

REPOSITIONING ADULT EDUCATION TO ADDRESS YOUTH RESTIVENESS IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examined how adult education can be repositioned to address youth restiveness in Rivers State. The study was anchored on John Burton Human Needs Theory. The key instrument for data collection was Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in three Local Government Areas in Rivers State. The views of experts in the field of adult education through interviews were also used to complement the experience and personal observation of the writer. The findings of the study revealed that the causes of youth restiveness include illiteracy, poverty, unemployment and insincerity of the community leaders and the activities of the politicians. The author concluded that adult education if repositioned can address youth restiveness and other emerging issues in the society. Based on the findings, the writer recommended among others that adult education objectives, scope and curriculum should be revisited to address the developmental needs of the youths and that adult education agencies as a matter of urgency should form a synergy with other stakeholders to reposition adult education practice for greater relevance.*

KEYWORDS: Adult Education, Repositioning, Youth, and Restiveness

INTRODUCTION

Youth restiveness in the Niger Delta region has inundated both the local and global press and become a subject of concern in public discussions in the past few decades. It has attracted the interest and sympathy of researchers, activists, development experts, analysts and the international community among others. The youths accused the Nigerian government and multinational oil conglomerates of neglect and underdevelopment of the region. They also decried the degradation of their environment through the exploration of crude oil and gas by the multinational oil conglomerates. Consequently, they have agitated for increased intervention and development and greater participation in the control of the derivation of the resources from the oil rich region.

In the early years of these agitations, the youths expressed their grievances through peaceful demonstrations, blocking oil companies' gates and locking workers out of their offices. That was the time of Isaac Adaka Boro and later Ken Saro Wiwa were leading these agitations. They also organized press conferences and granted interviews to the press. Sometimes they chased oil workers out of their facilities and prevented them from carrying out their duties especially in the field locations or oil rigs. The agitators were well educated with sound intellect and were able to put their grievances and demands across. The agitations attracted the attention and sympathy of the press especially the independent ones, environmental activists, the general public, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and international community that they all joined to condemn the insensitivity and neglect of the government and the oil conglomerates to the

situation in the Niger Delta region. This wide support from external bodies may not be unconnected with the obvious injustice, intimidation, marginalization, and inequity perpetrated by the government on the region which is characterized by unprecedented poverty, hunger, illiteracy, unemployment, environmental degradation and general underdevelopment.

These agitators later metamorphosed into militant groups whose activities include kidnapping or hostage taking of oil workers especially expatriates, blowing of oil pipelines and illegal oil bunkering. The agitators formed themselves into different groups with different identities. The government employed the use of force by the military and other security agencies to call the youths to order but that did not stop them. The situation became worse after the 2007 election until the federal government introduced the amnesty programme. Amnesty was declared on all members of various militant groups who may wish to give up their arms and embrace peace.

Since after the 2015 general elections, the restive activities among the youths in the Niger Delta especially in Rivers state have taken a different dimension. Cult groups usually formed by the youths have sprang up at all the nooks and crannies in the region. In some parts of the state the youths fight themselves, kidnap and rape women, kill perceived opponents and innocent people including women and children, destroy properties and displace many others. Some community members have abandoned their homes and are taking refuge in neighbouring communities that are less volatile. Some colleagues from these areas, like Emohua, Ahoada, Omoku and some parts of Ikwerre hardly visit their communities for fear of being kidnapped or even killed. Presently, Iwaje community in Ogba/Egbema Ndoni in Ekpeye kingdom is deserted, about twenty houses were razed down because of a fight that ensued between the police and some youths. Lewe and Bormu in Gokhana Local Government Area of Ogoniland have also been in turmoil in recent times that left some parts of the area deserted.

No meaningful development takes place in a conflict prone area because as Ugwu (2013:204) noted, during conflicts, there is inadequate cooperation among community members, absence of outside support, inadequate participation of community members in community development process and lack of fund among others. Without interaction and cooperation among community members, community development cannot take place and there can hardly be outside support as development agents are scared to enter into conflict zones.

Information gathered on the course of this study shows that most of the youths involved in these dastardly acts have little or no education and they are recruiting the younger ones into their cult groups. Supporting this assertion, Uriah, Ololube and Egbezor, (2015) affirm that most of the people involved in restive activities in Rivers state are school dropouts, who were sent out of school for poor academic performance and few others who had certificates that could not get them employed in a highly competitive environment. This is also supported by a study by Adieme and Abraham (2016) which reveals that the aggregate completion rate for a full course of primary school for boys in Rivers state was 66%. The Ministry of Youth Development, Rivers State notes that the long neglect of the youth development sector has resulted in youth restiveness, militancy and unemployment (NSRP, 2017).

