

RESOLVING THE INCREASING TREND OF AGITATIONS IN NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA THROUGH QUALITY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Agitation in Nigeria dates back to colonial era. The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 by (British government) was by might of the colonial master, a forced unification. There were agitations from the minority groups seeking to be recognized as independent entities. After independence, there was greater feeling of marginalization oppression and exploitation by minority groups including the Niger Delta. The mutual suspicion and insecurity among ethnic components precipitated into civil war. The end of war witnessed more agitations from the Niger Delta. There came a period of increased awareness of the challenges the people are facing, ranging from environmental degradation, economic strangulation and exploitation to political marginalization resulting in object poverty and hunger. Hence the demand for resource control. Consequent upon lack of attention by government in power to the genuine agitations, indifference to the people plight and neglect of the region, is the rise in hopelessness and youth criminality. Youth empowerment through education, to equip them with knowledge, skill and character formation to handle their affairs and manage the environment is a lasting solution to the perennial problem of agitation in the Niger Delta.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a nation of nations, with a population of two hundred million people. It is not only a multi-ethnic, multi-culture but also a multi-religious nation. The various ethnic and cultural units existed on their own, centuries before the colonial invasion. Before the Missionary enterprise in some Southern part of Nigeria then in the 1840s, the Islamic culture and practices had been fully developed in the Northern part of Nigeria. The 1804 Usman Danfodio Jihad solidified the unity of Islamic faith in the Northern part. This actually slowed down the penetration of the early Christian religion and education in the 1840s up to the early 1900s in the North. This also affected the British policy and governance in the area. While it was not easy to exercise political control over the various ethnic groups in the Southern zone of the entity now called Nigeria, it was so easy for the colonial administration to govern the North through their already established central government, thus the indirect rule system.

The amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 by the British government under Lord Lugard created a forceful mark. The people became one in principle but not in practice. The colonial government used their "civilization" and sophisticated ammunition to induce the people's loyalty. Of a truth, there was no nation but nations. What, however, reduced the tension to manageable level was the recognition of regions: the Northern, Western and Eastern regions. Even at that, there were still the minority voices, expecting to be heard in the crowd. In the North the majority tribes are the Hausas and the Fulanis, while the West has the Yorubas as the main tribe, the East has the Igbos. Within each of these groups are scores of minority tribes, each agitating for recognition as an entity.

Nigeria managed to live as a nation of nations also, through the awareness of Western education. The elites across the regions started interacting together. Soon they realized that their greatest challenge was self-determination as a people. With this the elites began to unit for independence. The concern for self-rule brought the likes of Sir Herbert Maculey, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Belewa, to mention just the four, together, each leading the team of loyalists from its zone. The integrated, but genuine, effort of our founding

fathers, regions notwithstanding, resulted to the political independence granted Nigeria 1st October, 1960.

Shortly, after independence, regional autonomy and interest increased. This lingered and so emptied itself to the Military takeover of government in 1966. There was the suspicion and agitation that the coup was plotted against the Northern politicians by the Southern army officers. Then came a counter coup later, which was also perceived by the Southerners, especially the Igbos as a plot against them, especially the way and manner their son Major General Ironsi was killed. Besides, the Igbos in the North began to suffer in the hands of their Northern brothers. Lives and properties were lost. Then the Military governor of the Eastern region Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, in consultations with his people declared the region and its affiliates a country (Biafra). This agitation was protested against by the rest part of the country, resulting to the 1967 civil war in Nigeria. The war was between the "People of Biafra" and the rest that wanted to remain in Nigeria. The war was fought for nearly three years. It ended in January 15, 1970. The slogan at the end of the war was "no victor no vanquished", but realities on ground disproved of the slogan.

Two major things happened to weaken the strength of the war then. One was the creation of twelve states and the other was the 1969 curriculum Conference on Education. The first was created mainly to give the minorities a kind of autonomy. The other was arranged to use education as a vehicle to solidifying the unity of the nation. Both were successful to some extent. It is, however, important to state that the inability to sincerely uphold to the philosophy of the end war slogan of "no winner no loser" is still raising dust, as the Igbos feel that they are not allowed to assume their rightful position since after the war. This perhaps triggers the renewed agitation for the Republic of Biafra. But this is not the perspective of this paper.

