

NOMADIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: USING ENGLISH TO FOSTER COMMUNAL PEACE AND ENHANCE THE EDUCATION OF THE HERDSMEN

Dan Chima Amadi PhD

Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT: *The importance of nomadic education cannot be over-emphasized. The neglect of any segment of the population as experience has shown in the Niger Delta Region of the country is a potential time bomb. If they contribute significantly to the nation's economy, only time can fuel discontent and ignite their agitation. Education is the birth right of any Nigerian child and this right has been enshrined in the nation's constitution. This paper address the importance of the nomadic education in the country, their contributions to the nation's economy, the importance of English language in the promotion of mutual understanding, reduction of communal clashes between nomads and their host communities and the enhancement of the National Policy on Nomadic Education.*

KEYWORDS: Nomadic Education, English, Peace, Lineage, Community, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The education of the nomads ought to be seen as an important exercise considering their strategic position in the nation's economy as the major supplier of protein. The onslaught of the insurgent group, Boko Haram in many parts of northern Nigeria has made suppression of any group a dangerous exercise. The cheering news of the establishment of Alma Jiri schools in the northern states of Nigeria and the attendant success thereof make the promotion of communication with the group a national imperative. The rampant clashes between nomads and their host communities have been traced to poor communication as many of the herdsmen could barely communicate in English. As Nigeria has over two hundred tribes and languages, the itinerant nomads find it difficult to communicate with the other ethnic groups. Changes in world economy marred occasionally by animal disease (like the mad cow disease in Europe), education within the nomadic population should be enhanced to respond to these changes. Literacy and numeracy will help them to read and access the internet to know not only how to prevent these diseases but also the sale of their products. Effective English communication will be a great asset.

Studies so far conducted on the history of nomads in Africa reveal that with the exception of Somalia, nomads are in the minority wherever they may exist (Adamu, Kirk-Green: 1986). In Nigeria where they spread out in the Savanna Region, even when they constitute about five million of the 120 million of the population, they are still in the minority. Their numerical strength notwithstanding, they contribute about 95 percent of the 12 million cattle in Nigeria (Adamu: 1991). Of the nomadic groups, the cattle Fulbe, also known as Mbororo form the largest group. The important role played by the Fulbe can be seen in their being the major supplier of beef, mutton, hide and skins, hoof, horn, dung for manure, bones, cow urine used in the production of medicine etc. Satisfying about 95 percent of their compatriots protein needs, they are undeniably an important segment of the nation's economy. The "janjali" tax which they pay should further elicit pity and consideration in the distribution of amenities which they are unfortunately denied.

It might be necessary to make a distinction between nomadism and pastoralism; terms sometimes used interchangeably which portray the Fulbe as possibly the only nomadic group in the country, the only ethnic group the National Policy on Nomadic Education in Nigeria hopes to address. The term pastoralism includes all migratory groups dislocated by ecological and occupational hazards that are deprived of a settled home. The fishermen, thus though not rearing cattle are all nomads if they live itinerant lives and have no land holding rights (Aminu: 1991). Nomadism on the other hand as a term is used to signify the activities of an itinerant group who drive their cattle to pasture. In a sense, pastoralism is more inclusive, encompassing pastoral character, fashion, cult and mode of writing of the group.

Literatures so far consulted appear not to stress the singular importance of English in the success of the National Policy on Nomadic Education as one of the most important instruments for its propagation. English Language is the gateway to communicate the Western Education which the policy hopes to advance and the final settlement of the group. Without playing down on the importance of the local or indigenous languages, English as the lingua franca of the country has tended to give all the over 250 tribes and languages a medium of communication to freely interact without threats of domination. We may have to blame the centrality of the language on our past historical experience with colonialism, but the situation has become a permanent feature of our national life.

The National Policy On Education of 1981 has given succor, cover and legal teeth to the Child right on Education by calling it the birthright of every Nigerian child and that which must be brought close to the environment of the child. The National Population Commission in Nigeria describes a literate child as the one who has the ability to read and write in any language. Thus, if the Fulbe can read and write Arabic, he is literate. The kind of education the National Policy on Nomadic Education, to my mind, which is being advocated, is the Western Education which the present curriculum in our educational system handles. The medium of communication in this system is English.

