Formal Education with Entrepreneurial Touch: A Reengineering for Transformation of the Niger Delta Situation

Prof. Ojakorotu Victor

Abstract
This paper discussed how the nature and character of education available to Nigerians in the Niger Delta Region have for long contributed to, and, over the years, aggravated rather than ameliorate the agitation over resources, and how the diversification towards entrepreneurial development can act as a long term solution to the crisis. This came from the background that a concrete source of agitation in the Niger Delta is the unending demand for paid employment by the youth; with which the multinational oil companies cannot, as they claim, cope. In a qualitative exploration of literature, the paper assessed the Niger Delta Situation and held concluded that while the multinational companies must employ Niger Delta indigenes as part of their cooperate social responsibilities, there must be a systematic introduction of what gradually reduces dependency on the companies and ultimately transforms today's job seekers of the Niger Delta to tomorrow's petty employers of labour; as well as business partners of their former employers. It is on this basis that entrepreneurial education for the youth is recommended.

Keywords: formal Education, Entrepreneurship, Niger Delta, Transformation

Introduction
Youth restiveness, agitation as well as militancy have for over the years characterised the Niger Delta area of Nigeria and neither the Nigerian state nor the international community has been able to handle the problem. The problem has endured since the Isaac Adaka Boro’s declaration of the Federal Republic of the Niger Delta in 1965, in what was called the Twelve day Revolution. While the Adaka Boro's declaration could not be said to be violent, the restiveness in the Niger Delta today is what the youth have resorted to in order to "back up or press further the demands of the indigenes for a fairer deal in the crude oil business" that take place in their land (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2008).

In response to the problem, the Federal Government of Nigeria has taken several steps in terms of policies and practices. All of the policies have however not been able to address the situation, making the problem of almost intractable. One thing however stands consistently right: the ability of all committees, panels and commissions set up by the government so far, to identify the need to engage and empower the Niger Delta youth for themselves so that they would stop looking on to the oil companies for employment and support. It is the
consistency of this issue that provides explanation for why the government of President Musa Yaradua’s instituted the Amnesty programme in 2008.

One of the pillars of the Amnesty Programme includes taking the militants for professional training abroad. While this is a form of education based solution- because it recognises the need to train and educate the irate youth so they can be positively engaged - something is however wrong with it: youth taken for such trainings are spread across the world to take different professional courses (medicine, accounting, law, engineering and so on) from different countries of the world: the United States, The United Kingdom, Germany, Italy France and other. The trainings they have abroad may not be directly adaptable to the social needs of their Niger Delta environment and Nigeria as a whole. Besides, with such courses they are still prone to seeking employment from the already choked oil companies and other formal organizations when they return. Besides, though trainings are arranged for them in advanced countries of the world, it may be difficult to synergise the purpose as different countries have different orientations to professional courses. Consequently, years after the amnesty programme and its training mechanism, the problem in the Niger Delta continues.

This is why the current paper proposes Formal Education with Entrepreneurial Touch as the model of training needed for the Niger Delta youth. In what immediately follows here, the paper explores the nature and character of the Niger Delta problem and the solutions that have been fashioned to it so far by scholars, activists and policymakers. Of all the solutions the paper singles out the educational; that is, that which is based on some form of training or the other, within the broad spectrum of the overall Nigerian educational system. The lacuna discovered is that there has not been such education based solution that is tailor made for the youth of the Niger Delta and how to address their situation. The paper explores this lacuna to build a model so referred to as Former education with entrepreneurial touch, and recommends that its implication will go a long way in solving the problem in the Niger Delta.

The Niger Delta Crisis
The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, rich is the mineral resources of oil, has for a long time been tumultuous due to youth militancy and restiveness that manifest in the forms of disrupting the social and economic activities on of almost all actors in the oil industry, especially the multinational oil corporations and their allies in the Nigerian government. While this is no news as a host lot of scholars have asserted, Abraham (2011) emphatically warns of the consequences of the dangerous dimension of hostage-taking of Nigerians and foreigners who work with the multinational oil corporations. Abraham suggests what he calls functional education as a panacea to the prevailing situation in the region (2011:2). Indeed, the restiveness, military and violence have for long hindered the smooth operations of the multinational oil corporations through bunkering, pipeline canalization, kidnapping and hostage taking as well as destruction of oil installations. Let pause and ponder.