There are, however, several agitations, past, present and even future in Nigeria, but for the purpose of this address the focus will be the Niger Delta case. The questions which may or may not be completely answered in this paper are: Who are these Niger Delta people or region? What is or are their contribution(s) to the country? What are their challenges? What are they agitating for and how? What are some of the obvious attempts by the government and oil companies to addressing such grievance(s)? How could functional educational be applied to resolving such agitations?

The Niger Delta People and Region

The Niger Delta people are different ethnic groups that find themselves within the Niger Delta region. Each group being unique in character, language, culture, and values. They are found mainly in states like Rivers, Ondo, Bayelsa, Edo, Delta, Imo, Cross Rivers, and Akwa Ibom. The region could be said to have the highest number of minority ethnic groups, each with its unique identity. For instance in Rivers State alone, there are the Ikwerres, Etches, Ekpeyes, Engenis, Ogbas, Andonis, Abuas, Kalabaris, Okrikas, Oyibos, Ogonis, Elemes, and others. Each of these people have their own languages and culture, among others, different from others. This makes the region sensitive in nature.

The region (Niger Delta) located in the Southern Nigeria covers about 75,000 Sq.km. It is bounded in the East by Nigeria Cameroun boundary, West by Ondo – Ogun boundaries, North by Enugu, Ebonyi, Anambra, Kogi and Ekiti States and in the South by the Atlantic Ocean. The region is the world's third largest mangrove forest. It is the world's most expensive fresh water swamps in Western and Central Africa, as well as the Nigeria's major concentration of biodiversity. Over seventy five percent (75%) of this settlement dwell along the Nigeria coastal region (Alagoa, 1972, Okaba, 2005a, 2006b, 2008).

The Contribution(s) of the Niger Delta Region

For the past six decades the Niger Delta has attracted immense national and international recognitions as the economic engine room of Nigeria. In addition it is a major source of global energy supply and world industrial development. The region is not only important for its rich mineral resources, but also blessed with enormous water resources. About twenty-one rivers connect the

region to the Atlantic Ocean which is the water highway that links Nigeria to other continents of the world. (Dara, 2003; Okaba, 2005 and 2008).

Afinotan and Ojajorotu (2009) also comments on the blessings of the region to Nigeria, Africa and the World State:

Comprising mainly of a distinct aquatic environment which embraces marine, brackish and fresh water ecosystems. It encompasses the most extensive fresh water swamp forest in West and central Africa, and manifest an intricate network of cracks, rivers, streams, swamps, braided streams and oxbow lakes, besides, a stretch of flat and fertile land mass. In this region also lies Nigeria's over 35 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, besides an even larger deposit of natural gas. The region also accounts for over 80% of Nigeria's Gross Domestic product and represents the economic jugular of the country (p. 191)

The Development Challenges in the Niger Delta Region

In spite of the glorious blessings it is naturally endowed with, the region suffers terrible neglects. Some of which are:

1. **The neglected Rural Settlement:** It is estimated that over ninety percent (90%) of the people live in rural settlements, eighty five (85%) of which depends on local enterprises such as fishing, canoe carving, subsistent farming, blacksmithing and others. These people are abandoned without basic infrastructure. They take away the oil and gas and reject the host community.
2. **Low Poverty Ranking:** The Human Development Index Report of 2005 rated the region HDI as low as 0.564, making it much lower than other regions and nations with similar resources. The index report covers the longevity of age, knowledge and decent standard of living such as access to safe and clean water, quality health and educational services, electricity, road, gainful employment, political participation, among others.
3. **Hopelessness and Youth Criminality:** The Niger Delta Youth, according to Okaba (2008) have been pushed to concede and indulge in conflicts and vices such as hostage taking, prostitution, armed robbery, drug trafficking and other negative practices, considered to be alternatives to poverty, deprivation and unemployment.
4. **Environmental Despoliation:** The region has been suffering of long environmental degradation, which adversely affect its local investments, through oil spills and gas flares. It is not only that the natural resources of the region are arrogantly exploited without commensurate physical and economic development, but also the devastation of the ecosystem and marine life. The gas flaring constitutes the greatest danger in devastating the region. According to Chimee (2008), in 1986 alone, 617 billion cubic feet of associated gas was flared off, releasing 30 million tons of carbon dioxide to the environment alone. He went further to state that "Nigeria oil fields contribute more to global warming than the rest of the world put together". (p. 1209).
5. **Environmental Refugeism:** The hazard caused by the oil spills and gas flares, among others, which now results to poor productivity in the rural communities made a lot of youths and even family heads to drift to the nearest urban settlements such as Yenagoa, Calabar,

Warri, Port Harcourt, Benin and others. The result of this is overcrowded population, high crime rate and militant behaviors.

- 6. Reckless abuses of Human and Environmental Rights:** The region suffer abuses and other related forms of atrocities and injustice by the government and their law enforcement agents, and more so by the multi-national oil companies. The government and its agencies also evolve obnoxious laws/acts to justify their crimes against the people on their God-given land. The hate Decrees and Acts rolled out by the government, even when she pretends, she was concerned for the development of the region, portrays sharp wickedness. They include: The Mineral/Petroleum Decree 1969, Land Use Decree 1978, Exclusive Economic Zone Act 1978, Associated Gas Re-injection Act 1979, The Oil Mineral Pipelines Decree 1990, The Petroleum Decree 1991, The Lands (Titled Vesting) Decree 1993, and The National Inland Waters Ways Decree 1997.
- 7. High Rate of HIV/AIDS Pandemic:** The hate policies and attitudes meted against the Niger Delta region and the people have suddenly subjected the region's doors and windows open to the infiltrations and spread of HIV/AIDS, leading to high death rates, mostly of youths supposed to be the bright future of the region.
- 8. Selfish Pursuit of some Stakeholders:** The region has evolved selfish and self-centered class, now called stakeholders, opinion leaders, mediators, who, rather than positively mediating between the host community and the Government and oil companies, pursue their personal interest. This in turn results to internal and external conflicts and violence.
- 9. Emergence of Ethnic Militia Groups:** The Niger Delta region has witnessed increased number of warlords and armed youth groups, encouraged by the divide-and-rule strategies of the various oil companies, and of Late, political interest. This upsurge has always turned out to be nobody's friend. It has now grown to become a thing of great concern to the region, national and international communities. (Okaba, 2005 & 2008).

Reflections on Responses on the Niger Delta Development Agitation

In February, 1966 AdakaBoro from the Ijaw extraction of the Niger Delta Region launched out the Niger Delta Volunteer Service, purposed at creating a State of the Niger Delta people, to address the human and infrastructural development problems in the area. Boro's struggle, according to Eseduwo, (2008), was a follow-up of some earlier agitations of the Chiefs and politicians in the region for a state of its own. Among such early movements were the Ijaw State Movement, Rivers Chiefs and People's Conference championed by Chef Harold DapaBiriye, and others. Such early agitations which dated back to 1950s informed the 1957 Willinks Commission of inquiry set up by the British Government. The report of the committee in 1958 stated, in part that:

The needs of those who live in the creeks and swamps of the Niger Delta are very different from those of the interior. It is not easy for a government or legislature operating from the inland to concern itself or even fully understand the problems of the territory where communications are so difficult, building so expensive and education so scanty in a country which is unlikely ever to be developed. (Eseduwo 2008:494)

The commission report concluded that "a feeling of neglect and a lack of understanding was widespread". It noted that the area was poor, backward and neglected in spite of its rich natural endowment, enjoyed by the nation.

