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CONTENTS

Language & Communication Skills for Technology Education: A Need Analysis & Proposal for Enhanced Manpower Development in Nigeria	A. O. Adeosun & A. N. Maduekwe	1-7
Re-thinking Higher Education Management for Poverty Reduction among the Youth In Africa	U. G. Emetarom & Joy Chinwe Obunadike	9-18
The Role of University Education in Leadership Preparation in Nigeria	Adams O. U. ONUKA & Benedict O. Emunemu	19-25
Entrepreneurship Education in Nigerian Universities: Implementation Challenges and Strategies	Ijeoma A. Archibong & James Bassey Ejue	27-32
Education And Youth Re-orientation: A Panacea for Lasting Peace in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region	ISAH, Emmanuel. A. & BABAYEMI, Beatrice Adeitan	33-39
Cases Involving Cultic Group Infiltration into Educational Institutions in Poland: Preventive Aspects	Piotr T. Nowakowski	41-45
Management of Higher Education for Economic Empowerment of Youth Towards Peace and Security in The Niger Delta Region of Nigeria	Ebuara, V. O. Ozurumba, C. N. & Udey, Franca U.	47-50
Functional Inclination to Human Potential for Youth Opportunity: Implications For Higher Education In 21 st Century	Okechukwu Dominic Nwankwo Loyce Chiedozie Onyali Ndidi Melody Modebelu & C. C. Nweke	51-56
Privatization of Higher Education and Social Responsibility	P. Muthaiyan, K. Selvanathan & C. Vijayabaskar	57-60
Graduate Empowerment for Future Leadership Competencies in Higher Teacher Education Institutions in Nigeria	Egboka Patience Ndidi Rev. Fr. Ofojebe, Wenceslaus N. & Onuselogu, Adaobi. P.	61-68
Personal Projects Analysis by Brian R. Little as a Method for Measurement of Changes in the Psychocorrective Process	Dariusz Kuncewicz	69-76
Influence of the Role of Cross River University of Technology (Crutech) on Youth Preparation for Parenthood	Udida, L. A. & Udey, Franca. U.	77-83
Graduates' Employability Skills for Today's Workplace: A Groundwork For Assessment	Omenyi, Ada & Agu, Ngozi Odimegwu, Christy O.	85-95

EDUCATION AND YOUTH RE-ORIENTATION: A Panacea for Lasting Peace in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region

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The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has been a hot bed of political and economic agitations in the last 10 years. Though the agitations which began in 1966 by late Major Adaka Boro has in the last decade assumed wider significant dimensions which threatens the peaceful coexistence of the One hundred and fifty million Nigerian that live in the entity called Nigeria. The causes of agitation is traceable to the availability of rich oil and gas deposits in the Niger Delta region accounting for almost 90% of Nigeria's gross total foreign exchange earnings in the last four decades. Despite the abundance of these resources, the region has felt marginalized and requested for a fair share of the nations resources. The military with its totalitarian nature in previous Nigerian governments have often scuttled every attempt for legitimate agitation. The advent of Democracy in Nigeria in 1999 resurfaced the struggle for resource control in the region. This paper reviews the cause of the Niger Delta struggle seen as political marginalization, social deprivation and economic exploitation in a federating environment. Solutions featuring political solutions, economic evolution and social regeneration of the region have been recommended. Useful suggestions to educational planners have been provided.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian Niger Delta Region consists of Nine states namely: Abia, Edo, Imo, Akwa-Ibom, Cross Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta and Ondo States. The Nigerian nation consists of a total of 36 states. Among the 9 states which constitute the region, four (4) are regarded as upland states, Edo, Abia, Imo and Ondo states other 5 states are seen as core Niger Delta states with the following characteristics; coastal in nature with difficult terrains of over 60% creek environments, transportation in this region is mostly through water and consists of several ethnic nationalities of not less than 250 characterized with rural population (Bisinia, 2004). The population of the entire region is estimated at 28million out of a national population of 140.1m (FGN, 2006) indicating that the region is a minority. The region is of extreme significance due to its rich endowment in gas and petroleum resources. It is

estimated to be the richest in Africa and with its rich deposits has ranks Nigeria as 5th largest exporter of crude oil to the USA. Nigeria accounts for 20% of total oil exports to the USA giving the region a place of significance in global oil productivity analysis. Reference to Niger Delta region though includes the nine oil producing states in this paper, but major reference is made to the five costal states that suffer the fate of crude oil production.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Despite vast resources in oil and gas in whose exploration commenced in 1932 and oil exploitation started in commercial quantity at the eve of Nigeria's independence in 1959 (Douglas, 1993) the region has been greatly impoverished. Its impoverishment is traceable to several factors inclusive of : low educational enrolment in schools at primary, secondary

