

AMNESTY PROGRAMME FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE FOR ADULT EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Adult education, a pillar that was rejected by the leaders of our great nation, Nigeia has been remembered for use in re-integration of the Niger Delter ex-militants into the Nigerian society. But, the irony is that those using adult education for this re-integration exercise do not acknowledge that it is adult education they are applying in the process. In this paper, a case is made for due recognition and usage of adult education for forestalling militant and other related activities in order to create a conducive platform for national development. Considering the relevance and appropriateness of adult education in re-integrating the ex-militants into the social, political, cultural and socio-economic life of the country, the paper concludes that adult education should be given adequate attention by our political leaders.

Keywords: adult education, national development, reintegration of ex-militants

INTRODUCTION

Oil was first discovered in 1956 in Oloibiri, Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. Since then, crude oil and gas have been the main stay of Nigeria's economy. Nigeria has a total of 159 oil fields and 1481 wells in operation according to the Ministry of Petroleum Resources. The most productive region of the nation in terms of oil production is the coastal Niger Delta Basin in the Niger Delta which has 78 Of the 159 oil fields (Wikipedia, 2011).

The oil rich Niger Delta was greatly undermined and neglected by the Federal Government and the Multinational oil conglomerates in terms of development. This neglect prompted the nationalist and compatriot Isaac JaspAdakaBoro to lead an armed campaign for greater Niger Delta autonomy, resource control and self-determination for the Niger Deltans. The armed insurrection marked the genesis of militancy in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria (Siollun, 2008). This was followed by Ken Sarowiwa's peaceful agitations in the 1990's and the insurgence of many militant groups at the dawn of democratic governance in 1999. These agitations brought the issue of Niger Delta neglect and under-development to the world's attention owing to the fact that 90% of the country's revenue base derives from this region. The multiplicity of militant groups and the consequent agitations were so overwhelming that the issue featured in the front burner of every political discourse in the country. This moved the Federal Government of Nigeria to swing into action in search of the solution to the problem.

In the attempt to stop the agitations and other multiplier activities of the militant groups, government first adopted a military action as a better option to flush out militants from the region. This option did more harm than good to the country as more militant groups evolved who engaged in more devastating nefarious activities that gruesomely affected the economy, lives and property of people of the nation. These activities included among others: kidnapping, oil bunkering and illegal refining of petroleum products, pipeline vandalism. The activities resulted into problems such as environmental degradation, closure of many companies, low production of crude oil per day, decline in foreign reserve, decline in gross domestic product and so on. This was an attempt in the wrong direction as government sought to address the symptoms of the problem rather than tackling the problem from the root which is developing the Niger Delta region.

When the military action failed as it did more harm than good to the country, federal Government resorted to the option of Amnesty Declaration. Amnesty was declared on all members of various

militant groups who may wish to give up their arms and embrace peace. This was declared by the then president, late Umaru Musa Yar'Adua on June 25, 2009 with effect from August 6 to October 4, 2009 (The Guardian, 2009). This paper therefore seeks to examine the place of adult education in the Amnesty programme for national development.

Meaning of Amnesty

Amnesty is derived from a Greek word *amnestia* meaning forgetfulness. It is therefore defined as a grant of general pardon or as a general pardon granted by a government especially for political offences (freedictionary, 2011). In international law, amnesty is defined as the act of effacing and forgetting past offences granted by the government to persons who have been guilty of neglect or crime (Encarta, 2009).

In this context, amnesty is a pardon granted to members of all militant groups who have been involved in different nefarious activities that made the nation looked insecure and uncondusive for foreign investment which impinged on the growth and development of the nation's economy and which also dragged the nation's international reputation to the mud. It is an unconditional pardon granted to all persons who directly or indirectly participated in committing offences associated with militant activities in the Niger Delta as well as all persons presently being prosecuted for offences associated with militant activities (Compass News Paper, 2009).

The Content of the Amnesty Programme

Amnesty in Nigeria was a brain child of the Technical Committee on Niger Delta which was inaugurated on September 8, 2008 by then late President, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. The committee among other things recommended amnesty for militant groups which shall proceed from disarmament through demobilization to reintegration into the Nigerian society (DDR). It had two phases of grant and acceptance of the offer and the post amnesty phase. The first phase included the disarmament and demobilization while the post amnesty phase included reintegration, and hence, amnesty has disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes as its content (interagency coordination report, 2009).