The key reason for violence has been that the environment of the people of the Niger Delta region is being destroyed daily by the operations of the multinational oil companies, and the destruction of the environment in turn destroys the source of livelihood of the people. As this all negative scenario continues, it has been noted that in spite of complaints and campaigns advanced by local and international organizations - aside from those of the Niger Delta people themselves- successive governments in Nigeria appear to have remained insensitive to
the plight of the people who “in spite of their phenomenal contribution to national wealth, remain the poorest in all regions of the country” (Aaron, 2005). Aron goes further to assert that "No region in Nigeria's history had ever been so rich in resources, yet so poor (Aaron, 2005); in a situation where the multinational oil corporations appear unmoved by the condition of the people who live in almost absolute penury in which potable water and electricity remain elusive. Yet, officials of the multinational oil corporations 'sink boreholes in their flow stations and other production sites, have uninterrupted electric power supply and flare excess gas which could be used to better the lots of the rural poor Niger Deltans'.

Apart from the Adaka Boro's scenario referred to in the foregoing, the defacto trial and killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni leaders by the administration of General Sanni Abacha due to their involvement in the fight against environmental degradation and other injustices through the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People, MOSOP, was another problem the Niger Delta situation inflicted on Nigeria. That assassination attracted international attention and earned Nigeria several sections from the international community. Also in 1999 administration of General Olusegun Obasanjo as civilian President of Nigeria, about a thousand soldiers acted under the president's instruction to launch real war weapons that included rocket launchers and armoured vehicles to attack the Odi community in search of a few erring youngsters who had purportedly attacked the soldiers a few day before (Eseduwo, 2008). That scenario, which today is popularly called the Odi Mascara, and described by Tari (2001:16) 'as using a machine gun to kill a housefly', is another tumour of created by the Niger Delta situation. In them all, the youth are actively involved either as suspect of violence or target of state response.

In a bid to address this problem, however, many scholars have proffered many solutions and the Nigerian state herself has implemented several policies, either through government trying to gain legitimacy, or under other circumstances. The solution preferred by Abraham (2011) focuses on the actions and inactions of the multinational oil corporations that work in the Niger Delta. Abraham advises the companies to "turn a new leaf, and discharge their corporate social responsibilities to oil bearing/producing communities with honesty and sincerity" He stresses that this they must begin by ploughing back directly to these communities a reasonable part of oil proceeds in making the environment safe and habitable, and that basic social amenities must be provided for the communities as a means of compensating them.

Other scholars have suggested what the government of Nigeria can do to resolve the situation, and, series of efforts have been asserted on the part of the successive governments that have been consistently pressurised to address the Niger Delta conflict. The efforts include but are not limited to setting up of countless commissions, panels and committees which tried hard to address the origin of the region's conflict and proffer enduring and sustainable solutions to it. The Ogomudia Report of the Special Security Committee on Oil Producing Areas of 2001, and the Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan of 2004 are expressive of both the government’s historical focus on trying to resolve the Delta conflict and its glaring inability to do so. There also was the Special Security Committee on Oil Producing Areas that was inaugurated by the government of Nigeria, at a time when all solutions continued to lack potency and the situation of security in the Niger Delta continued to deteriorate. In spite of the cogent and fundamental issues raised and solutions suggested by the committee, there was no tangible difference made as a result of what has been widely
noted as lack of political will from the Federal Government of Nigeria. There was even the 2004 Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan that was proposed by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) based on meticulous assessment of everyday yearnings and aspirations of the residents of the Niger Delta. It was another major attempt made to address the problems of the Niger Delta.

Furthermore, the Special Security Committee on Oil Producing Areas attempted a detailed package of mutually supportive, multi-sectoral and pragmatic measures that promised to address once and for all, the challenges of the Niger Delta and also explore the opportunities and potentialities offered by the region to the corporate benefit of the Nigerian state in forms of generating employment, creating wealth, empowering the youth, reducing poverty, as well as offering value re-orientations orchestrated by the expansion of the oil sector. It was also about the development of a social charter as well as the re-introduction of government reforms across the country.