and tertiary levels. National primary school enrolment as at 2004 was 76% (NEEDS, 2004) but enrolment at primary level in the Niger Delta in some places was as low as 46% (Bisinia, 2004). Enrolment at secondary and tertiary education levels could be predictable. Other factors evident in the region is gross social neglect of over 5 decades of oil exploitation. The environment is inaccessible, environmentally degraded due to the activities of oil exploitation companies with oil spillages which remain most of the times uncompensated (Douglas 1993). The ecosystem of the region predominantly agriculture and fishing have been destroyed due to the activities of oil companies. The area is predominantly poor, unemployment rages, illiteracy high and urbanization poor. The objective of this paper is to expose, the causes of conflict in the region with the aim of proffering lasting solutions that will end the conflict. Natural questions which comes to any researcher shall form the research questions for this study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the causes of conflict in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria?
2. What role will education play in the resolution of the conflict in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria?
3. How long will it take to resolve the crisis? In the Niger Delta Region in Nigeria?
4. What are the possible solutions to the Niger Delta crisis.

Research Question 1

Causes of Conflict in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region:

The festering conflict in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is traceable to the following:

1. *Marginalization in Nigeria's political evolution:* Nigeria came into being in 1914 due to the amalgamation exercise of Frederick Lugard (Fafunwa, 1974). The Country consist of major and minor tribes. The major tribes are in the North, West and East while the minor tribes aggregate as the South, South of Nigeria. The North is predominantly inhabited by the Hausa's while the East is dominated by the Igbo's and the West by the Yoruba's. The South South to which the Niger

Delta belongs has no specific tribe. Other regions have produced national leaders at one time or the other and have influenced government policies to favour their regions, but the South South of Nigeria has never produced any politician of note except recently. Nigeria's political evolution has witnessed lopsided policies as Revenue Allocation which has no specific policy but has been seen to revolved around government interests especially military governments over the years (Wifa, 2003). The effect is that minority tribes are left out in the political balancing of national equations and the status of the Niger Delta region might never allow her to produce leaders of note with her population and so may remain marginalized. Other policies are the equal opportunity policy to tertiary education (Fabunmi, 2005) and (Ajayi, 1986), Federal Character Commission principle which to a large extent disfavors the minority to which the Niger Delta region belongs. Table 1 shows population distribution in Nigeria's Niger Delta and to a large extent the standard of living. Table 2 shows the lopsided nature of resources distribution. The rural populations in Lagos, Kano, Ekiti etc, are about 50% which shows some level of development contrary to the case with core Niger Delta States whose level of under development is exposed by the rural population coverage that averages and hovers around 85%.

2. *Environmental degradation of the region:* though the region has a small size, it is rich in natural gas and petroleum reserves. The region accounts for over 70% of Africa's gas reserves with 90% of the gas flared at an approximate rate of 70million m³ per day. The level of greenhouse emission in the region here is comparable to no other zone in the universe with its attendant environmental hazards. Again, the effect of oil spillages on oceans and lands have to a large extent destroyed aquatic life and impoverished the available land making it unfit for agricultural purposes. The people of the region have been disempowered due to lack of occupation and income. The level of the rural population is large as can be seen in table 2. The rural income is low and unemployment heavy.

3. *Social and infrastructural decay of facilities in the region:* The social implications of the exploitation of crude oil from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria are grave

Table 1
Population Distribution in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region

S/N	State	Total Population	Urban wage earners	Rural wage earners	Urban self employed	Rural self employed	Rural population	Urban population
1.	Rivers	5,185,400	46.2	19.5	53.8	80.5	76.4	23.6
2.	Cross Rivers	2,888,966	38.9	7.7	61.1	92.3	88.3	11.7
3.	Akwa Ibom	3,920,208	48.1	19.8	51.9	80.2	88.7	11.3
4.	Bayelsa	1,703,358	33.5	17.0	66.5	83.0	92.3	7.7
5.	Delta	4,098,391	28.6	16.2	71.4	83.8	85.0	15.0
6.	Edo	3,218,332	44.7	13.5	55.3	86.5	64.2	35.8
7.	Abia	2,833,999	27.6	16.6	72.4	83.7	74.3	25.7
8.	Imo	3,934,899	56.4	14.5	43.9	85.5	93.8	6.2
9.	Ondo	3,444,024	40.5	11.6	59.5	88.4	71.4	28.6