It is necessary to reflect that the Niger Delta agitation against oppression, exploitation, violence, servitude and establishment brigandage, even pre-dated the 1950s and the 1960s, historically speaking. Reference must be made to King Jaja of Opobo, Nana of Itsekiri and even Eyo of Calabar, all cases of resistance to imperialism, dominion, and exploitation. The region being a major economic

gateway in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods, suffered exploitation, victimization and abandonment. There has always been the brutality of force and coercion in the past and the present to silence any voice of reason or opposition from the people of the region. Regrettably, the same divide-and-rule tactics applied by the colonial regime was inherited and perfected by the post-colonial administration.

In the 1960s, revenue allocation formula was favorably based on derivation, but as the fortunes of the oil fields increases from the Niger Delta, the post-civil war regime in Nigeria adopted a skewed formula, which now favored equity of sates, land mass and population, hence, appropriating the fortunes from the region to favour the other regions to the detriment of the producing region.

Despite this obvious injustice against the Niger Delta region and people, the government still showed no genuine interest in the development of the region. The cumulative injustices ignited a new phase of ferment agitation for resource control in the 1980s. This, according to Chimee (2008), began, peacefully, as a Right group known as the Movement for Survival of Ogoni People under the leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa. Environmental consequences of oil exploration and exploitation of Ogoniland was his ground of campaign. It was mainly targeted at the oil companies operating in Ogoniland. The meticulous approach of Ken Saro-Wiwa's leadership earned the struggle the Ogoni Bill of Rights in 1990. The Bill of Rights as represented by Chimee, (2008:1210):

...cited the ecological devastation of Ogoniland, the marginalization of the people, the non-development of the areas by the Federal government and its oil agents; and included in it also was the desire of Ogoni people to be autonomous within the Nigerian Federation.

This Bill opened up the foundation for the current agitation for resource control and youth militancy. The Saro-Wiwa led campaign attracted international attention from the United Nations, Inter-Governmental Agencies, and foreign governments. The government inability to aptly respond to the new call order, spurred the vandalization of oil installations in Ogoni land by Ogoni Youths. Rather than calling for dialogue, the government of Nigeria (the then Military regime) in 1993 deployed army in the area and also promulgated the obnoxious Treasonable Offences Decree 1993.

In addition, both the government and the oil companies employed their tactics of divide-and-rule within some leaders and people of the Ogoniland. At the end their trap caught the then leader of MOSOP and his able lieutenants, hence the Ogoni Nine tragedy. Ken Saro-Wiwa, the hero of the time was hanged, alongside other eight Ogoni leaders by the Military junta led by General SaniAbacha on 11th November, 1994.

The death of Ken Saro-Wiwa and others increased the agitation of the Niger Delta Youths for self determination and resource control. Pretending to have realized their errors, the Federal government then had to set up the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992. The insincere nature of the commission from its inception made it to "die long before it died". Since then there has been show of power between the government and their oil companies' collaborators on one side and the Niger Delta Youths (Militants) on the other side.

It is very important to note also that the peace-loving people of Umuechem, in Etche Local Government Area also in Rivers State experienced the worst assault on their land between 30th October and 1st November 1990. Umuechem is one of the highly rated oil producing communities in Etche and the Niger Delta region for the past fifty years. Their armless Youth went to the site of the shell oil company operating in the area to demand for some basic development facilities such as electricity and pipe borne water. The company immediately called the government agencies and they sent soldiers and mobile police forces, as was for a full war and devastated the land. The Paramount Ruler of the Kingdom Chief A. A. Ordu, a second-class chief and some member of his family were burnt to ashes, dozens of other citizens were killed as others were hospitalized. In addition, over four hundred residential buildings were completely destroyed within the three days

raid. The only "sin" committed by the land and people of Umuechem, like their counterparts in the region was to ask for a little from the much that was taken away from them.

