



NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

**EDUCATION, SECURITY, ECONOMY AND
VIABILITY OF DIGITAL RESPONSE**

VOLUME 33 NO. 2, OCTOBER, 2022

ISSN: 0794-0114

e-ISSN: 2971-5652

Published by:

PHILOSOPHERS OF EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA (PEAN)

www.peanpapers.com

TIMSMEK GLOBAL PUBLISHERS®, PORT HARCOURT



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Conflict in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria and its Effects on Educational Development

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Abstract

A society cannot prosper in conflict situations where there are fightings, quarrels, distrust, hatred, anger, vandalization, killings among others. People are usually confused, worried and panicked in such a setting leading to serious unrest, underdevelopment, chaos, etc. The crux of the matter is that the federal government is not doing enough for the area despite it being the treasure bank of the nation. It is very ironic that this area suffers from hunger, epileptic power supply, underemployment and unemployment, poor educational infrastructure, among others. The Niger Deltans also decry the injustice and maltreatment meted to them by multinational companies in the area who explore their oil but leave their farm-lands and environments destroyed due to oil spillage, burning of carbons and other toxics. Consequently, education has suffered greatly in this region and its citizens are worst hit. Due to these happenings, many youths in the area have lost interest in education and prefer to do anything that will give them quick money including bunkering, banditry, kidnapping, violence, stealing, etc. The government thus, will do well by listening to the plight of the Niger Deltans and do what is right for the region before the area becomes uncontrollable. Also, there should be a proper memorandum of understanding (MoU) between government, the multinational companies and leaders of the region in order to facilitate development in the area and reduce growing insecurity. In this way, education in the region will be protected and enhanced for everyone to benefit from.

Introduction

Over the years, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has been considered the treasure bank of the nation's economy. It comprises nine states namely Rivers, Edo, Ondo, Bayelsa, Delta, Cross Rivers, Abia, Akwa Ibom and Imo. This means that the entire states in the South-South, one from South West and two from South East are involved. The area is very rich in vegetation, suitable for agriculture

and boasts of rich human, material and mineral resources. Sadly, the supposed treasure is not felt by the people as they are economically deprived and exposed to deadly diseases emanating from oil exploration and production activities; even as the peasants who rely on their farm products resort to anger when their water and farms are polluted without sufficient compensation by the explorers. Knowingly or unknowingly, they wage war against themselves and others.

Conflict is a disease that has the tendency to alter the growth and development of any nation. The quest of the Nigerian government to give education to its citizens was displayed by such policies as Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the past and the current Universal Basic Education (UBE). The UBE policy provides that all Nigerians should have a minimum of the nine –year basic education. However, the present killings, kidnappings, insurrection, cultism, armed robbery, ritualism, rape, drug abuse among other horrible activities are seriously threatening the educational attainment of the Niger Deltans (Townsend, 2008).

Conflict has been in existence just as man. In his theory of the state of nature Thomas Hobbes, a famous philosopher, born in 1651, stated that in the beginning, man had been in conflict with his fellow man. At that time, there were no laws, no authority, no sense of justice and injustice, no notion of right and wrong. People simply pursued their self-interest and desires (Opata, 2018). Thus, in an attempt to satisfy their appetites, men clashed, quarreled and fought among themselves.

Consequently, there was continuous conflict in the state of nature; a state of war and insecurity among men (Dewey, 1968). Men opposed each other just as conflicts, struggles and war prevailed. People actually lived in constant danger and fear of death. There was no definite ownership of anything by anyone; whatever anybody could grab was his as long as he was able to retain it; a stronger person could come and snatch it from him and become the owner until someone else does the same. In this state, according to Thomas Hobbes, there were no peace, progress, development, industry, letters, account of time, and accurate knowledge. Life was solitary, nasty, brutish and very short (Papineau, 2014).

It is important to note that in any society where people are denied their right, there will be problems. Likewise, developments are affected in such places as there will either be stagnation or retardation of progress earlier made. Again, citizens rely on their leaders for direction and social gains; and in the absence, of these, they become disappointed, hence conflicts.