Source: Provisional Census Results 2006 and National Bureau of Statistics 2004 and Provisional Census Results 2006

Table 2
Showing Population, Rural and Urban Distribution Patterns in Nigeria

S/N	State	Urban wage earners	Rural wage earners	Urban self employed	Rural self employed	Rural population	Urban population	Total Population
1.	Abia	27.6	16.6	72.4	83.7	74.2	25.8	2,833,999
2.	Adamawa	38.1	11.7	61.9	88.3	92.3	7.7	3,168,101
3.	Akwa-Ibom	48.1	19.8	51.9	80.2	88.7	11.3	3,920,208
4.	Anambra	54.9	15.1	45.1	84.9	93.5	6.5	4,182,032
5.	Bauchi	35.8	12.0	64.2	88.0	88.3	11.7	4,676,465
6.	Bayelsa	33.5	17.0	66.5	83.0	92.3	7.7	1,703,358
7.	Benue	18.6	5.6	81.4	94.4	79.3	20.7	4,219,244
8.	Borno	46.3	9.9	53.7	90.1	66.7	33.3	4,151,193
9.	Cross River	38.9	7.7	61.1	92.3	88.3	11.7	2,888,966
10.	Delta	28.6	16.2	71.4	83.8	85.0	15.0	4,098,391
11.	Ebonyi	33.6	7.4	66.4	92.6	87.1	12.9	2,117,501
12.	Edo	44.7	13.5	55.3	86.5	64.2	35.8	3,218,332
13.	Ekiti	23.8	10.3	76.2	89.7	42.3	57.7	2,384,212
14.	Enugu	56.4	10.4	43.6	89.6	90.4	9.6	3,257,298
15.	Gombe	31.1	8.1	68.9	91.9	87.5	12.5	2,353,879
16.	Imo	56.1	14.5	43.9	85.5	93.8	6.2	3,934,899
17.	Jigawa	32.0	14.0	68.0	86.0	94.5	5.5	4,348,649
18.	Kaduna	53.2	11.4	46.8	88.6	60.6	39.4	6,066,562
19.	Kano	40.0	10.5	60.0	89.5	58.5	41.5	9,383,682
20.	Katsina	31.6	21.4	68.4	78.6	85.7	14.3	5,792,578
21.	Kebbi	11.2	9.1	88.8	90.9	96.6	3.4	3,238,628
22.	Kogi	30.9	15.8	69.1	84.2	83.0	17.0	3,278,487
23.	Kwara	36.1	17.6	63.9	82.4	49.9	50.1	2,371,089
24.	Lagos	35.5	27.9	64.5	72.1	5.3	94.7	9,013,534
25.	Nassarawa	56.8	18.5	43.2	81.5	91.5	8.5	1,863,275
26.	Niger	36.3	12.9	63.7	87.1	85.2	14.8	3,950,249
27.	Ogun	33.0	18.0	67.0	82.0	44.0	56.0	3,728,098
28.	Ondo	40.5	11.6	59.5	88.4	71.4	28.6	3,441,024
29.	Osun	24.2	10.5	75.8	89.5	34.6	65.4	3,423,536
30.	Oyo	24.0	6.9	76.0	93.1	34.6	65.4	5,591,589
31.	Plateau	29.7	8.8	70.3	91.2	93.7	6.3	3,178,712
32.	Rivers	46.2	19.5	53.8	80.5	76.4	23.6	5,185,400
33.	Sokoto	38.9	7.8	61.1	92.2	90.1	9.9	3,696,999
34.	Taraba	25.5	14.0	74.5	86.0	94.9	5.1	2,300,736
35.	Yobe	24.7	8.9	75.3	91.1	83.7	16.3	2,321,591
36.	Zamfara	38.5	11.5	61.5	88.5	87.9	12.1	3,259,846
	FCT	57.0	15.3	43.0	84.7	69.1	30.9	1,405,201
	Total	36.2	13.1	63.8	86.9	-	-	-

Source: Provisional Census Result: FRN official gazette vol 94 No 24, 2007 and National Bureau of Statistics 2004.

the effects are visible in table 2 which shows the level of urbanization and rural life in the region. Apart from Cross River and Rivers states, all other states of the core Niger Delta experience well over 85% of rural life and population who are de-empowered and unemployed through the destruction of the ecosystem. Rural employment in Agriculture and fishing are no longer available for the people have resorted to aggressive agitations. Social infrastructure as electricity, pipe borne water, hospitals, access to and through the region is almost impossible and difficult and in some communities totally inaccessible. Social neglect of the region has created inner dissatisfaction among the youth who feel deprived of their needs. Maslow (1968) identified human needs to be in a hierarchy consisting of physiological, safety, esteem, achievement and satisfaction needs. This theory is amplified by Asagba and Nwagu (2003) who identified inner life satisfaction as measures of peace and a means to social enhancement in life. The assertion of (Maslow, 1968) and (Asagba and Nwagu 2003) are missing from the lives of the inhabitants of the region, hence the level of social resistance being witnessed there.

