



SPECIAL EDITION

YOUTH FORGE

— A CIVIC TALKS —



Executive Summary

This report documents YouthForge - A Civic Talks Special Edition, a youth civic assembly convened by the Centre for Inclusive Social Development (CISD) on 27 August 2026 at The Meeting Point, Gudu, Abuja, under the theme “Unfiltered: The Nigeria Young People Are Inheriting.”

The report sets out what was said in the room, by whom, and what the assembly produced. It is written for government institutions to which the youth demands will be shared with, and participants who contributed to the success of the event.

The assembly was designed as a listening room rather than a regular conference. It was designed for young people to speak first and at length, the panel sits towards the close of the day, and that panelists respond to what participants have already said rather than setting the agenda.

Civic Assembly Design

Before proceedings began, participants wrote on a wall in response to a prompt about the Nigeria they are inheriting. Some of the entries out of the 77 participants include:

Encouraging business climate; youth inclusion; transparency; improved health-care; free access to basic needs; economic stability.

Invest more in Africa's tourism and culture; a Nigeria that works for the people; involve us in leadership; reduce suffering; stronger policy participation for youth; a secure nation to live in.



Youth Spark Voices

Seven young people spoke on lived experience.

Their contributions clustered around education, employment, national identity and civic efficacy.



“From a student perspective, getting admission is a problem of nepotism and favouritism over meritocracy. Beyond the government we have people around us, the problem also starts with us, because when we ourselves don’t see the values in people and encourage them by giving them what they deserve, there is a problem that comes into play”.

— **Adanna Omeje**

Adanna Omeje also recounted being told by departmental staff on her first day in the university that she would fail because “this is not a department where people succeed”.



“Getting a 5.0 is impossible in Nigerian universities. Professors telling students they can’t be more than me, or you cannot get more than them. That kind of situation will continue to keep older people in the administration and not give room for the young; their ceiling is capped.”

— **Taiwo**, recent graduate, University of Abuja.

“Nigerians are being treated badly because of their green passports, and I won’t blame them, because whatever they are doing is the perception of the country you are coming from — based on insecurity, based on economics.”

— **Akinyemi Japhet**, describing experience as an international student in the United States.



“I prefer the UK shoe, not because it is better, but because it was made in the UK — because I grew up with the mindset that anything from Africa or Nigeria is inferior.”

— **Oladipo Ajibola**, *student, Nile University.*



“How do we shift from talking to actually influencing change? How does it actually influence government decisions? How do we carry this conversation beyond this building?”

— **Tochi**, *Engineering student, Nile University.*



Hon. Chinemenrem Thomas, representing Enugu North in the sixth session of the Nigerian Youth Parliament, told the room that attempting to correct wrongdoing generates opposition, and encouraged participants to speak not only for themselves but for those who have confidence in them.



Barry Emmanuel, who graduated in 2018 with a degree in mathematics and education, told the room he had found no work in his field and had started a business in 2021. He described operating costs rising from five thousand to fifteen thousand naira between 2021 and 2026, and concluded that the country’s conditions are not

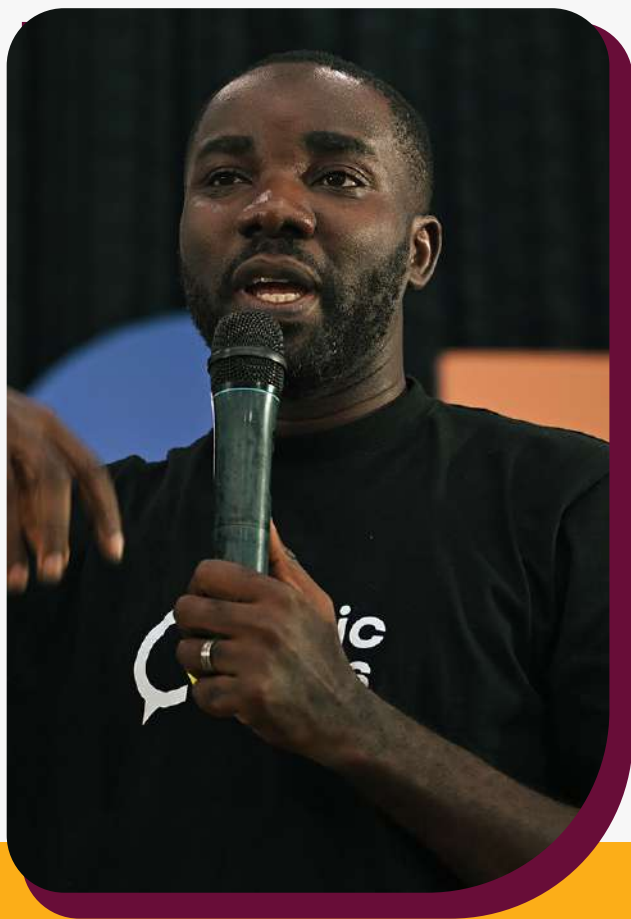
An anonymous male participant asked what practical steps young people could take to retrain and recreate mental models, while another participant named Peace raised the tension between organisational culture and inherited social culture, citing an example of a chairman objecting to being addressed by first name in an organisation that had adopted first-name terms.