While it can be taken that what the duo of the 2001 and 2004 attempts was an expression of the understanding of the Nigerian governments that resolving social and economic marginalization, dearth of basic infrastructure, social neglect, poor governance and other contradictions in the Niger Delta was an urgent issue, especially if it must be taken from the root. The solution is still farfetched, and several scholars have continued to explain this with issues such as lack of political will, weakness of state institutions and illogical militarisation of the troubled region (Davies 2010; Adeyemi and Adu 2012). In fact, Davies sweepingly declares that “Without first addressing militarism, there can be little hope that proposed economic and political initiatives made by the Federal Government would be able to take root and develop into solutions (2010:3).

Perhaps it was in a bid to achieve a paradigm shift from militarisation, and then delete the hindrances to development in the Niger Delta that President Yar’Adua in 2009 adopted the amnesty policy which was to last between August 4th and October 4th 2009. The amnesty offer and the disarmament exercise that would follow it were widely welcomed by the people of Nigeria as well as the international community. The policy was designed to disarm, demobilise and subsequently reintegrate the militants, making available for them some daily food allowance, monthly stipend as well as overseas educational and vocational training.

The Amnesty programme worked to the extent that it saw significant changes of positions by some militant groups operating in the region. For instance, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) made public her ceasefire in the month of January 2010: not up to a year after that the amnesty program was implemented. In the end however, the problem continued as not more than six months after, the same MEND proceeded to claim responsibility for two bombs exploding adjacent to a government building in the city of Warri. The group succinctly stated its position with the announcement that the “deceit of endless dialogue and conferences will no longer be tolerated.” This again was a failure on the part of the solutions offered by the Federal Government, and it further eroded faith in government and led to a renewal of violence.

It is this kind of perambulation, allegations, counter allegations as well as bridge of trust between the Niger Delta militants and the Federal Government of Nigeria that makes scholars shift from what might be called political solution to educational solution, and, for a long time
some forms of education or the other have been proposed as the panacea for addressing the problem of the Niger Delta. However, in order to be able to explore and appraise these education based solutions, it will be ideal to review the overall educational system of Nigeria, for which the Niger Delta is a part.

Adeyemi, Oribabor, and Adeyemi (2001) opines that the nation of Nigeria continually witnesses an array of rework and review of her educational systems since it became independent in 1960. It asserts that the post independence educational system was based on the British educational system which was nothing but what Walter Rodney (1973) would call 'education for underdevelopment' because it failed to promote the creation of a formidable workforce needed for the socio economic and political development of the nation. Adeyemi et al add that this "pave way for the 1969 curriculum conference that focused on the Nigerian children in Nigerian society with National policies on Education in 1977, 1981, 1998 and 2004; all with the prime purpose of ensuring that Nigeria get the kind of education that would solve her social problems and resolve her social contradictions" (2001:1). Adeyemi et al assess the entirety of the 6334, nomadic and distance learning systems of education and concluded that in all, they have not been able to solve the Nigerian problems.

After a painstaking assessment of nature and character of education in Nigeria, Okoroma (2006) concludes that although most educational policies are well focused, they however suffer effective planning, and this makes them difficult to implement. He adds that even at that, the society often over estimates the resources available for the implementation of the many educational policies ever formulated, making implementing them becomes unrealistic at the end of the day. Okoroma directly asserts that "Since educational policies are usually translated into plans before implementation, studies have shown that the costs of implementing such plans have often been under-estimated. Most educational policies have become stalled at the planning stage" (2006:7). He adds that never have dependable data been used in educational planning in Nigeria, so, effective implementation of educational plans has never been facilitated. At the end of the day, Okorocha laments, some interplay of politics and power often intrude upon and ultimately determine the implementation of educational policies, and, for a long period of time, this has not helped the country at all.