Concept of Conflict

Conflict connotes a struggle, a clash of interest, opinion or even principles. It is found in all societies as its basis may be personal, class, racial, caste, political or international. It could also be emotional, intellectual and theoretical, in which case, academic recognition may or may not be an important motive. Conflict may grow over time as a result of different cultural values and beliefs (Forsyth, 2010).

Conflict can equally be considered an activity which occurs when people (individuals or groups) attempt to implement mutually inconsistent acts concerning their wants, needs or obligations. It is an escalation of a disagreement and is characterized by the existence of conflict behaviour, in which the beings are actively trying to injure one another (Lee, 2004).

According to Jehn and Mannix (2021), group conflict frequently follows a particular course. First, routine group interaction is disrupted by an initial conflict within the group, caused often by internal differences of opinion and disagreements between its members or scarcity of resources available to the group. At this point, the group is no longer one and may split into coalitions. In some cases, this may pave way for a conflict resolution stage, after which such group can eventually return to normal group interaction or split.

Niger Delta Conflict

Prior to commercial oil production in Niger Delta region of Nigeria in 1958, the region was mainly peaceful which aided substantial subsistence resources for the population. The region accounted for a large percentage of Nigeria's commercial industry in the areas of farming, fishing, pottery, mat-making and hunting; unaware that underneath its soil was one of nature's esteemed mineral resources (Afinotan, 2009).

Crude oil was first identified in the Niger Delta with the discovery of oil in Oloibiri in 1956 by shell Petroleum Development Company (Aaron, 2010) and has become the main stay of the Nigerian economy, contributing over 90 percent of foreign exchange earning of the federal government. Interestingly, the nation's constitutional development, socio-economic development and class formation has been massively influenced and dictated by the politic of oil (Omolola, 2006).

Nigeria as a nation values the availability of the crude resources as a 'blessing' and a source of pride in the global market. However, the communities where this resource is endowed with consider it a 'cruse' as a result of its massive exploitation; which creates enormous developmental, social and environmental problems, that the Nigerian nation and its collaborative oil partners have neglected for long (Nwachukwu & Pepple, 2011). Consequently, Owugah (1999) claimed that the oil that brought so much wealth to the nation and those in power, has brought much poverty, diseases, death and loss of livelihood to the of Niger Deltans. The emergence of a Pro-Niger Delta militia groups - the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) thus in 2006, further increased the struggle for the ownership of the nation's oil and has assumed a more violent dimension.

In addition to MEND that presented their grievances as Environmental Insecurity and Socio-Economic Marginalization of the Niger Deltans, there are other groups that emerged in the region. A number of them appear to have been driven not by liberation ideology but crime and criminality (Townsend, 2008) and the activities alone are a threat to the region. Recently, some of the oil installations were attacked and some oil workers, particularly expatriate staff, were taken hostage for ransom (Akpan, 2010). All these happened despite the presence of the Joint Task Force (JTF) that comprised Navy, Army and Air forces who were sometimes overwhelmed by the superior fire power of the militants.

The implications were significant as oil production figure plummeted to all time low, resulting in many TNCs announcing production shut-ins. For example, the average production figure for 2009 was around 1.6 million barrels per day (bpd), which reduced from 2.7 million bpd (NNPC, 2009). This means that within this period, the country lost an estimated \$92 billion in oil export earnings due to production shut-in and crude oil theft as a result of the militants' activities.

The consequence of this was a major fall in the country's oil exports; culminating in a serious public financial crisis since independence (Aaron, 2010). In a bid to end violent response in the region, late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, on 25th June, 2009, proclaimed an amnesty for militants who were willing to give up their arms. The amnesty programme was in three phases (i) Disarmament, (ii) Demobilization and (iii) Reintegration (DDR). Disarmament of militants ensured the physical removal of the means of combat from ex defaulters (weapons, ammunition). Demobilization entailed the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed groups, followed by processing of individual combatants in temporary centers with provision of support package while Reintegration implied the process of reintegrating former combatants into civil society and ensuring against the possibility of a resurgence of armed conflict. This initiative led to a measure of peace in the region but with limited development in every ramification (Keagon, 2016, Nwachukwu & Pepple, 2011).