These revelations call for the reorientation of the youths through adult education to raise their consciousness on the ills of their activities on themselves, their communities and the society at large. A lot has been written on restive activities in the Niger Delta and Rivers State in particular but not much has been done on repositioning adult education to address the issues, hence the need for this study.

Problem Statement

Restive activities in some parts of Rivers State have resulted in the death of many people, displaced some others and retarded community development in recent times. Literature, experience and observations show that the youths involved in the dastard acts are unemployed, lack skill and education. It is only education that can give the youths the capacity to change their social economic circumstances and the capacity to moderate how they express their grievances and channel it in a more civilized manner to the appropriate quarters. They also need education to be equipped with skills that can make them self-reliant and independent. Adult education which is mostly non-formal in operation and with multifaceted programmes will take care of these learning needs and change the attitude of these youths in the desired direction. However, adult education the way it is organized in Rivers State cannot address these issues. It is more of literacy programmes, has little or no attention from the government and mostly urban based to the neglect of rural communities where these activities mostly take place. The few existing literacy centres are organized by individuals most of whom are not adult education specialists or experts. It is against this backdrop that this paper proposed a repositioning of adult education in Rivers State to be able to address youth restiveness and other related issues.

Adult Education

Adult education has been defined in different ways by different scholars. This arises from the fact that it is a world-wide programme engaged by people of different backgrounds be it academic, socio-economic, political, cultural and so on. People define it based on what prevails within their immediate environment (academic, home, work and so on) and their accumulated life experiences. For instance, it has been seen as literacy education in developing countries like Nigeria where illiteracy level is high. This has affected its practice because it has focused so much on literacy education. However, the definition changes as the scope expands. According to Okedara in Ugwu and Mbalisi (2016), Adult Education is a process whereby persons who no longer attend school on a regular and full time basis (unless full-time programmes are especially designed for adults) undertake sequential and organized activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in information, knowledge, undertakings or skills, appreciation and attitudes or for the purpose of identifying and solving personal or community problems.

This definition did not take cognizance of the people who never had the opportunity of the formal school system. However, adult education continues to expand its scope as changes occur in the society. In this vent, Nzeneri (2010:10) defines it as “any education given to adults based on their social, political, cultural and economic needs or problems to enable them adjust fully to changes and challenges in their lives and society”. This means that the type of education given to the adults will depend on their own needs. Expanding on the former widely accepted definition by UNESCO in 1976, UNESCO in its General Conference in 2015 adopted a more detailed definition of adult education. The new definition distinguished three areas of skills and learning thus:

- To equip adults with literacy and basic skills
- To provide continuing training and professional development
- To promote active citizenship through community, popular or liberal education

These areas capture the educational and learning needs of all categories of people in the society. The three distinguishing areas of adult education is reflected in (Ojo, 2013 and Fajonyomi, 2013) where they stated that the role of adult education is multidimensional and one of the building blocks of human development. Ojo affirms that without persistent adult education, the continuous agitation for genuine democracy that will be built on genuine democratic culture will not be achieved. This he says is informed by the fact that the younger generation of Nigerians is already imbibing the negative values of counterfeit democracy, the most fundamental of which is government by falsehood and pretext. Adult education can re-orientate the youths to have a different mindset on how to put their grievances across to their leaders and the government. It was this form of education articulated by Paulo Freire that was used to resolve development crises and accentuate democracy in Latin America which had similar developmental crises as Nigeria (Patrick, 2013). It is only through adult education that we can address the real problems of the society, including power sharing, wealth creation, illiteracy, violent conflicts, gender and health issues.

Youth Restiveness

African Youth Charter defines a youth as “every person between the ages of 15 and 35”. However, for the purpose of this discussion, let us adopt the definition by National Youth Policy of Nigeria which says that “a youth is a young person between the ages of 18 and 35”. It defines youth restiveness in Anasi (2010) as a sustained protestation embarked upon to enforce desired outcome from a constituted authority by an organized body of youths. According to Ejumudo (2014), it is an engagement by youths in agitation for the restoration of their rights and dignity or self-seeking and criminal activities. This definition suggests that there are different reasons for restiveness by the youths. The agitations by the youths in Rivers state as mentioned earlier have changed from genuine agitations to that of self-seeking and selfishness. Otherwise, one can hardly explain the atrocities that are perpetrated by these youths in recent times. What is happening in Rivers state can better be described as unlawful or illegal activities by youths on innocent members of the community to express their frustrations caused by themselves and the society which they found themselves.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on John Burton Human Needs Theory and Karl Marx Differentiation and Revolution Theory. The Human Need theory developed in the 70s is based on the premise that humans have basic needs that have to be met in order to maintain stable societies. These needs according to Abraham Maslow include human basic needs like food, shelter, clothing etc., need for safety or security, social needs (love, affection and sense of belonging), self-esteem needs and self-actualization. These needs are in hierarchical order; as one is met, the need for the other arises.