It need be said that Nigeria is not the only modern state in the world where nomadic groups exist. Apart from the Fulbe in Nigeria there exist such groups as Keyam, the Arab, the Badwai, the Buddun, the Azbenawa and their dark Buzzu (Aminu: 1991). Indeed, the nomads have been found in all parts of the world like the Aborigines of Australia, the Massai, the Gypsies and Tinkers in Britain. Other areas they could be found include Kenya, Uganda and in all countries where they do not have settled population.

Efforts not directed at incorporating the nomads into the conventional school system where English is the official language will only complicate issues. Education must be seen to have a goal apart from self-development and worth. The goal is that the nomads must be made to be seen as belonging to the Nigerian nation and protected by the nation's constitution. To exclude them from the programme of the country will merely aggravate the tense relationship already existing between them and their host communities. To restructure the educational system is an effort to accommodate him. Just like the schools built for the Almajiris in the northern states of Nigeria, the nomads can be educated through the shift system; that is the movement of the school as they move their cattle in search of pasture. As the school moves with them, they will have a rest of mind to learn and attend to their flocks.

Another way to accommodate and teach the nomads is to make the programme an evening affair where the nomadic teachers come and teach them at the period of their rest. The distant education approach has been advocated where materials can be sent to them and they learn at

their leisure. No particular time is fixed. They determine it themselves. The one teacher and koranic teacher approach can be tried. The presence of the koranic teacher builds confidence as the teacher impacts his education. Several approaches have been adopted but it is advisable that each state or locality models itself to a pattern which proves most effective.

The best method to educate the nomad is to settle him, to give him a permanent abode where he can be located and taught. It has been argued that the Grazing Law of 1965 (NRL Gazette No 4) enacted by the Northern Region was not only a hindrance but that the Land Use Decree of 1978 (Supplement to Official Gazette Extraordinary Number 14) has further distanced the nomad from settlement and grazing areas. In his attempt to survive, his movement of cattle into private farms has provoked communal clashes. The impetus to provide land for settlement purposes is the business of government, but the will to imbibe education must come from the nomads; for the simple reason that it is not enough to be in the classroom but that the child must show the willingness to learn. But this can be supplemented through stiffer legislation for both child and parents to ensure the overall success of the programme. The 1987 blueprint produced by the Federal Ministry of Education ought to pursue this angle further. Part of the nation's constitution prescribes duties and responsibility for both the state and the citizenry.

Arguments against nomadic education

These arguments include:

1. Impracticability of the programme as they have no permanent abode.
2. It could create second rate education.
3. Separate education is unnecessary as special education already exist in the present school curriculum in Nigeria.
4. The need to pursue settlement policy first before nomadic education.
5. The nomads themselves are disinterested in formal or Western Education.
6. They have been gainfully employed while their counterparts with long certificates roam the streets in search of jobs after Western Education.
7. Past legislation has produced no useful result.
8. Government is not likely to enforce the policy as experience has shown.
9. It is an avenue to waste public funds.

Problems confronting the nomads

To give good and qualitative education to the nomad, the problem surrounding his existence need be appreciated. It has already been stated that lack of land holding right and permanent settlement are his foremost problems. Solving these problems will ensure his security as well as grazing grounds for his cattle. Although many of them carry weapons about them, they are victims of unfriendly societies who view them with suspicion and abhor the deployment of their herds to people's farmland. Rapes of unprotected women working in farmlands have been bandied about against them and where offenders exist nomads are lumped together and vilified.

Moving about under very harsh climate, the intense sun and the bitter cold, made prey of tsetse flies, mosquitoes, snakes and other wild beasts, his physic reflect the hostile realities and agitation around him. Although he is a harbinger of nutritional values, he is ever malnourished. With no one to cook for him, he eats intermittently and depends largely on wild fruits. Sometimes games come his way but because he is ever on the move, he sells them off at paltry sums; being not in a good position to strike a fair bargain. The children born to him suffer the

same fate and his wife is often deprived of nuptial love. With all these absent, modern amenities are clearly beyond him, good roads are constructed without him in mind, or medical facilities for his family, himself and his herds. Reviewing the whole idea of nomadic education, Hamidu Alkali has this to say:

Mobile schools are being mentioned, where and when precisely these classes will be held? Where will the teachers be housed? How many will sacrifice life, even from the most backward of villages and adopt and adapt the life of a nomad, in order to teach him the three RS? Where, and when is the nomad child or adult, men or women to be educated will precisely, be found? How far will mobile schooling go? How about education beyond literacy and numeracy? In the usual way, we are beating the shadow and leaving the substance. Settle the nomad first and then give him the same type of education as available to the rest of Nigerians. By settling him he will feel that he is also a Nigerian. His children will grow in the same environment as other children. He will have other facilities and to other good things of life.