Cultism

Cultism portends evil for institutions of learning. It demonstrates a situation where people (e.g. students) of like minds come together as a group (brotherhood) to strengthen their interests and do things in common. Sadly, the acts they commit are evil e.g. ritualism, rape, theft, kidnapping, etc. Cultism has made our schools unsafe and unhealthy for academic activities to thrive smoothly (Keagon, 2016). It shows that many youths who entered school in order to acquire knowledge and improve themselves, abandon that passion and join, form gangs called "brotherhoods" for selfish reasons including inflicting violence on people.

Many schools have become arenas of gangsters, who molest students and teachers to the extent that some of them are closed down for weeks; thus, disrupting academic activities. Also, parents are afraid of their children's safety when they are in school, leading to uncertainly and unsafe academic atmosphere.

These cultists use the ignorance of the new students to deceive them to accept their membership. Some students also join cultism in order to feel belonged, for protection, due to frustration, quick wealth, etc. (Akpan, 2010).

Jumbo (2019), asserted that schools should not be a breeding ground for cultists; otherwise, there will be serious challenges in the society. Their manner of operations is very sinister and bizarre, living behind a trail of destructions. Many lives have been lost prematurely as a result. In spite of government's efforts to curtail cultism in schools in the Niger Delta, it is still growing like wild fire and has become a major crisis which must be tackled urgently.

Herdsmen/Farmers Crisis

The continued problem of land and water use, obstruction of normal migration routes, livestock theft and crop damage are factors which lead to drought. Likewise, desertification has degraded pastures, dried up many natural water sources across Nigeria's Northern Sahelian belt and forced a large number of herders to migrate south in search of grassland and water for their herds (Nzeh, 2019). This has resulted to instances of farmers-herdsmen conflict across the Niger Delta region in Nigeria; threatening the hitherto peaceful relationship between farmers and herdsmen; with many lives and properties destroyed. According to Adisa and Adegunle (2010), violent conflicts between herdsmen

and farmers in Niger Delta have escalated in recent years; threatening its stability with an estimated death toll of 2500 people in 2016. This figure has risen in recent years.

Conflict between farmers and herders has shown high potential to worsen insecurity and food crisis; especially in rural communities where most of the conflicts are localized with reverberating consequences nationwide. The scholar Nzeh (2015) noted that, before the present herdsman-farmers conflict assumed an inimical dimension, the relationship between them had been cordial and symbiotic. He further stated that upon herdsman entry into Nigeria, through the Nigeria/Cameroon border in search of pasture, they settled in Borno / Adamawa where they found pasture and had a peaceful symbiotic relationship with the farmers that was beneficial to both groups. He further claimed that, the availability of land for both herdsman and farmers, given the subsistence nature of farming and the few number of cows that the herdsman bred, made them to co-exist amicably.

A number of factors are responsible for the conflict between herdsman and farmers; some of which include climate change which forced the migration of Fulani herdsman to further South; which has led to invasion of farmlands by cattle; expansion of farming pasture, extensive sedentarization, burning of rangelands, scarcity of freshwater and blockage of water points, overgrazing of fallow lands and ineffective coping strategies (Ofuoku & Isife in Abigo 2019). Also, agricultural produce and activities are essential to human survival because of their benefits. However, this is hardly so in the River-Delta due to the unending conflict between herdsman and farmers. For instance, the southern parts of the country are presently experiencing slow rate of growth in economic activities as in inadequate supply of food and low industrial activities; making many persons including farmers to be out of business; amounting to serious poverty in the land.

