

United Nations
Anti-Corruption Day

The Youth Can

Change the Narrative in Nigeria

A Call to Action at the roundtable organised by Juritrust Centre on UN Anti-Corruption Day 2025

- Youth-Led Dialogues for Integrity
- Beyond Theory: Actionable Solutions
- GenZ's Role in Safeguarding Democracy
- Strengthening Anti-Corruption Frameworks
- Digital Platforms & Accountability

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Today, 09 December 2025, is observed as the United Nations Anti-Corruption Day, commemorating the signing of the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC, 2003). Series of activities, including youth focused dialogues, are held all over the world to promote the Global Anti-Corruption Agenda. Several of such activities were held in Nigeria, demonstrating the role of the youth in fighting corruption, promoting integrity and safeguarding democracy.

I had the privilege to moderate a robust conversation of enlightened youth at a forum organized by the Juritrust Centre for Socio-legal Research and Documentation

I am a strong advocate for youth participation in governance, in particular in anti-corruption because I believe that the youth should not just be considered as leaders of tomorrow, but of today and architects of tomorrow for a better society. The dialogue went beyond theory to sharing of practical and lived experiences and recommendations, to actionable solutions in the context of deepening the fight against corruption and strengthening democracy and good governance in Nigeria.



From the outset, I was amazed by the quality of the audience for three reasons: First, there was a good gender balance of panellists and discussants; secondly, majority of the participants were young lawyers with vibrant ideas and unflinching passion for Nigeria; and thirdly, it was a constructive dialogue of the Genzees, which raised my expectations and optimism regarding the role of the youth in anti-corruption, democracy and participatory governance.

The most important remark that mesmerized me was the consensus among participants that "a nation cannot defeat corruption if corruption decides who leads it". This is a value loaded message which revibrated throughout the discussion and this is an important message with regard to the character and morality of our leaders, which should be the essential criteria for leadership selection.

The forum observed inter alia, that:

- There is sufficient legal foundation for youth participation, not only in fighting corruption, but in overall governance and development. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) as amended, and other anti-corruption legislation are fairly comprehensive but their effectiveness and real time enforcement remain problematic and the results fall below expectations.

- Accountability is not only holding the government responsible but everyone being responsible and accountable.
- Leadership by example as a pillar of integrity is crucial. Yet, integrity is earned, not bought.
- The various challenges in dealing with corruption, including institutional resistance, financial and technical limitations, as well as inherited tribal and religious sentiments have created structural societal biases making the fight against corruption a herculean task in Nigeria.
- The youth must seize the opportunity to protect their future by getting involved in governance, including the courage to demand for accountability from leaders. They must also be role models in leadership at whatever level they find themselves.

Overall, participants unanimously agreed that despite the challenges of getting the opportunity to effect the change, the youth remain the last hope and can change the narrative, noting some exemplary contributions to anti-corruption, including:

- The use of digital platforms like the work of BudgIT in increasing budget transparency in Nigeria; the use of Corruption Trackers Apps and SMS Tools which have been successful in Kenya, Uganda and Ghana;
- Youth Led Integrity Elections Observation and Monitoring, leading to transparent, fair, credible and acceptable elections in Zambia, Kenya and Ghana; and
- Active Youth Anti-Corruption Ambassadors in Liberia and Sierra Leone, focused on police bribery, local government procurement fraud and mismanagement of resources meant for war-affected youth.
- The EndSars and BadGovernance protests in Nigeria were cited as examples of youth legitimate expression of rights and demand for accountability. However, the youth must be conscious of their future rather than seeing themselves as victims of corruption to be able to make a significant change in society

