

My Journey as a Corper

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Place

An Experience That Cannot Be Left Untold

After graduating from the university, what next? [National Youth Service Corp \(NYSC\) is a scheme](#) that helps answer the question 'what next' in the one year following tertiary education for every Nigerian graduate. NYSC was set up by the federal government to indulge graduates of the Country in National development.

After graduation, NYSC requires a confirmation of your qualifying degree from your institution as this is the eligibility criteria to partake in their program. As a Nigerian graduate you are required to partake in this scheme except you do not intend to seek employment in the country or are over 30years of age on graduation. Seeking exemption from the scheme by reason of age demands an application in the form of a letter with accompanying proof.

There are a few processes that prepares potential 'Corpers' for the service year. The first phase is registration. During registration, intending Corp members completes necessary form indicating their personal details. They would be required to select of the thirty-six, four states they would like to be posted to. After a successful registration process, a dashboard is created for the applicant who, usually, within a month gets notified of the state they have been posted and when the exercise would commence. One issue I do have with this program is that you hardly get posted to any of your selected four states.

A Corp Member's Service year comprises four main segments which one must satisfactorily participate in before he/she is qualified to be issued a certificate of National Service. These are;

- Orientation Course
- Primary Assignment
- Community Development Service and lastly
- Winding - Up/Passing -out

These segments all happen accordingly except for Primary Assignment and Community Development Service (CDS) that occurs simultaneously.

Truly, NYSC is a step closer to "real life" where there are hurdles, handicaps and hardships along the way that can derail one on the path to fulfilling his dreams and careers in life.

My NYSC experience so far has been fun and exciting yet the best time for me to define my goals in life, build relationships, and a number of other things. Like they say "The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step" which was how my service year journey started on a Tuesday, 16th of January 2018.

NYSC Posting

I received notice of my posting to Jigawa State, in the North of Nigeria. This was not in anyway exciting news. I however considered it was a clarion call I could not disobey. In faith, I travelled up North for the orientation course scheduled to last for three weeks. Now going for the orientation course was not necessarily a problem. The challenge however was traveling by road for over 16hours which became an issue for me. The thought of such a journey was initially disheartening. Despite all forms of discouragements, I embarked on this arduous journey. Now I figured it would be wise and probably safer for me to break the journey into two parts, to avoid traveling at night knowing how dangerous it could be especially on Nigerian roads. More so with the insecurity and insurgency across the middle-belt and Northern states, I had to be extra cautious and vigilant during this trip.

My route was to take me to Abuja from Benin, a journey of approximately 8-10hours, and then head for Jigawa the following day in approximately 6-8hours. I finally arrived at the NYSC Permanent Orientation camp, Fanisau, Dutse Local Government Area, Jigawa state on the 16th of January, 2018.

After being searched at the entrance gate, I proceeded to reception desk for clearance before I was successfully allocated an accommodation. It was a stressful day. There was quite a queue at each clearance point which tested my patience; moving from one long queue to another. The rather long day finally came to an end. There were military personnels all around and it dawned on me what I was up

against.

The military in Nigeria are strict and rigid in nature. Few consider they are there not only to protect the territorial integrity of the nation but also to serve its law abiding citizens who indeed pay their wages! It was 4.00am the next morning, I was already starting to have a taste of their own medicine as they woke us all up with the sound of a bugle while screaming at the top of their voices "Lazy Corpers, lazy Otondos get up and move to the parade ground!" I knew this happens in camps but what I did not know was that it started from the very first morning.

As I hurriedly rushed out from my block, I stepped out into a very cold and unfriendly weather I had never experienced before. It became evident to me that this was the cold season Jigawa was known for. Sadly I had nothing warmer on to beat the cold. The cold was not the only thing new to me as the commandants did not care whether it was our first parade session or not. We were all drilled like military men. My first parade session was like a nightmare I wished could end quickly.

After the parade, I returned to my accommodation to freshen up and begin the rest of the day. I finished up all I needed to do and was given my complete NYSC kit. I could then be referred to as a partial Corp Member. Three "unsquared" meals were fed to all Corp members daily. I would not consider them particularly appetizing.

Swearing-in Ceremony

My third day at the camp was the official swearing-in day of all Corp members. The day began with the usual early morning parade which I was now better prepared for including whatever else they had in mind. At 9am we came out kitted six over seven (it implies dressing in six out of seven NYSC complete attire; the cap, crested vest, belt, khaki trouser, socks and jungle boot but except the khaki shirt) and headed straight to the parade ground ready to be Gentlemen Corp Members.

We stood AT EASE! AT ATTENTION! AT EASE! AT ATTENTION! waiting for the Jigawa State Governor for about 3 hours, until his representative from the Government house later showed up in the person of Alhaji Muhammad Inuwa Tahir (Head of service, Jigawa State). Where he praised the management of the NYSC for sustaining the entrepreneurial training both in camp and post camp and he also admonished Corp members to take the orientation program seriously and abide by the camp

rules.