Okoroma further argues in what seems to re echo the popular saying that an idle hand is a devil's workshop. He claims that if and only if the schools in Nigeria, including the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in the Niger Delta, had had sufficient qualified teachers, youth restiveness in the area would not have escalated to the point it is as suggested by some studies that claim that these qualified teachers would have modelled the youngsters in the three areas of cognitive, affective and psychomotor, and, if done, it would make it difficult if not impossible to have the crop of militants we have today. Okoroma (2006) claims that students in higher institutions who, in hundreds, receive lectures hanging out of windows and doors cannot be expected to graduate out of the University without some form of recalcitrant behaviour, especially when they have the opportunity to compare and contrast their situation with that of other parts of the same country. He stresses that facilities such as classrooms, offices, laboratories, workshops, libraries, power, water and so on are basic requirements in every school system, and that these have been found to be grossly inadequate in most Nigerian educational institutions, ditto with the Niger Delta.
So, a host of scholars, activists and policymakers have called for a total disbandment of the present national educational policy on the ground that it appears esoteric and unworkable. Some of them posit a replica of a autochthonous educational system fashioned after those adopted by the Asian tigers for the youth in the Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole. It is in response to this kind of lacuna in the education of the youth that other scholars have coined the phrase functional education. According to Abraham (2011), functional education refers to "such that will equip youths of the region to compete favourably with their peers from within the country and beyond, for job placements. Abraham goes ahead to recommend this kind of education to the Nigeria Delta youths. It is however not clear whether Abraham refers to formal classroom education or informal education that can orientate and give reorientation to the people of the Delta.

Still in line with education based solution to the problem of Niger Delta, Chukweru- Amadi (2007) gives what can best be called a consultative approach to the issue. Chukweru- Amadi is of the opinion that the irate youth in the Niger Delta, most of whom are in school or of school age, had not been involved in the policy solutions that the Nigerian governments have proffered so far, and that this explains why the policies almost always fail. Chukweru- Amadi therefore advises that since falling standards in academics and morals in school are connected to violent activities in the region, government and school authorities should consult widely with students when making policies affecting them. The author attributes the agitation to some form of cult activities and advises the use of guidance and counselling, moral instructions, and close monitoring of the socialization of the youth in order to help redirect their minds.

Evidently, at least from issues interrogated and explored so far in the foregoing, the Nigerian governments have not been idle on the issue of resolving the Niger Delta crisis. They have set up committees, panels, commissions and what have you - almost uncountable- to explain, explore and address the issues. Most of the efforts of the committees have culminated even in policies as well as political considerations. However, such policies and political considerations have often failed to resolve the problems for reason of politics and policies too. The rendition here is that some form of education is needed on the issue, and the education is for both the Nigerian state and its agents, the Multinational Oil Companies operating in the Niger Delta, and then the Niger Delta people themselves. It is in line with this kind of solution that the second attempts can be described, and this is why some scholars began to identify and teach each stakeholders in the crisis, what to do.

One scholar who worked in that direction is Abraham (2011). He for instance, in a bid to proffer solution to the problem, identifies and educates the Multi National Oil Companies, MNOCS, the Community and the State on what needs to be done on the Niger Delta crisis. Abraham declares that functional education is sine qua non if the Federal Government of Nigeria is serious and willing in terms of getting a long term measure for solving the problem of militancy and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. Abraham then recommends that the MNOCs should "build and equip primary and secondary schools in the region to international standards and then pay some reasonable allowances to teachers in the region to avert their attraction to other sectors as these will raise the quality of education in the region and make the youths adequately equipped to compete for jobs in the oil sector" (2011: 443) that they often prefer.
However, if, according to Zeilberger (1961, cited in Obanya 2003), seem to agree with other scholars that functional education is all that is needed in the Niger Delta, the functional education is then defined as “education that comes from the child's needs, and that uses the child's interests as a mechanism for activating him towards his desirable activities”; and if indeed, the "purpose of functional education is to develop the mind that acts from the wholeness of organic life, with relation to practical life in the present and in the future (Zeilberger, 1961, Obanya, 2003 in Abraham 2011), then for the Niger Delta, it cannot be just the general education. It should be certain form of education that is specially and autochthonously thought out in line with the peculiarities of the problems of the region, and that has the potency of preventing the youth from restiveness while integrating them to the dominant side of the society. Such education has to be formal - so that it can be systematised regularised and certificated; but must have a broad base of entrepreneurship, hence, what the current paper describes as Formal Education with Entrepreneurial Touch.