An anonymous female participant asked what one practical thing young Nigerians could do beyond voting to hold government accountable, and asked what guarantee exists that questions asked will receive a response. She noted that communication without feedback is not communication.

An anonymous male participant asked why young people should attend school at all, given the possibility of earning without it.



What Speakers Said



“Every generation inherits three things and we only ever talk about two of them: geography- the land, the borders, the 36 states and 774 local governments; a set of institutions - ministries, agencies, and the rules, written and unwritten, that run them; and a psychology - the fears, habits and instincts of the people who build those institutions. This is the one nobody hands you a manual for”

— **Folahan Johnson**,
Executive Director, CISD

He argued that Nigeria’s leadership class was shaped by military command culture, the civil war and inherited distrust before taking office. He cited the 2018 case of thirty-six million naira reported as swallowed by a snake as an indicator of the state of public discourse, noting that six people were formally charged and that the case remains in court.

The Executive Director also presented a statistical profile of the country and pointed to countervailing evidence in the technology sector, citing growth in registered agricultural technology start-ups and capital raised by financial technology companies. He gave the example of Stanley Anigonu of Anambra State, founder of a company he described as having trained over six thousand students and recycled over twenty thousand kilograms of waste into energy solutions.

Expert Perspectives



The keynote addressed the third of the Executive Director's three inheritances. Its central claim was that culture is learned rather than innate, and therefore open to change.

“Culture is learned, not inherited, which means we have the opportunity to change our actions.”

— Ayokunnu Ojeniyi,

“There’s a culture of sycophants and hypocrisy that has been passed down, and if we are not careful, we will pass it down to the next generation.”

— Ayokunnu Ojeniyi



What The Assembly Produced

	 Governance	 Livelihoods	 Education
Problems Identified	Weak legal system; transparency; lack of trust in government.	Earning problem; sustainability; lack of skill. Accountability placed with both government and citizens.	Survival mentality displacing education; corruption; vocational training; lack of professional teachers; no correlation between what is learnt and what is practised; no standard curriculum from basic to tertiary level.
The Demands as recorded	Independent judiciary: true judicial independence in Nigeria is hard to achieve because the president chooses who becomes the Attorney General. Because of this political connection, the Attorney General is naturally expected to protect and support the president's interests.	Engaging the grassroots: close the gap between existing policies and implementation.	Improving the education system requires a collective effort. Real progress can only happen when everyone, including the government, parents, families and ordinary citizens, works together toward a shared goal.
Solutions and Demands	Independent judiciary; personalising the problem; upholding democracy; full youth participation with easier access.	Engaging the grassroots; better implementation of existing policies; transparency and accountability with the budget; accessibility and awareness.	

The review document records six demands drawn from the demand wall



The Panel and the question of response

Mr Arinola Addo Daniel argued that young people do not know how to ask the right questions, and that a shift from asking “what can I do” to asking how a specific outcome can be achieved would over time yield greater insight into how to participate in governance. He added that a voice acquires credibility through association and a track record of work.

Ms Damilola Onemano set out a structural account. She cited a business failure rate and attributed it to power supply problems, inflation, cost of living, multiple layers of taxation and exchange rate conditions. She then posed a series of questions about the proceeds of reform:



“When the government has gained from those reforms, where are they plugging those gains into? How has this translated into improvement for citizens? We see on paper that we achieve some level of macroeconomic stability, but then how can the everyday person say I have benefited?”

— Damilola Onemano

She added that states have received substantially increased federal transfers since the removal of the fuel subsidy and asked how those funds have been applied to education, healthcare and social infrastructure. On employment programmes, she argued that job creation figures matter less than whether an enabling environment exists for those jobs to be sustained.

Dr Jenifer Jatau addressed the transition from education to work, arguing that responsibility rests substantially with students themselves.



“The real problem is not just that jobs are hard to find. The true challenge is with us as students and youth. We need to understand that there are critical things we must do on our own initiative. We do not have to wait for anyone to hand us a career on a silver spoon.”