John Burton then popularized this theory and posits that aggressions and conflicts are the direct result of some institutional and social norms that are incompatible with inherent human needs. He believes that there are limits to which people can endure or conform to these institutions and norms (www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijpsvol31/cover31.htm). Burton affirms that the society must adjust to the needs of the people if there must be a stable society.

This theory is related to the study because conflict is caused by aggression which in turn is triggered when actors seek to meet a need or some needs as seen in the causes of restiveness among youths in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in three Local Government Areas comprising Emohua, Ikwerre and Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni. The choice of these local government areas was informed by the high incidence of restive activities in those areas. They also house large number of oil wells in Rivers state which accounts for the high level of conflicts in the areas. The key instruments for data collection were Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interview. Three focus group discussions involving 30 respondents of ten (10) youths in each group were conducted. Some of the youths have been involved in one form of restive activity or the other. The first focus group discussion which was held in Aluu community in Ikwerre Local Government Area consisted of youths from Aluu, Isiokpo and Ubima communities. The members of the second group from Emohua are indigenes of Elele-Alimini, Rumuekpe, Ogbakiri and Ibaa communities while the discussion was held in Elele-Alimini. The third group who are from Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Areas comprised youths from Egii, Omoku, Erema and Akaboka, while the discussion was held in Akaboka. The choice of the communities where the discussions held was informed by the relative peace in those areas at the time of the study to enable full participation of the respondents.

The discussions were based on the causes of youth restiveness, the characteristic of youths involved in restive activities and the impact of youth restiveness on the people, the communities and the society in general. The researcher was assisted by two Master Degree students of the Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education who taped and recorded the discussion to enable the researcher who led the discussion to maintain eye contact with the discussants or respondents. Three lecturers who are from Aluu, Omoku and Emohua were also interviewed.

On the aim of the study which is repositioning of adult education to address youth restiveness, three adult education experts – two from the Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education, University of Port Harcourt and one from the Agency of Adult and Non-Formal Education, Rivers State were interviewed to get their views.

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

The study reveals that there are similarities on the causes of youth restiveness in the various communities in the local government areas studied. The major causes according to the respondents include: unemployment, illiteracy and poverty. They noted that majority of the youths in those areas are unemployed of which majority of them dropped out of school and the ones that managed to complete secondary school do not have skills that could fetch them means of livelihood or

employment. The unemployment that was caused by illiteracy and lack of skills contributed to their poverty and lack of basic necessities of life which they now seek to acquire by all means. This relates or agrees with Burton's Theory of Need which affirms that as long as certain needs are not met in the society, there will be no stability.

Another cause as revealed by the three groups is the insincerity of the community leaders. They noted that when the oil companies pay compensation to the communities, the community leaders have the greater share for their personal and their family use rather than using it to develop their communities. It was also revealed that sometimes when oil companies want to build infrastructures or communities, some of the community leaders would rather prefer cash which will not go beyond their pockets thereby impoverishing the poor communities more. They also neglect the youths who agitate for this compensation.

The attitude of the oil conglomerates was also condemned because they dole out monetary compensation to the youths instead of giving them education and other skills that will enable them become self-reliant. Once the money finishes, they fall back on whatever they can lay their hands on like, stealing, kidnapping, armed robbery and other vices.

It was gathered from the colleagues from the areas studied that parents in this restive region have not lived up to their responsibilities of bringing up their children in a proper way. Most of the youths involved in restive activities had very poor upbringing. They stated that the quest to make money or get rich quick was also responsible for the attitude of some of the youths. They dropped out of school to make wealth without education and skills and found themselves getting into all kinds of social vices in the name of making money. They also noted that politicians armed these youths with dangerous weapons during elections to fight their opponents and rig elections but could not retrieve these weapons after election and could not engage them in any meaningful venture hence they now use the weapons to terrorize innocent people including those who gave them the weapons. The respondents also stated that the undue recognition given to wealthy people without recourse to the way and manner the wealth was made has sent wrong signals to the younger generation who now try to acquire wealth by all means.