Kidnapping

Kidnapping is another form of crisis facing Niger Delta; especially within the last fifteen years. People are kidnapped for a number of reasons but primarily for money. It is sad that different people/groups are responsible for this. Some of these kidnapped are workers in established / multinational companies. Others are those who the abductors feel they can extract money from, through their relatives or where they work / worship (Omotola, 2006). The major reason however for kidnapping in the Niger Delta can be connected to what Townsend (2008) claimed as "natural resource rationalism" i.e. the tendency to seek bigger share of the returns from natural resources. It is also related to what Akpan (2010) called "accumulation politics" i.e. the ability for the ruling class to be involved in endless accumulation of natural resource rents accruing from the region through deliberate act of marginalization.

The concern for the development of Niger Delta is an age-old phenomenon. The communities in the region have consistently and peacefully protested the injustices for decades, until recently when it took on a violent form. Owugah (1999) noted that the parties in the conflict involve both the Federal Government, the Niger Delta people and the oil multinationals. Generally, the grievances of the people have involved three closely interrelated but analytically distinct issues (Akpan, 2010). Firstly, that all laws relating to oil exploration and land ownership are abrogated; secondly, the issue of natural resource control and self-determination be settled; and thirdly, that necessary institutional and financial arrangements should be provided by the oil producing communities for the developmental and environmental problems connected with oil exploration and exploitation.

Government does not appear to be handling this matter seriously given its attitude of applying military might to suppress the people's demands and protests; enabling the locals to go for hostage taking, hijacking and kidnapping of expatriate oil company workers as well as the demand of ransom and the repeated invasion and blockading of oil installations. It is estimated that over 300 foreign oil workers have been kidnapped in the region since 2010 (Keagon, 2016). The Niger Deltans are presently more determined in their demands for the development of the region, which has been denied them for a long time. Thus, the contrasting positions of the Federal government and the indigenes have prepared the stage for violent conflicts.

Concept of Education

A nation's growth is heavily dependent on its citizens' level of education. The more educated they are, the more technologically advanced and developed it becomes. Education is the accumulation of every process by which an individual develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which add value to the society in which he lives (Fafunwa, 1974).

As an institution, education derives its form from the values of society where it operates. True education shows relevance, significance, potentiality, productivity, sets goals and culture of excellence among others. Consequently, education is essential and adapted to the needs of the society[^] and confronts issues like dignity of labour, leadership and committed citizenship, self-reliance, globalization, industrial harmony, etc (Amaele, 2010).

Education is crucial to the development of any nation as it empowers and strengthens it; hence, a powerful weapon for the equalization of economic and social-political opportunities to lift people out of poverty. It is necessary therefore to encourage the educational development of the Niger Deltans as much as possible.

Conflict as a Threat to Education in Niger Delta

The scholar Keagon (2016), claimed that conflict is a form of interaction in which people whether as individuals or in group, see themselves as fighting or struggling over resources or social values. He stated that people in conflict consider themselves as competitors; hence, their interaction is antagonistic, thereby trying to obliterate / neutralize the actions of others. Conflicts produce hatred, anger, fear, unwanted killings, male and female abuse, jealousy among others. Whether it is internal or external conflict in a given community or between communities, it is the people who suffer enormously.

The perception of education in the Niger Delta is another factor that affects its development in the region. For example, absence of employment for the school leavers and insufficient remuneration of the educated elites not working in oil companies have negatively affected how youths value education in the region (Afinotan 2009). Also, the carefree lifestyle of their contemporaries in the oil and gas sector has created the desire to live a luxurious life in their minds. Thus, access to guns and ammunition has resulted in criminal behaviour; making those who dubiously benefit handsomely from the proceeds of oil jobs not to value education. Rather, they indulge in pipeline vandalization, killings and destruction of educational facilities and infrastructure.