— **Dr Jenifer Jatau**

“The jobs we see online are only 20% of the jobs available; 80% of jobs are hidden jobs that you can only gain through skills like networking.”

— **Dr Jenifer Jatau**

She recommended identifying a relevant organisation, building relationships and shadowing staff, and argued that artificial intelligence will not remove jobs but that the skills to work alongside it will make candidates competitive.

Hon. Ali Idris Zakiri, represented by Hon. Abbas Hussaini, placed responsibility with the legislature.



“The legislators, our senators, our representatives — they are the ones that are supposed to create enabling laws, they are the ones that need to make sure these are being implemented so that decent jobs are created, so that survival shouldn’t be the standard for this particular generation. Everybody is now an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship is very important, but decent employment is also very important.”

— **Hon. Ali Idris Zakiri**, *represented by Hon. Abbas Hussaini*

Recommendations

Institutionalise youth participation in policy design, implementation and review

Government institutions should move beyond episodic youth consultations towards formal and recurring mechanisms through which young people can influence policy decisions.

The Federal Ministry of Youth Development, alongside relevant state ministries and MDAs, should establish structured youth policy forums at federal and state levels, with clear mechanisms for submitting recommendations, receiving institutional responses, and tracking subsequent action.

Importantly, participation should extend beyond established youth organisations and political structures to include students, informal-sector workers, entrepreneurs, unemployed young people, persons with disabilities, and young people from underserved communities.

Recommendations

Introduce a formal feedback mechanism for government youth consultations

A recurring concern at YouthForge Unfiltered was not simply whether young people could speak, but what happens after they speak. One participant explicitly questioned what guarantee existed that questions would receive responses and observed that communication without feedback is incomplete.

Government-led youth consultations should therefore adopt a **“You Said – We Responded – We Did” framework**.

Following major youth consultations, responsible institutions should publish:

- The issues raised by young people;
- The government's formal response;
- Actions accepted or rejected, with reasons;
- Responsible MDAs;
- Implementation timelines; and
- Periodic progress updates.

This would help shift youth engagement from consultation towards accountable participation.

Recommendations

Strengthen accountability for implementation of youth-related policies and public expenditure

Participants repeatedly identified a gap between existing policies and what is experienced at community level, particularly around livelihoods, education and public services. Their demand was not simply for additional policies but for better implementation of existing commitments.

Federal and state governments should therefore strengthen public reporting on youth-related programmes and expenditure.

Relevant MDAs should publish accessible information showing:

Allocation → Release → Implementation → Beneficiaries → Outcomes.

The Federal Ministry of Youth Development and other youth-serving institutions could complement existing statutory reporting with a simplified annual Youth Policy and Expenditure Implementation Scorecard, enabling citizens to see which commitments have been implemented and where gaps remain.

Recommendations

Strengthen the education-to-work transition

YouthForge Unfiltered participants questioned the relationship between formal education and economic opportunity. Discussions highlighted unemployment, practical skills, vocational education, professional teaching, networking and the perceived disconnect between what students learn and what they need after graduation.

The Federal Ministry of Education, NUC, NBTE and tertiary institutions should strengthen structured pathways between education and employment through:

- work-integrated learning and quality internships;
- career services within tertiary institutions;
- employer partnerships;
- entrepreneurship support;
- digital and emerging-technology skills;
- vocational and technical pathways; and
- mentorship and professional networking opportunities.

The policy objective should not simply be producing graduates but improving young people's transition from education into decent and sustainable livelihoods.

Recommendations

Bring youth policy implementation closer to communities

The livelihoods group specifically called for “engaging the grassroots” and closing the gap between existing policies and implementation.

Federal youth interventions should therefore include stronger state and local delivery mechanisms. Partnerships with local governments, community organisations, educational institutions, credible CSOs and youth networks can help government identify where national programmes are failing to reach intended beneficiaries. This should include deliberate outreach beyond Abuja and state capitals.

Recommendations

Establish an accountability pathway for the YouthForge demands

The demands generated at the assembly should be formally transmitted to relevant institutions, beginning with the Federal Ministry of Youth Development, alongside a request for written responses to priority recommendations. CISD should publish a 6- or 12-month YouthForge Accountability Update showing:

What young people asked for → Who CISD engaged → Government response → Commitments made → Progress achieved → Outstanding actions.

The central policy message emerging from YouthForge is not simply that Nigeria needs more youth-focused policies. Young people are asking for a stronger connection between policy commitments and their lived realities: meaningful participation in decisions, transparent implementation, accessible opportunities, responsive institutions and clear mechanisms for holding government accountable for what it promises.

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