The above is clearly a realistic submission but education can go on simultaneously with their settlement. The nation cannot wait until they pose the kind of problem like in the Niger Delta Region.

Hard facts about the nomads

It is an undeniable fact that the nomads in Nigeria are by no means a poor group. They possess rich herds that are convertible to cash. What the nomad in his early twenties possesses may amount to millions of Naira while his counterpart in the university cannot boast as much. Except for the occasional outbreak of disease, the nomad is economically empowered. He makes no pretense about it and is ready to fight on for his survival.

In advocating for his continuous funding, the man at the centre of its inauguration, Prof. Jibril Aminu has this to say about the economic status of the nomad, the need to educate him and the idea that the programme is not a waste of public funds: "Nomadic education is not a waste of public funds. Unlike the unproductive nomads of other lands, Nigerian Nomads are economically very productive. They are no beggars. All they need is to be shown the "light. They can fend for themselves in every way. Education will only serve to increase their productivity which is so important to all of us. After all, it is sometimes stated that sustained development of human and livestock resources of the Mambilla Plateau alone can supply the livestock requirements of the whole of West and Central Africa" (1991:3)

SOLUTION/RECOMMENDATION

The very first effort ought to be teaching the nomad communication skills to enable him strike a good bargain in the sale of his cattle. In many cases, intermediaries are used which could be both defective and unprofitable. Herein then is a ready and handy tool to enable him reach other nationals who continuously depend on him for their protein.

As it is difficult to immediately provide instructional classrooms, charge critics have been using to discourage government interest in the programme, claiming that the nomads must

first be settled before they can be educated; it might be advisable to locate the shifting schools to conventional sites-places where public schools exist. This could cut cost and serve the same end. The nomad could begin his gradual integration with the sedentary population from there. Sighting other children being instructed, both boys and girls the need for his education can be more realizable.

The alternate school attendance might be another good step that can be advocated for the nomad. Since they are usually in group of two, three or more, they could split while one group tends the cows, the other group attends classes. In the evening while sharing their experiences, they would see the immense benefits of Western Education.

To pursue this goal further, government could commission literature where the nomad could read about characters that successfully combined education and nomadism. This guided art is for his formation. As he grows in education, particularly when he begins to read English Literature, his horizon will be wider. The teaching of English should be accompanied by literature texts as in conventional schools in Nigeria.

Legislation has been introduced but not rigidly enforced. Like on the national program on immunization, the national policy on nomadic education should be pursued with the same vigor. Such attractive incentives like school meal program, free education etc. can be introduced.

Telecast system has been suggested but efforts need be made for him to follow his education in English so as to reach the wider world. Both radio and television can be used. While he can carry his radio about and many of them do; government has to provide other modern facilities like good roads, water and electricity.

The use of power point and mobile cinema can be used to teach the nomads English and other subjects can be taught through this medium to accommodate large groups.

The grazing reserve law of 1965 must be revisited and fully implemented to enable nomads have access to land and grazing areas to encourage their settlement. Nomads should be encouraged to build permanent abodes, which will not only give them a sense of belonging but earmark a place for the useful, progressive and result oriented children they have to leave behind when they die. Gradually through inter-tribal marriages, many of them could be assimilated into the local population. The constitution of the country guarantees free movement and association in all parts of the country.

In conclusion, the nomad need be introduced to a global and competitive economy through a language that can help him in his quest for a better life, security, good health, better communication, water supply, legal rights and balanced diet. English will best serve these purposes. Language can help in promoting peace, reduction of civil strife and communal clashes. The time to pursue this policy vigorously is now.

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