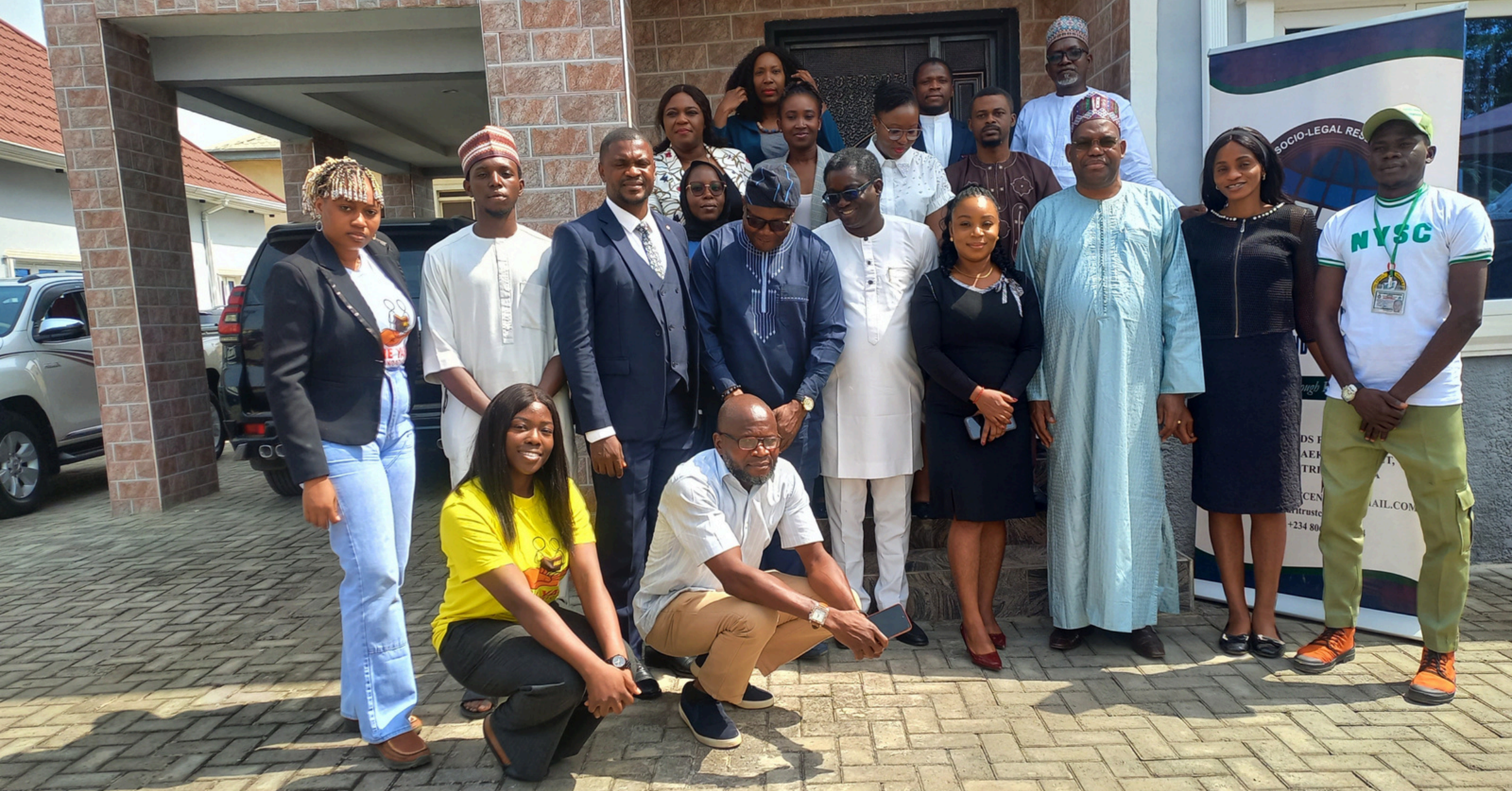
Recommendation

Participants at the Youth Forum noted the legal foundation for youth involvement in anti-corruption and called for the strengthening of the anti-corruption frameworks, including access to whistleblower protection by law. Other recommendations include:

- Going beyond criminalization and making corruption a capital offence, punishable by death as obtained in China.
- Empowering the youth to be more active in anti-corruption and governance.
- Prioritizing the use of digital technology for preventive purposes by reducing human contacts in procurement, revenue generation, etc.
- Establishing and strengthening specialized courts and expediting prosecution of corruption cases.
- Improving the quality of investigation as a function of good prosecution.
- Naming and shaming corrupt officials, in addition to conviction deterrence.
- Appointing capable, competent and meritorious persons to lead the fight against corruption
- Following, recovering and returning stolen assets to Nigeria.

Combating corruption is a shared responsibility. The Youth Forum was hosted by Juritrust Centre with the support of MacArthur Foundation which underscores the need for developed countries, donor agencies and other international partners to support developing countries in preventing illicit financial flows and recovering the proceeds of crime.




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