In spite of all odds posed by the various regimes in Nigeria and their oil companies' collaborators, against the Niger Delta region, the people still show the willingness for peace. The following organizations were very decent: the Ijaw National Council (INC), Movement for the Payment of Reparation of Ogbia (MORETO), Ethnic Minority Rights Organization of Africa (EMIROAF), Association of Oil Producing Communities (AOPC), the Southern Minorities Movement (SMM), and the Association of Oil States (AOS) etc. These movements in their modern approaches agitate that their rights as minorities be respected, a measure of political autonomy, access to oil wealth, compensation for oil extracted in their land, to negotiate for Nigerian nation state and repair of damages done to their environment, among others. But these dialogue seeking movements appeared not attract the positive responses of the government and the oil companies.

The adamant posture and attitude of government to the peaceful and non-aggressive movements ignited the call for more aggressive combatant groups. This gave rise to the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), led by MujahidAsariDokubo, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), led by Ateke Tom, the Nduwini Volunteer Force (IVF) led by Baboye Johnson, etc. These combatant forces now draw the attention of the government that in 2000 the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established, to improve the oil producing areas. How far the commission has gone, is a subject for another time. Aware of the limitations of the commission, to the plights of the region, the Niger Delta movements remain resolute to free the region from exploitation, neglect and degradation. They see their fight as a war against the rape of the Niger Delta, a region that produces wealth, which is used to develop other regions but remain impoverished.

In May 1999, a Niger Delta Community called Odi in Bayelsa State experience some violence and some policemen were sent to keep peace. In the process four policemen were killed and the then President of Nigeria, deployed troops and Odi was completely destroyed. This again triggered the already established Militant groups in the region for Military confrontation. At this time the NDPVF and the NDVS, issued warnings asking the foreigners and non-Ijaws to withdraw from the region. They intensified ground on attacking oil pipelines and installations, kidnapping suspected enemies in the region. It was then that it became done on the Federal government to seek fresh negotiation with the groups.

Some major developments that are recorded gradually from the later part of President Obasanjo's regime to President Goodluck Jonathan include: the review of the derivation formula to 13%, granting Amnesty (Pardon) to repented Niger Delta Militants, rehabilitation and empowerment of some Niger Delta Youths.

The present rising trend of armed struggles by the Niger Delta Youths of different colorations, against the oil companies in the region and the Federal government, if not wisely and urgently addressed, would devastate the entire nation. Already, part of the recession experience now in Nigeria is the drastic drop on the daily output of Petroleum in Nigeria. Of course, the present increasing agitation may not be unconnected with the present political posture of the present administration. The body language of His Excellency, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria seems to suggest punitive approach to some issues, especially relating to some parts of the country and groups. It is possible that the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), the Reformed Egbesu Fraternities (REF), the Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate (NDGJM), Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force, Niger Delta Red Squad, AdakaBoro Avengers, Asawana Deadly Force of Niger Delta, Niger Delta Revolutionary Crusaders, Red Egbesu Water Lions, Reformed Egbesu Boys of the Niger Delta, Egbesu Mightier Fraternity and other allied Militant movements are trained and sponsored to counter the excesses of the militancy prone government of the day. These groups emerged in 2016, and are all forceful in operation. The truth now is that, the present trend is not favourable to anybody. Every Nigeria must feel concerned and should pray and work against it on both sides. It is an unnecessary waste of life, property, natural resources and income. What then must we do?

It is regrettable that even the said derivation formula, speculated to be 13% is still circled within political friends, as contracts awarded, most times are swallowed by corruption. Most of the suffering host communities have not benefited from such revenue. The amnesties granted to some "repentant militants" are abused and in some cases make militancy an occupation and militants' heroes. The various commissions set up to address the region, in most cases, are either corrupt or politicized. Some of the "repentant militants" are neither repentant nor properly rehabilitated. The option then is aggressive investment on functional education.

Resolving the increasing Trend of Agitations through functional education

When the people are adequately educated, they can think well, plan well and work well. The best way to save a people from slavery and unproductive life is to give them the required dose of education. Education, though, has no universally accepted definition, could be associated to total human development. The educated, by true functional education, ought not to be a job seeker but a creator of job, an employer of labour. Hence, it is the greatest Legacy any society should bequeath its citizens. The better education the people receive the better the society becomes.