Furthermore, due to insecurity, teachers in the region are un-willing to work, supervisors from schools' board are also trying to secure their lives by not reporting. The National Youth Service Corps

members are not exempted as they deliberately secure means of protecting themselves by refusing transfers or postings to these conflict prone areas. Also, parents/guardians are not willing to send children to school; hence, a low school turnout during the period of crisis which significantly affects the quality of education (Tamuno, 2006). There is also the elongation of years of study for students in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions due to institution shutdown for several weeks and months as education cannot thrive in a violent atmosphere.

In spite of federal government's efforts to maintain peace and unity among the Niger Deltans, conflicts still abound, which threatens the academic activities of students. It is observed that most of these clashes are due to ownership of land as in farming, fishing, oil deposits, solid minerals deposits and in defence of community pride and property (Keagon, 2016). Also, conflicts like inter and intra communal, class, ethnic and insurgence are experienced within the various communities. These tendencies have inhibited educational activities and development leading to tension and panic of stakeholders owing to loss of lives and properties, destruction of educational facilities, etc.

National Development

National development is the overall enhancement of a nation; which is seen in every sphere; be it in socio-cultural, political, economic or religion. It is a dynamic and revolutionary enthronement of the society which is both qualitative and quantitative; resulting from the combined effort of all citizens and forces in addition to human resources, knowledge and skill (Bebibiafai, 2015).

According to Aminigo (2003), national development parameters include equal living standard for all, expansion of facilities regarding education, shelter, health, social welfare and preservation of the environment, equal share of all in profit and equal distribution of income and capital. To strengthen his view, Amaele (2010) added that national development includes sports development, respect of people's fundamental rights, respect for separation of power and the rule of law and keeping to global practices in human relation.

Applying the second national development plan in Nigeria facilitated between 1970 and 1974, national development could be seen in our national philosophy as demonstrated in:

- i. A free and democratic society.
- ii. A just and egalitarian society.
- iii. A united, strong and self-reliant nation.
- iv. A great and dynamic economy.
- v. A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (Aminigo, 2003).

Through national development plan by government, there is a conscious attempt to remove poverty in the land by growing national income and per capital income. Likewise, there is the effort to build quality in education, develop transport and communication, improve agriculture, improve medical facilities for good health and curtail environmental pollution as well as hazard using the tool of science and technology among others.

National development is achievable when the leaders and followers do what is right. Nwachuwku and Pepple (2011) opined that it begins with having right leaders in the right positions. Also, their policies and implementations need to be genuine; these leaders should display high moral standards as they conduct their daily affairs. Likewise, the followers must

do same. It is only then that group existence, socio-economic and technology development can be actualized.

Conclusion

Social conflicts are inevitable in the world, including Nigeria. For organizations to exist, there must be disagreement as far as there is an interest. However, it should be managed expediently in order for it not to escalate and harm critical sections such as education. It is imperative to assert that education is the bedrock of society. This means that with incessant crisis and absence of quality education, the Niger Delta cannot develop. Conflicts in the region result in closure of schools, destruction of educational facilities, creation of fear and tension in the teaching and learning environment and so on; which affect academic performances of students. This can be corrected if the government and other stakeholders of education in the region such as private organizations can join energies to remove all the bottlenecks and create a conducive environment for education to thrive in the region; thus, promoting all round development in the process.

Recommendations

The following are thus recommended:

1. Government at all levels in collaboration with multinational companies should form a formidable force for creating employment opportunities to the educated youths; also, empowerment programme such as vocational training should be created for young men and women in the region who do not have formal education. Their children should equally be empowered with scholarship in order to imbibe in them the value of education.
2. A massive enlightenment campaign should be carried out by youth leaders, community development chairmen, women leaders, traditional rulers, etc. on the dangers of associating or participating in heinous crimes such as kidnapping, vandalization, destruction of educational facilities and so on. Likewise, the inhabitants of the region should be enlightened on the importance of education.
3. Oil multinationals should ensure they respect MOU agreements between them and their host communities. This will help in facilitating peace and progress in the region.
4. Government should constantly listen to the voices of its citizens regarding their welfare. A government that refuses to do this is going against the natural norms and may directly or indirectly be encouraging conflicts.

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