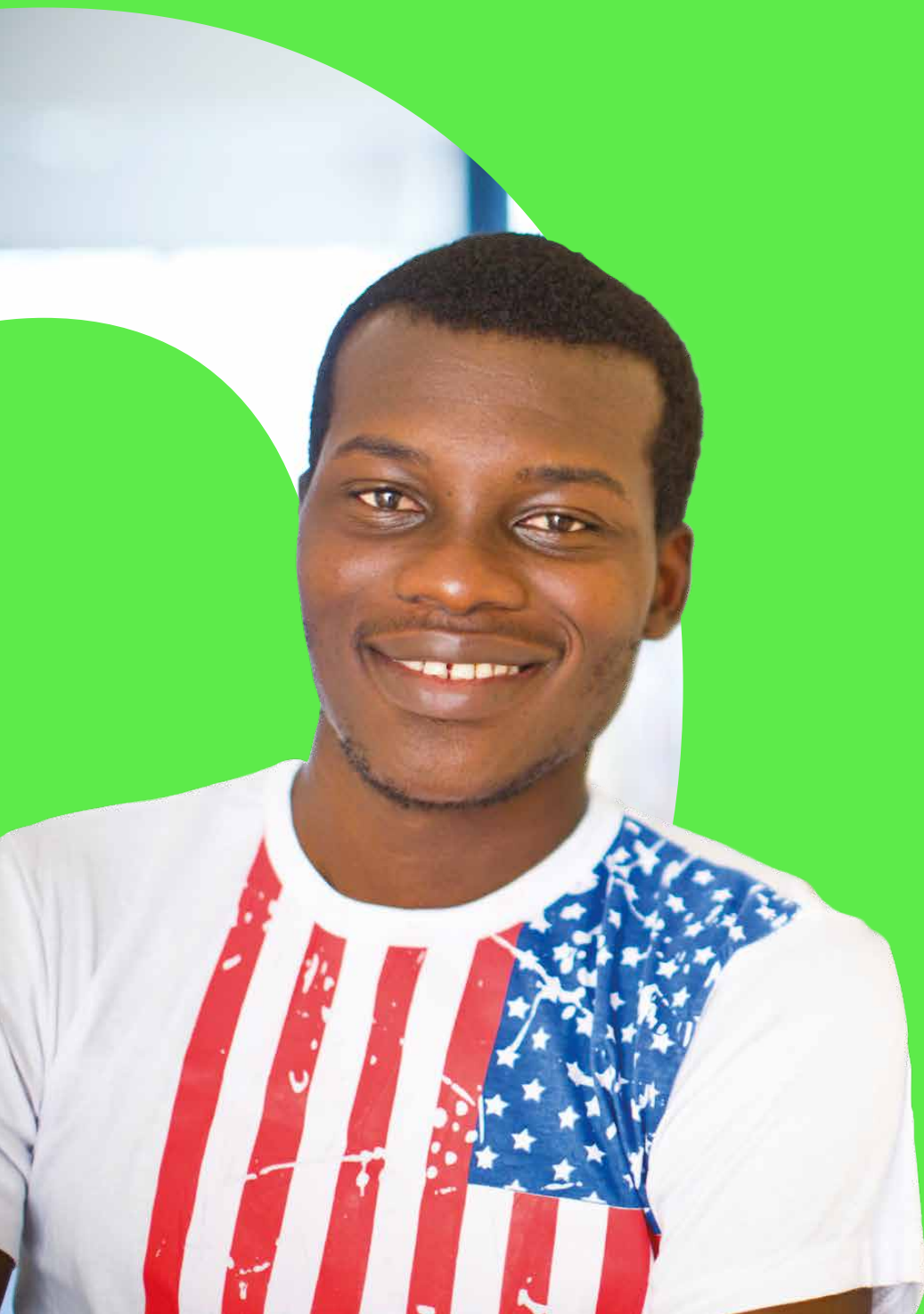
The research identifies who and what serve as the formative influences for these values among young Nigerians. In terms of security, it concludes that this is most likely a reflection of the pervasive under-service experienced by young Nigerians across a range of crucial areas, including health, education, employment and physical security from conflict and violence. Family and religion, meanwhile, which represent the two most important institutions for the majority of young Nigerians, encourage a set of common values, including benevolence, tradition and conformity. Celebrities in the sports and entertainment industries, finally, are acknowledged as among the most important influences on the value of self-direction, encouraging young Nigerians to be creative and discover and follow their own path, in their own way.

This research explores the visions that young Nigerians have and, in many cases, are already working towards, for themselves, their communities and their country. Eight aspirations are identified.

Young Nigerians want to advance positive, values-driven leadership of Nigeria, with many regarding young leaders as the ones most suited to realising this ideal. They want to assure their own and others' economic prosperity and security, and further believe that by doing so, they will tackle challenges such as crime and substance abuse, plus amplify the voices of young Nigerians by building their confidence, self-efficacy and credibility in the eyes of others. Highly

cognisant of the value and importance of education, young Nigerians want all Nigerians to be able to realise their potential by acquiring the right skills and knowledge, both by widening access to schools and universities and by developing curricula, teaching methods and practices that are fit for purpose and adapted to the lived experiences of young people today.

