

THE POTENTIAL OF YOUTH-LED SERVICE

By Norman C. Hill

Nigerians like to say that they live under “a fierce African sun.” Temperatures near the equator vary only slightly regardless of the season. So when we had our all-Africa service project in August, we began at 7:00 a.m. in order to get as much as possible done in the cooler morning hours.

With shovels, rakes, and machetes, we got to work clearing weeds and hauling trash from the vacant lot near our Yaba Ward building in the Lagos Nigeria Stake. After working for three hours, we had cleared about three acres (1.2 ha) of the four-acre (1.6 ha) lot.

“What do you think of rounding off with this small section and scheduling another day to finish clearing the lot?” the bishop asked.

Overhearing the bishop, Emmanuel, the teachers quorum president, expressed disappointment.

“If we leave this section undone, none of the youth will feel that they have done much today,” he said. “Please, let’s finish.”

Because the weeds were about six feet (1.8 m) high in most places, they obstructed our view and made it difficult to determine how much remained.

“Brother Hill, let’s see how long it might take you and me to clear a



narrow path, maybe only two feet wide,” Emmanuel said. “If we can do it quickly, others may see that it is possible to finish sooner than they might imagine.”

The young men, divided in two groups, had been working on opposite ends of the lot all day. No one had broken through the maze of weeds to the other side. With an aching back, I went to my knees to find some relief while continuing to hack away at the weeds with a machete. Worried, some youth came to see if they could help and then pitched in when they saw Emmanuel and me working toward each other. Within minutes we had broken through to each other, and a small cheer went up. Seeing the breakthrough, others began working in pairs doing the same thing.

In less than an hour, we finished. Beaming with satisfaction, we congratulated each other—especially Emmanuel, who had literally provided a path for others to follow.

The bishop and I thought that we, in our age and wisdom, knew what these young men could accomplish.



GIVING YOUTH A CHANCE TO SERVE

“How many deacons and teachers quorum presidencies consist of

merely calling on someone to offer a prayer or pass the sacrament? Brethren, these really are special spirits, and they can do things of significance if given a chance!”

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Unto the Rising Generation,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1985, 11.

We saw only hot, tired boys, but Emmanuel saw an opportunity for his friends to build dignity and confidence. He knew that exerting extra effort would bring greater satisfaction to them than finishing the job later. He reminded us of the strength of the youth of the Church and how we all benefit when they contribute and lead.

I realized that we don’t need to wait for our youth to grow up—they can make a difference *now* if we let them. ■