After the welcoming speech from the Governor's representative, we then reached the fun part of the program where we had to remove head-dress to salute Executive Governor of Jigawa State, Mr Muhammad Badaru Abubakar duly represented by his able Head of service. We then sang the two important anthems in the NYSC orientation camp; The National Anthem and the NYSC ANTHEM.

At about 2:00 pm, after the closing remarks and departure of Governor's representative we were officially addressed as Gentlemen Corp Members.

Completing the Swearing-in Ceremony meant I could now consider myself a Corp Member or commonly referred to as a 'Corper'. Days passed by having to carry out pretty much the same routines beginning with early morning parades, then attending seminars or talks before breakfast. We would then attend for mid-morning talks or lectures before breaking for lunch. The afternoon witnessed a number of activities including opportunities for games and learning new skills before dinner. The day ends with an evening parade closely followed by social activities which often lingers on until 'lights out' at 9:00 pm, signaling bed time.

My camp experience was fun. I met people from different universities and from other parts of the country. A few attended the induction camp from outside the country. The diversity represented at the camp was notable. Corpers were from different socioeconomic backgrounds, tribes and cultures or faith. It was an awesome experience that I would treasure all my life. I personally would not have had a reason to visit the North at this point in my life if not for the NYSC call up. It was a bitter (considering how long the journey lasted, language barrier and their cold weather) and at the same time sweet experience owing to the fact that it was my first time being in the north.

How time flies. The three weeks looked more like three days with my orientation course experience coming to an end. We received our first official pay as Corpers. While my friends got posting letters on that very last day to their various PPAs (Place Of Primary Assignments), I had to wait for my redeployment letter from Jigawa to Rivers State which thankfully came through in time; ending my stay in Jigawa and journey back.

Thankful

I was grateful to God for a successful induction experience and a safe journey back home to my family in Benin, Edo state.

Redeployment

While my mates at Jigawa were settling down into their PPAs after camp, I arrived in Rivers State to resume another clearance process. It took over a month to finally settle down in Port Harcourt as I initially had no steady accommodation there. I had to travel into Port Harcourt from Warri for a while before I was offered accommodation by an Uncle. Regardless of the fact that I had a B.Sc degree in Geology from Delta State University. I eventually got posted to a Model Senior Secondary School, in rural Port Harcourt where I was given the opportunity to pick any subject relating to my field of study. I opted for Mathematics on account of the Challenging effect it always has on me. I was appointed as a Mathematics assistant teacher for Senior Secondary School Two (SSS2).

'Allowee' - The Corper allowance

As a Corper in Nigeria, you are entitled to a monthly allowance for the duration of the service year. This requires you evidence your participation in the four major components of the service year as previously noted: Induction, PPA, Community Development Service(CDS) and Passing out parade.

I was randomly allocated to the NDLEA(National Drug Law Enforcement Agency) for my CDS. The NDLEA as its name implies is a national body set up to combat the menace of drug trafficking and related offences. Our role was to assist in preventative work running public awareness activities. I resumed at my PPA in April as a full time assistant Maths teacher. I took lessons twice weekly and would mark exam papers, record and prepare results; all of which made me realise the challenges of being a teacher. Tuesdays were my CDS days when I attend NDLEA CDS group meetings and would also join the group outings to sensitize the public about the effect and dangers of wrongfully taking and abusing drugs.

At the end of each month I am issued vouching letters from my PPA and CDS group, confirming that I had worked and participated in carrying out my services in both

areas. Armed with the vouching letters, I then visit the state NYSC Secretariat for my monthly clearance necessary to get paid. The process of final payment unfortunately does take a while which really reflects poorly on the organisational processes in place given the amount paid is meagre and subsistent.

Opportunities

The NYSC year depending on what your roles are, might offer spare time for other interests or opportunities. In my case, I took up some short courses, and also explored online learning. I have also been challenged to develop my writing which I aim to continue doing as this might become a useful skill to have in the future. In general, one can not really say the NYSC is a total waste of time. It is however still not what every graduate wants to participate in these days but for the lack of options. Not in today's economic climate with prevailing sociopolitical rancour and ethno-religious instability in parts of the country breeding insecurity. If the government did not take the NYSC certificate so seriously, many graduates would not consider it a worthwhile pursuit.

The objectives of the NYSC programme were probably achieved in its formative years when young graduates were lauded and readily courted with job opportunities offered soon after completing the year. The NYSC truly served as a vehicle for national integration and unity. The moral depravity that overran government like a cancer, the corruption that fostered differences where none existed previously, sadly bred distrust and people became unwelcoming and biased in their acceptance of others.

My hope is to be able to build a career from these little beginnings here in Rivers state.

- An excerpt of a serving Corpers experience - 2018. All views expressed are the authors and published in good faith. Any references made to third parties are in the context of their role as public officers and do not in any way seek to comment on their credibility or abilities. Further information about the [NYSC scheme](#) can be obtained by clicking on this [link](#).

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