In line with the importance placed by young Nigerians on the values of security and benevolence towards others, young Nigerians believe that ending discrimination and prejudice and fostering unity will have a positive impact on the voices and prospects of the Nigerian population as a whole. They are also vocal advocates for justice, opposing acts of criminality and abuses of power, and calling for reforms that will maintain the rule of law and ensure high-quality governance. Recognising the power of mass media and the internet to facilitate public discussion and transparency around core issues, they believe that advancing media access and, in particular, access to the internet has the potential to yield civic and democratic dividends, but are also sensitive to the need to balance media freedoms against the threats of disinformation and hate speech. They continue to promote the importance of health and well-being and believe more needs to be done to guarantee universal, high-quality healthcare for all. A number of young Nigerians are taking the lead as climate activists, to help safeguard their country and the world from climate change.



The Covid-19 pandemic has magnified the imperative to support young Nigerians to achieve these aspirations. Compared with Nigeria's great success in combating the Ebola virus epidemic in 2014, the response to and impact of Covid-19 in Nigeria has not realised the early optimism of some commentators, but neither has it been as detrimental as in other countries. Amid the pandemic, Nigerian youth have been subject to competing media narratives. On the one hand, these narratives showcase young Nigerians' efforts to support their communities and pioneer the innovation and technology that will help lift Nigeria and the world out of the pandemic. On the other hand, they reiterate associations between youth, violence and unrest, through stories of young people stealing palliatives, resisting lockdown and engaging in violent protest.

Looking past these narratives to hear young Nigerians' own perspectives, the research uncovers that many have been hard-hit financially and in terms of future employment prospects. They are also concerned that poor trust in government has led people to ignore mitigation and prevention measures, weakening the efficacy of the public health response. In spite of these challenges, however, the actions of many young Nigerians are characterised by resilience, resourcefulness, kindness and generosity.

These include taking time away from their regular occupations to learn new skills; pursuing new business opportunities, particularly in the online space; and self-organising to support their community by donating and delivering food, face masks, personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitation supplies to those in need.

To amplify youth voice and support better youth policymaking, this research asks, first, what having a voice means to young Nigerians themselves. From their perspective, to have a voice an individual must have a sense of safety and security; the educational attainment necessary to be able to recognise and articulate one's views and perspectives; and the self-efficacy required to feel motivated to speak out. A person must also be afforded the opportunity to speak, should they wish to, and legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of their audiences, if they are to be heard.

In the context of local, national and international public discourse, young Nigerians perceive their own voices as limited and insignificant compared to more dominant groups that include politicians, religious leaders, celebrities and prominent human rights activists, as well as violent groups such as Boko Haram.

**‘The report is a reminder of the brilliant hope and towering aspirations that best describe Nigeria’s young people.’**

Chioma Agwuegbo and Adetola Onayemi, Next Generation Research Task Force

On the international stage, meanwhile, they regard Nigeria itself as a dominant voice on the African continent, but substantially less so on the global stage, upon which the USA and China, as well as the UN, lead the way in terms of voice and influence. Despite the dominance of the USA's voice on the global stage, within Nigeria itself, the most dominant voices are China and the UN across the country, and Saudi Arabia among Nigeria's Muslim population.

In the context of their day-to-day lives, however, young Nigerians commonly identify ten asset classes in which they do have a voice. These are among friends, with family, in the community, in education, in the workplace, in commercial hubs such as marketplaces, within religious groups, when participating in sports, when using legacy media – most notably television and radio – and online, particularly on social media.

Finally, in regard to formal political participation, the research identifies four clusters within the youth population which are salient to supporting young voices within Nigerian democracy and governance. These clusters include politically apathetic Nigerians (who are the most disengaged from political and democratic processes), unengaged voters, politically engaged young Nigerians, and the politically ambitious. Each cluster is associated with a set of challenges that must be addressed to ensure full youth

political participation in Nigeria. Moreover, while these clusters are distributed across all demographic sub-groups, certain patterns are more strongly associated with some groups than others.

There is no quick fix for young Nigerians to achieve their visions for Nigeria. As a country that is ranked by young Nigerians as among the highest globally in sectors including education and employment opportunities, however, the UK and the British Council are optimally placed as partners supporting them to do so. To this end, this report offers 57 recommendations that are designed to amplify the voices of young Nigerians so that they can better influence the decisions and policies that affect their lives. These recommendations are tailored towards optimising the conditions under which young Nigerians have a voice both in day-to-day life and throughout the election cycle. All of these recommendations are informed by both the input of the Next Generation Nigeria Task Force and the views and perspectives of young Nigerians who participated in the research. In actioning these recommendations, we encourage the British Council and the task force not only to advocate traditional approaches, but to be bold and embrace new and innovative practices and methods that are designed to adapt to the reality of young Nigerians' lives.

## **‘Next Generation Nigeria continues to highlight the potential of the country’s youth.’**

Lucy Pearson, Director Nigeria, British Council