Disarmament Programme

This is a process that involved comprehensive ways of recovering arms, ammunitions, explosives and allied equipment from militants and preventing their recirculation in the society. The recovery of arms through voluntary action and free-will on the part of the militants and engagement of stakeholders was the desired methodology for this exercise. At the end of the disarmament period of 60 days, 2,760 guns of different caliber, 287,445 round of ammunition, 18 gun boats, 763 explosives and 1,090 dynamites caps were recovered (Wikipedia, 2009).

Demobilization Programme

Demobilization which came after disarmament involved registration and gathering of necessary information from those who have voluntarily surrendered their arms, ammunitions and explosives otherwise referred to as ex-militants. The purpose of this phase is to prepare the ex-militants for reintegration into the normal society through developing in them appropriate skills, provision of appropriate education and entrepreneurial supports. Steps to ensure effective realization of the purpose of this phase included among others: opening of camps, admission of ex-militants into camps, documentation, production of identity cards for the ex-militants, counseling and training on non-violence behavior for the transformation of lives of the ex-militants and classification by medical experts (allafrica.com, 2008).

Reintegration

This phase involved reintegration of the ex-militants in social and economic spheres of society. The process was to be handled through government institutions and programmes with the participation of stakeholders including the civil society groups. It focused on social and economic initiatives necessary to encourage the ex-militants to develop and deploy their potentials into more lucrative and sustainable economic ends. The integration team placed the ex-militants on any school and skill acquisition

programme of their choice based on the outcome of the counseling and classification report (allafrica, 2008).

The amnesty office has successfully placed a total of 17,500 out of the 26,358 ex-militants who accepted amnesty and have been enrolled for degree and vocational skills acquisition training programmes in Nigeria and abroad (Pointer, 2011). The vocational and technical training programmes include: seaman training, welding, aviation, computer technology, leadership training, marine technology, entrepreneurial skills, information technology, employment/placement opportunities development activities and so on.

The recommendations of the Technical Committee on Niger Delta for effective realization of the content of amnesty programme according to Mosop (2008) are to:

- a. establish a credible and authoritative DDR institutions and processes including international negotiators to plan, implement and oversee the DDR programme at regional, state and local government levels;
- b. provide for open trial and release on bail with a view for eventual release of Henry Okah and others involved in struggles relating to the region;
- c. grant amnesty to all Niger Delta militants willing and ready to participate in the DDR programme;
- d. address short term issues arising from amnesty to militants by promoting security for ex-militants and rebuilding of communities destroyed by military invasions;
- e. work out long term strategies for human capacity development and reintegration of ex-militants;
- f. reflect on a time-line with adequate fund for the DDR programme to take place;
- g. stop the illegal demands put on youths from the region by prosecuting the suppliers of small arms and light weapons and also those involved in oil bunkering by identifying highly placed sponsors of violence for economic and political reasons;
- h. exclude from amnesty and criminalize the activities of those militants not committed to the DDR process and unwilling to surrender their arms;
- i. ensure that signatories to the DDR programme show clear commitment to the entire process.

National Development and Amnesty Programme

This section does not attempt to discuss development in details with reference to all associating arguments from different scholars in development studies. It attempts to bring to the fore the generally conceived meaning of development in order to understand the extent to which militant activities affected the development of the Niger Delta region in particular and the nation in general.

Development, according to Indabawa and Mpofo (2006) is defined both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively, development is seen as growth in Gross National Product, Gross Domestic Product and Per Capita Income of any nation. This Growth is expected to quantitatively lead to the provision of infrastructure and utilities such as potable water, electricity, schools, primary health clinics, roads, bridges and recreational facilities (Rogers in Indabawa & Mpofo, 2006). In defining development qualitatively, Akinpelu (2002:80) focuses on human beings whom he referred to as the target of development processes rather than material accumulations surrounding him nor of the economic progress and growth of any nation state. He conceived development as:

A process of changing the personality, equipping it with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to conceive, design, and carry out his/her own self-development. It involves liberating him/her from all inhibitions (social, economic, political and cultural) that prevent him/her from realizing the best potentialities in him/her; enhancing his/her knowledge, skills and attitudes; boosting his/her self-confidence, self-reliance, self-pride, and poise to face the world, and of his/her creative potentials and sense of freedom and readiness to participate in any matters involving self and/or the environment.