4. *Absence of national and social justice:* Social justice are nationale goals which all nations aspire to and Nigeria aspires to that hence the Nigerian constitution 1999 guarantees equal opportunities for all. Natufe (2001) and Wifa (2008) have identified certain aspects of Nigerian Social life as responsible for the irrepressible agitations in the region. Prominent among them is the 1976 land use decree which carefully eroded the people's claim to their lands. They further explained that sections 44 (3) of the constitution of Nigeria deals with land ownership on mineral resources but section 162 of the same constitution Cap (12) made a distraction between ownership of oil mineral and solid mineral. The differences which is frustrating brings to focus previous national policies which only brought unfulfilled dreams. The first was the oil mineral productivity Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) established in 1992 with a 13% revenue fund from oil exploitation funds. Its activities were inadequate. Thereafter, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established in year 2000 with the aim of channeling development to the region.

The NDDC operated on a budget of 15% of oil funds on an arranged derivation arrangement. This has proved to be a conduct pipe through which government funds are siphoned by the few privileged in the region while the vast majority suffer in abject poverty. The natural result is conflict and agitation.

5. *Absence of internal cohesion and ethnic leadership conflict in the region:* The absence of an acceptable national ruler for the region due to the presence of many nations as the Ijaws, Itsekiris, Ogonis, Ibibios, andonis, Urhobos, Isoko's etc is a major factor that inhibits dialogue in the region as each tribe has its own independent thinking and expectations, leadership, cult group and ethnic militia groupings. The several militia organizations gives a vague picture of the enormity of the conflict which government is bound to resolve. The Ogoni's parade the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) led by Ledim Metee and the Late Ken Saro Wiwa, Niger Delta Volunteer Task Force (NDVF) Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) while others include the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Several other groups who operate in the creeks are glaring. All militia organizations have various charters of demands which are either similar or slightly different and the polarity of the region affects government ability to negotiate with the groups; the Ogoni bill of rights, the Kiama Declaration, the Warri Accord, etc. There is the need to merge negotiations and arrive at a reasonable conclusion.

6. *High cost of living in the region:* One of the causes of frustration in the region is the high cost of living occasioned by the activities of oil companies who remunerate their staff in hard currencies. The micro and macro economic variables are skewed in favor of the rich. The attitude of multinationals operating in the region display that they are not mindful of the hurt caused the inhabitants of the communities through their activities. Medical facilities are out of reach to the inhabitants. The poor immigration practices occasioned by insincere immigration workers in Nigeria expose the communities to different imported diseases which filter into these communities through foreign staff undetected especially sexually transmitted diseases (STD/HIV).

Research question 3: what role will education play in the resolution of the conflict The role of education in the resolving the Niger Delta conflict in Nigeria

Historical antecedents of western education in Nigeria reveal that government took over education from voluntary agencies in the late 70's due to the role education plays in national development. (FRN 2002:15) sees education as "instrument par excellence" in national development. Article 26 of the United Nations Declaration on Human sees education as a right to every one. MDG's emphasizes education specially basic education but in spite of these provisions, educational enrolments in the Niger Delta region is particularly low. While primary school enrolment as at 2002 was 46% in the region national enrolment was 76% showing the neglect of the region educationally. In the 5 core Niger Delta State Until 2007, there were only three Federal Universities specially in a nation where catchments area accounts for not less than 50% of total admission. The lower the level of education of a region, the less representation such region experiences in Federal appointments in Nigeria. A core demand in the agitations of the region include fair representation of its indigenes in appointment in oil companies. The oil companies as profit maximizers have explained that employments are competitive, only qualified candidates from the region will be considered. (Ake, 1996) explained that the people, due to as ignorance, high handedness of government were not able understand the struggle early enough to give life to the struggle. Today, the issues in Nigeria's Niger Delta region has assumed global dimensions.