On the characteristics of the youths involved in restive activities, it has been noted earlier in this paper that majority of the youths involved in restive activities are unemployed. It was gathered that majority of them dropped out of school. Some of them could not complete primary education, some also dropped out of secondary school while some that managed to go beyond secondary school came out with very poor results. This corroborates the findings of Uriah, Ololude & Egbezor (2015) who noted that youths involved in restive activities are school drop outs. It also agrees with Adieme & Abraham (2016) who found out that there is 66% aggregate of completion among primary school boys.

On the impacts of youth restiveness, it was revealed that many people have lost their lives, some displaced and properties destroyed thereby impoverishing the communities more. Some of the communities have been deserted and this has affected the livelihood system in the areas thereby causing more hunger and sufferings for people. The people that are still living in their communities are living in fear of being attacked. Companies and government establishments are closing and

relocating. Recently, a branch of Zenith Bank in Omoku was closed down because members of staff of the bank were being kidnapped. They also revealed that no development projects are put in place and the ones on ground have been destroyed. This agrees with the finding of Ugwu, (2013) who noted that in conflict situations, no meaningful development takes place. All these worsen the poverty situation of the people in the areas.

Repositioning Adult Education to Address Youth Restiveness

To reposition as used in this work is to put something in better perspective. It means that something is wrong with the practice of adult education in Rivers state presently. Adult education as practiced presently has too much emphasis on literacy education which is though the foundation of all learning but just one programme in adult education. The paper suggests repositioning it by giving more energy and fusing more activities and programmes into the practice for greater relevance and output. Below are some of the suggestions made by some experts in the field of adult education on how to reposition adult education to address youth restiveness and other emerging issues.

Interview with the Former Executive Director, Agency for Adult Education & Non-Formal Education of Rivers State, Evangelist Emma Ogbu.

Findings from the interview reveals that prior to the assumption of duty as the Director in November 2015, the Agency was almost moribund. However, within few months of his assumption of duty, he revitalized the few adult education centres on ground and created new ones, thus bringing them to a total of two hundred and fifty- eight (258) centres with about 10,490 adult learners in various communities in Rivers State. These centres are mainly involved in basic and post literacy programmes. According to him, UNESCO assisted in training the facilitators and providing some reading and writing materials for the learners.

On whether there are other programmes that can directly address youths' learning needs and other emerging issues, the Director stated that six vocational skills have been planned for which have not taken off due to lack of materials. These vocational skills are: Poultry and Fish Farming, Fashion Designing, Catering Services, Cinematography and Video Production etc, Hat, Soap, Disinfectants and bleach production and Paint Production. He noted that he was still at the process of getting the allocation meant for the programmes from the state government. The Director stated that the agency cannot do it alone and would approach other agencies for collaboration. Among the challenges facing the Agency are as follows:

- Inadequate office space, the agency is attached to a primary school with few rooms that do not accommodate the workers
- Lack of fund to pay UNESCO counter-part funding to pay about 411 facilitators' stipend
- Inadequate training for Agency staff
- Obsolete and outdated equipment.

Interview with Prof. I.S. Nzeneri (Professor of Adult and Non-Formal Education, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State)

On repositioning adult education to address youth restiveness, Prof. Nzeneri noted that experience in the field of adult education shows that adult education has failed to achieve what it intends to achieve because of the methodology used by facilitators who are mostly volunteer workers who are not experts. He also said that the learning was mostly centered on literacy which may not address properly the needs of the learners. The experts will use the right methods and materials to help the learners achieve their expectations.

He further said that the experts will do a need analysis of the youths' interests and expectations and incorporate with the societal needs to design the curriculum that will meet the learning objectives of the youths. Prof. Nzeneri also stated that the developmental tasks and roles of any individual depends on the stage the individual finds himself. The youths are neither adults nor children, so their learning should reflect the stage they are in life to address their developmental tasks and roles. The society he noted emphasizes on entrepreneurial education and adult education with its rich programmes is a veritable tool for entrepreneurial education in the society. With the expertise ideas, the youths will be able to acquire the knowledge, skills and resources to enable them achieve self-reliance and reduce restiveness. There is also need for collaboration among stakeholders like governments, oil companies, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and leaders and experts from institutions to address the issues in adult education to make it worthwhile or reposition it.

Interview with Dr. G. Adekola, a Lecturer in the Department of Adult & Non-Formal Education University of Port Harcourt and Director, Nomadic Education Centre, University of Port Harcourt.

Dr. Adekola as an expert in the field of adult education with many years of experience noted that adult education has been seen as mass education that focused on literacy and functional literacy. He noted that adults are restive themselves and also need education to address the issue. Youth restiveness is an emerging issue and should be handled with other emerging issues in the society. On repositioning adult education to address youth restiveness and other issues as he observed, there is need to expand the frontier of adult education and in doing this, the objectives, scope and curriculum studies of adult education should be revisited and the scope expanded to include all the changes that have occurred in the society over time.