The Model: Formal Education with Entrepreneurial Touch

In spite of all failures and summersaults recorded from the policies and politics of the Federal Government of Nigeria so far towards resolving the issues of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta, one thing has been consistently right: the ability of all committees to identify the need to engage and empower the Niger Delta youth for themselves so that they would stop looking up to the oil companies for paid employment. This can provide explanation for why the Yaradua government's Amnesty includes taking the militants for professional training. What is wrong with this however, is that youths taken for such trainings are spread across the world to take different 'professional' courses such as medicine, accounting, law and engineering; from different countries of the world: the United States, The United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, France and others. With such courses when they come back they are still prone to seeking employment from the already choking oil companies. Besides, though trainings are arranged for them in advanced countries of the world, it may be difficult to synergise the skills since different countries have different orientations to professional courses. What is needed therefore remains Formal Education with Entrepreneurial Touch.

By formal education we mean some form of systematised, organized kind of leaning that is guided by some formalised curricula, and that often leads to the award of certain certificates that command formal recognition in a particular social formation. This is perhaps in contrast, or as a supplement to the non-formal type of education which, though also organised in some way, albeit not sacrosanct, yet does not have to be guided by a formally structured curriculum. In this kind of education, experienced and trained instructors are used. The ultimate target is knowledge for its own sake, and there may not be need for a formal certificate award Jeffs and Smith (2011). The other extension to the issue of education is the informal type. In this case, neither formal curriculum nor credits earning is required is needed. The teacher is simply someone with more experience such as a parent, grandparent or a friend. Learners rely solely on the experience of the teacher as the process of education continues. Jeffs and Smith exemplifies such skills as babysitting and child minding as the kind of education that can be called informal.

It is indeed, in the sense of the formal learning highlighted in the foregoing that the idea of this paper can be located. The education has to be formal, that is, that which is based on structured curriculum and that attracts a formal certification on completion. The second dimension to this is the entrepreneurial. Entrepreneurial education is that kind of training that
focuses on how to develop skills and attributes that make the learners realise specific opportunities available around them, explore the opportunity and do so for the purpose of profit making in the short run, and self reliance in the long run. According to Miron-Shatz, Shatz, Becker, Patel, & Eysenbach, (2014), one very common trend of entrepreneurial education is that it makes people identify new areas of ventures and follow them. In the United Kingdom, most programs offered at the university level promote entrepreneurial skills that relate to other degrees. This educational variety can be administered either by formally trained professionals or persons with entrepreneurial experience, and it is, more often than not, very engaging and motivational since the aim of the participant is to explore opportunities that will make create self-reliance and open up new opportunities. The model being built, by our proposal of Formal Education with Entrepreneurial Touch, therefore, is a kind of formally organised and ultimately certified training that focuses on how the youth of the Niger Delta can develop certain opportunistic skills and attributes that serves the purpose of profit making in the short run, and self reliance in the long run. Such training will be organised in Nigeria, matter-of-factly in the Niger Delta area, and regulated by Nigerians. The curriculum will be autochthonous, that is, derived from the social and economic needs of the people.

Conclusion
As the trouble in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria continues to decry solutions put forward by successive governments of Nigeria, military and civilian alike; and as it has become experiential that force and counter force cannot be used to address the problem, it has become important to engage in a complete re engineering of the solutions proffered so far in order to advance. Such re engineering is what this paper has done engaging in a critical assessment of the issues in the region, vis a vis the solutions that have been enthroned. The paper looks at what kind of solution has failed or promised to work, and where they can be amended to work. The paper joins other scholars who have canvassed for s education based solution, and specifically, formal education with entrepreneurial touch. It is believed that with such training, the youth in the Niger Delta will be more actively engaged and less likely involved in frivolity. Beside, the kind of education will expose them to ways of making money for themselves without relying on teh Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies. The federal government of Nigeria, as well as all other stakeholders in the issues of Niger Delta, including the international community, should immediately begin to put machinery in place to commence the model suggested in this paper.

References


About the Author,
Victor Ojakorotu is a Professor of International Relations who has worked globally in the area of oil and resource conflicts around the world. He is currently in the Department of Politics and International Relations, North West University, Mafikeng, Republic of South Africa.

Email: victor.Ojakorotu@nwu.ac.za

© 2017 The Author(s). Creative Commons CC-BY: This open access article is distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License. This permits anyone to share, use, reproduce and redistribute the work without further permission provided the person gives due credit to the work.