Education will perform several roles and resolve several issues in the region if properly channeled by creating a sense of belonging in the region within the citizenry. With education at the door step of the nationals, human capacity will be built and empowered through employment by oil exploration companies the resultant multiplier effect of such changes can begin to attract private developments to the communities. Furthermore, it is estimated that the life span of the crude reserves in the region today can last till the next 50 years at the rate of exploiting 3million barrels daily.

Educational planners agree that it takes between (10 to 15) years to produce high level manpower (Longe, 2003), (Akangbou 1985) and (Babalola 2003). The simple implication is that if crude oil is not prospected again, the present level will take 3 generations of high level manpower hence it is not to late to begin the process of educating the people. Educational planning recognizes various methods of educational provision, they should be put in place. Education for the people will neutralize frustration and create a sense of belonging.

Research question 3: How long will it take to resolve the conflict in Nigeria's Niger Delta region: Implications of prolonged armed struggle in the Region

The crisis in the Niger delta region of Nigeria has various implications ranging from economic, social, political, environmental to global dimensions. With the region accounting for about 90% of Nigeria's annual budget spending, continuous armed struggle in the region will create insecurity to crude oil exploiters and will hurt the Nigerian economy significantly. This will eventually be transferred to other regions of the world who depend on crude exports from Nigeria to fire industries. The macro economic implications are grave as it will deplete any foreign reserve presently accumulated and further degenerate the already comatose infrastructure thereby worsening an already low standard of living. The social implications of a prolonged armed struggle can be imagined. With the economy down, other areas that will be significantly affected are health, education and agriculture.

Many projects will be halted. A prolonged agitation and insecurity in the delta region has the capacity of balkanizing the present Nigeria into fragments due to global oil politics. It implies that the fate of 140million Nigerians hang in the balance. Politically, the struggle has the potential of dismantling Nigeria's nascent democracy through secession and re-alignment of political loyalty.

Continuous agitation could precipitate greater environmental hazards through blowing up of oil bearing pipelines causing oil spillages to rivers and oceans and continuous damages to the eco system

whose global implications are grave. Presently, the rising demand for crude oil due to economic development in erstwhile poor nations especially in Asia has greatly jerked up crude oil prices. The agitation will keep Nigeria's oil locked up while international prices soar. Nations are presently looking up to Bio-fuels causing global food recession and crisis whose end can hardly be imagined. In recent times, deficit spending in developed economies are rising having macro economic influences on other sectors of their economies. In the light of the foregoing, a direct answer to the question on how long the struggle lasts will depend on how fast authorities accede to the recommendations below.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper has traced the causes of conflict in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. Most of the problems due specially poverty caused by years of neglect, disempowerment of the people through environmental degradation spanning over 5 decades, the poor level of urbanization and escalation in rural life population of the people and unemployment situation. Education was revealed as one of the missing ingredients in the Niger Delta coupled with high cost of living. It is in our opinion that the following recommendations will act as a way of resolving the crisis; provision of education at all levels. Government should ensure that education is provided at no cost to the indigenes since the people are already poor and are not in any position to bear the cost of education. Government should compel the oil companies to give and sponsor education for the indigenes at specific levels not the present one where competitive examinations are written to encourage them to attain high level education. Other segments of government such as states and local governments should be compelled to set aside not less than 26% of their various budgets for education.

The 1976 land use decree (Act) must be reviewed and revisited to give a sense of equity among oil producing communities and solid mineral producing communities. The principle of derivation must be entrenched in the revenue allocation system. Adequate compensation must be given to the communities whose

lands and waters have been degraded consistently over the years. Government should fight criminality in the region while engaging in useful dialogue with genuine agitators. In this regard, government is to assist the communities/region articulate good leadership that will eventually wipe out criminals from the region though this has much to do with the people's level of education, awareness, exposure to similar communities in foreign lands which can be achieved through government encouragement.

Government is to apply a multi-dimensional approach in resolving the crisis. New policies should be formulated for the region. Skill acquisition centers should be established, curriculum reviews (Babalola and Jaiyeoba, 2008), introduction of farming subsidies to the region, provision of modern fishing methods using good technology and equipment etc. the people should be assisted to acquire soft loans should be guaranteed by the various levels of government to allow the financial sector empower the people for greater and better productivity. Idleness must be discouraged as they find it easy to serve as militant soldiers in an economy suffering from unemployment and under employment particularly rural unemployment. Government should do all possible to provide and revamp decayed infrastructure in the land, provide of clean drinking water, electricity, access roads, adequate health facilities, disease eradication programmes for the people. Finally, government should encourage greater enrolments in schools and monitor the transition between levels of education taking care of gender gaps. Appropriate legislations should not only be enacted but monitored and enforced.

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