Undoubtedly, education plays very major roles in preparation and development of the individual, helping to perform specific functions in and for the society. Ezewu (1983:33) cited by Elechi and Ogbonda (ed) (2005) carefully states four major functions of education in a society, as;

1. The preparation of the individual's mind in order to enable him be internally consisted and harmonious with himself thereby developing the right type of personality required for living in the society.
2. The equipment of the individual with skills, knowledge and values of the past that are cherished and valued by a given society, so as to preserve them from one generation to another.
3. The equipment of the individual with such skills, attitudes and values which will make him function properly in that society since he must live in a society and play his role effectively by contributing to the betterment of that society.
4. The equipment of the individual to bring about changes that are useful to his society.

The above suggests that education is a human laboratory where the best in character, knowledge and skills are produced. It is a screening process which selects and eliminates individuals for and from access to skills, knowledge values, character and critical thinking. In other words, education must be functional in nature and approach. It can also be described as a tool in which the society can use to develop the individual in all aspects of life, so as to enable him adjust and fit-in into the society and make positive contributions for the interest of both the individual and his society. An educated person is a change agent for societal growth and development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the emphasis on functional education for Nigerian Children and Youths generally and those of the Niger Delta Region particularly, the following recommendations are as necessary:

1. The government, the various oil companies and the host communities should come to a sincere and genuine round table conference. Politics and divide-and-rule tactics and strategies should be out of this call. Among issues to be discussed are: environmental degradation, de-militarization of both parties (government and angry youths), payment of adequate compensation, derivation formula, assessment of all existing commission, harmonious relationship between the oil companies and their host communities, etc.
2. The Federal government should in addition provide free, compulsory, quality and functional education to the children and youths of the affected communities. Gifted and skilled youths should be identified in the process and given extra care in their gifted areas and be employed to work in the oil companies.
3. The present Amnesty arrangement should be reviewed, in order to avoid attracting more peace loving unemployed but qualified youths into joining militant groups.

4. The respective multi-national oil companies should learn to appreciate the plights of their host communities and offer some services, especially on the aspects of basic social amenities, training and employment of youths. They should avoid bringing the mobile policemen and soldiers at random even when the host communities visit them for peaceful dialogue.
5. The chiefs, elders and opinion leaders, as well as, the elites in the oil prospecting areas should be patriotic to their communities and the nation. This will make them to shun any form of corruption or over politicization of the genuine struggle to their people. They should not dance in the arena short term wealth that can draw people to death.
6. Credible persons, especially from the core affected regions should be appointed to head and oversee all the commissions, bodies or institutions set up for the empowerment and development of the Niger Delta regions. It must not be in form of political settlement, as it is presently observed.
7. Youths of the host communities should devise other diplomatic and gainful approaches to demand their rights. The use of force should be discouraged, because it is only the living that will enjoy the wealth. Besides, some of the operations they carry out run back to worsen the already destroyed ecosystem.
8. The Federal government should also relate well with the affected state governors and chairmen of local governments in taking decisions concerning the Niger Delta region. It should not be a party affair.

CONCLUSION

I see and embrace the theme of this conference as a call from God to save the nation from further destruction. Many people may not know that there is an internal war setting up in Nigeria. The war is between the Federal government and the Multi-national/national oil companies and the Oil Producing Communities in the Niger Delta region. As we all know, war has no friend. While I advise the people of the affected region to open up to dialogue, and the oil companies to own up some responsibilities to better their host communities, I also charge the Federal government to consider the interest and genuine points of the region's agitation, alongside their pursuit for oil production. Injustice breeds violence. To the conference, I strongly believe that the call for functional education as the best option to addressing the agitations in Nigeria generally, and the Niger Delta region in particular is golden and divine. I am strongly convinced that the various papers that will be delivered in the conference will surely be a safe call for justice and peace in Nigeria.

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