The facilitators in adult education centers should be retrained and monitored regularly to meet up with the trends in the society. For this to be done, adult education planners should form a synergy with all the agencies that are involved to properly address the emerging issues in the society including youth restiveness. These agencies should include those in peace and conflict studies, community development and other organizations to integrate adult education in their programmes and activities.

Infusion of Adult Education Programmes into Literacy Education for Greater Relevance

It has been adduced that one of the major reasons for the failure of adult education is over emphasis on literacy education and the neglect of other programmes. This has made adult education to be seen as only literacy by people who are not properly informed about adult education and its scope.

Below are some adult education programmes that when infused into literacy will equip the learners with information, skills, knowledge and attitude to enable them identify and solve their needs, those of the community and the society in general.

Family Life Education

This is education that promotes the growth and general well-being of the family. It is education that guides individuals and families to improve their interpersonal relationships. Children and youths can learn to improve their relationship in the family, with their peers and outside world. The family being the first major agent of socialization is an institution where the members of the family can learn to live in harmony with one another and learn to respect the sanctity of human life. They should also learn the need for hard work and consequences of greed and other moral values. If they learn these values from home, it will be difficult for them to waste human lives they way they do in recent times. Contemporary family life education centers more on learning about family rather than learning in the family. It means that it can be a programme outside the family. It can be in the community common meeting place, church, school or other learning centres. Contents of family life education can also be incorporated into community education programme. Family life education can also be run as professional course but emphasis here is on programmes outside the formal school system.

Skills Acquisition

Education can only be useful to individuals when such education is functional –that is when it is applied to everyday life to solve individual and societal needs. For instance, literacy can only be functional when it is applied to acquire skills for self-reliance and independence. Acquiring skills and becoming expert in it will make an individual economically independent to eliminate hunger and poverty. People with skills will not only have employment but create same for other people thereby reducing unemployment.

Adult education is at the fore front of entrepreneurial education hence its emphasis on non-formal education. Adult education centers should emphasize skills acquisition which can run concurrently with literacy education and other programmes. Skills like tailoring, bead, bag and hat making, auto mechanic, GSM repairs, make-up artistry, and so on, thrives and are very lucrative and can give people self-reliance. Skills acquisition will also remove the attention of young people from crime and some other vices and make the communities safe from conflicts.

Peace Education

In view of the volatile nature of some communities in Rivers state arising from poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and lack of skill and unemployment, there is need for peace education. Peace education refers to the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavioural changes that will enable children, youths and adults to prevent conflict and violence and create the conditions conducive for peace (Fountain, 1999). Peace education can be taught in communities using experiential learning and role play to send down the message of peace. People learn better through life experiences. Cinema in the community can also be used to show community people especially the youths the consequences of violent conflicts and the need to live in harmony with one another. Some recreational activities should also be organized during peace

education to promote healthy competition and foster cooperation among community people and enable them manage conflicts as they arise.

Leadership Training

The findings of this study reveal that some of the conflicts and restive activities by the youths are caused by the failure of some community leaders to provide good leadership or governance to the people. This calls for leadership training for all intending leaders. Just like can be found in Latin America, leaders should pass through some training to equip them with the skills to enable them provide good governance. The contents of the programme should include, leadership by example, people management, team building, conflict management, managing resources, community development and other areas that promote good governance. With these the leaders and the led especially the young ones see leadership as service and not a position for acquisition of wealth and property. With this notion, it will be difficult for the leaders to use the youths to foment troubles in the community.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has established that youth restiveness is a threat to the stability of Rivers state and challenge to community development and by extension national development. It has also revealed that the major causes of restive activities by the youths are illiteracy, lack of skills, unemployment and insincerity by the political class, oil companies and some government officials. The paper concludes that adult education with its various programmes is a veritable tool that can address the ugly trend with other emerging societal issues if repositioned or revitalized. Based on these findings, the writer recommended as follows:

- Adult education objectives, scope and curriculum should be revisited to address the developmental needs of the youths in Rivers State
- Peace education and citizenship education should be made compulsory at all levels of formal and non-formal schooling to reduce tensions in communities
- Adult education agencies as a matter of urgency should form a synergy with other stakeholders like community leaders, Community based and Non-governmental organizations and Philanthropists to reposition adult education practice for greater relevance
- Adult education experts and practitioners to market and promote adult education profession to attract attention from government and other stakeholders for greater sponsorship.

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