The ultimate of this type of development is “transformation” or “fundamental change of consciousness” – a change that goes to the very root of the personality (Freire&Nyerere in Akinpelu, 2002).

Development conceived only from one perspective stands on one limb. That is, it is incompletely, unholistically and erroneously conceived because qualitative paradigm of development should lead to quantitative paradigm of development and vice-versa. This implies that economic prosperity of any

nation should be able to improve the quality of lives of the citizens of that nation in terms of provision of human needs such as food, shelter, quality health delivery system, potable water, safety and security, quality education and so on. It is on this note that Indabawa and Mpfu (2006) defined development as “transformation both socially and materially”.

From the glimpse understanding of what development is, one will not be wrong to say that what is called development is lacking in the Niger Delta region and by extension, most states of the federation. This region lacked federal attention in terms of provision of potable water, good roads, electricity, hospitals and clinics, good schools and so on. In this region, people live in a dehumanized state with their environment gruesomely degraded. Abject poverty is still showing on the faces of the inhabitants of the creek areas of this region. This scenario made the youths of the region to embark on arms struggle and agitations in search of the ideal solution to their problem. This arms struggle affected negatively the economy of the nation as well as the negligible seeming aspects of development that were trickling down to the region as many companies deserted the region and rate of production of crude oil per day drastically dropped. The environment of the region was also dastardly degraded through the illegal bunkering activities of the militants as well as their conscious vandalization of oil drilling platforms of many oil companies in order to provoke the Federal Government of Nigeria. It was in the bid to stop the activities of the militants in order to attract investors to boost the nation’s economy that the idea of amnesty was conceived and granted.

The Pointer (2011) articulated specific benefits of the amnesty programme to include the following:

- a. oil companies and associated companies reopened shut-in wells. Thus, Nigeria’s combined crude oil and condensate production increased from less than 2 million barrel per day to currently 2.4 million barrels per day (ibtimes.com, 2011);
- b. the construction of the popular East-West road abandoned due to militant activities had resumed and work is currently ongoing;
- c. kidnapping activities in the core Niger Delta states has drastically reduced to the barest minimum;
- d. oil bunkering and pipeline destruction has also reduced considerably;
- e. crime rate also has declined to a manageable degree in the region;
- f. the LNG company’s reputation as a reliable supplier of LNG was restored;
- g. contractors handling development projects in the region were given adequate security to fast track their efforts so as to assure sustainable development in the Niger Delta;
- h. the amnesty office has successfully placed a total of 17,500 persons in degree and vocational skill programmes in Nigeria and abroad (Pointer, 2011); and
- i. federal presence is gradually been felt in the region. For instance, the citing of a branch of central bank of Nigeria in Bayelsa, Delta and other states, the Naval Logistic Command in Bayelsa and Delta states, Federal University Otukeke and Nigeria Law School etc in Bayelsa state.

Negotiations are on between the presidency, state governors and foreign investors to invest in Nigeria. There is definite hope that when all these negotiations are concluded, investors come in to invest, job opportunities will be created for teaming unemployed youths.

The Place of Adult Education in Amnesty Programme for National Development in Nigeria

Eheazu (1998:4) noted that adult education in recent times has been misconceived to mean night school by many who lacked understanding of its meaning and nuances. This is the reason it is important to clarify its meaning here in order to enable us delve comfortably into the roles it could play to forestall the emergence of dissident groups such as militants in the Niger Delta region in order to advance national development in Nigeria. In his effort to clear adult education of its misconception, Eheazu (1998) sees it as “some specific functional training/vocational programmes required by adults (who now constitute the illiterate, unskilled, semi-skilled or semi-professional labour force) to remedy not only their educational deficiencies but also meet the needs of their various occupations whether as farmers, artisans or employees of corporate/private organizations”. He went further to define adult education as “any form of alternative education that would reorientate them and modify their attitudes in order that they embrace new and progressive ways and actions that would improve their income,

living standard and contributions to societal development as well as bring about in them desired changes in their behaviour.” Nzeneri (2008) defines adult education as any education given to adults based on their social, political, cultural and economic needs and problems to enable them adjust fully to changes and challenges in their lives and society. It all encompasses all education and training activities undertaken by adults for professional or personal reasons (Nnazor, 2005:530). According to Barikor (2002), adult education is:

Any form of educative experience engaged in by people who are chronologically mature, socially responsible and mentally alert or deficient but eager to meet their specific needs. These may include intellectual need, occupational skills, socio-economic responsibilities, professional competencies and even self-fulfillment or self-actualizing needs, to improve themselves, by developing their knowledge, insights, tastes, attitudes and skills.

To Mbalisi (2010:59) adult education is “any educative and purposeful learning activity organized for adults to initiate them into a new way of life by providing them with relevant skills, competences, knowledge, information and attitudes required to excel in that aspect of life”. Looking at the relevance of adult education from the national development perspective, Nzeneri (2002) maintains that adult education trains manpower at all levels in the areas of needed skills and knowledge to increase output, changes people’s behaviour and attitude towards work, productivity and profit making. Adult education programmes under which trainings and development are organized for the adult beneficiaries include community development, entrepreneurship, civic and peace, literacy, remedial and consumer education programmes (Nnazor, 2005; Nzeneri, 2002). It is now clear and understandable that all the federal government programmes as has been identified in this discourse which are designed for the ex-militants are adult education programmes.

All the definitions of adult education given above have “adult” as a common concept. This calls for a need to explain briefly who an adult is. A lot of definitions of adult abound. But the one given by Bown and Tomori in Eheazu (1998:18) is considered more appropriate in this discourse. According to them, “an adult is a person (man or woman) who has achieved full physical development and expects to have the right to participate as a responsible home maker, worker and member of society. From the definition of who an adult is, it would be agreed that members of the various militant groups are adults for whom adult education programmes are designed.

The fundamental principles, desirability, nuances and concepts embedded in the definitions of adult education given so far in this discourse buttress Eheazu’s (1998:4) affirmation that “adult education is not a Night School”. It is an alternative and/or intervention education designed to take care of illiterate non beneficiaries and dropouts of formal education who would be susceptible to any kind of lure into any of the militant groups. It could be understood that the former militants were lured into the militant activities because of most of them are illiterate, semi-literate, unemployment, unskilled, semi-skilled and have their minds not positively developed and inclined towards national development. They found themselves idle and therefore useful to all kinds of the unlawful activities to which they are exposed. If adult education programmes should be well planned, it will go along way to impart skills into the participants (who are adults) and engage them into some lawful activities they could do with the skills they have acquired. When these adults are engaged, they are disorientated from participating in nefarious activities that would hamper national development. By this, emergence and proliferation of militant groups and their engagement in unlawful activities would be forestalled.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

What constitutes key functions of adult education as contained in the definitions given by Eheazu (1998) and Nzeneri (2002) have links with the elements of development as x-rayed by Akinpelu (2002). Adult education in all its ramifications is relevant and remained appropriate for re-integration of the ex-militants into the social, political, cultural and economic life of the country. It is also appropriate to develop and engage the unemployed in one socio-economic activity or the other to prevent them from embarking on activities that will hamper the overall development of the country. Adult education is therefore a veritable tool for implementing the federal government’s amnesty programmes for national development.

The problems adult education suffers in Nigeria could be traced to its misconception by the leaders of the country. This led to poor funding, low recognition as both a strategic goal and a tool for national development, poor policy framework and so on. It is high time political leaders in Nigeria give adult education adequate attention, considering its relevance to national development. Government agencies involved in public enlightenment should always collaborate with adult education departments in Nigeria's higher institutions in getting the public informed of the importance of government's policies (such as fuel subsidy removal) before their implementation. This will help secure wide acceptance of the policy by the general public. More adult education institutions for technical/vocational skills acquisition should be established while already existing ones should be expanded, empowered, revived and well-funded for efficiency and effectiveness rather than travelling abroad when needs such institutions would have satisfied arose.

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