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## Peace Education and Sustainable Development in South-South, Nigeria

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### Abstract

This paper examined peace education as a catalyst for sustainable development in South-South, Nigeria. The rate of conflicts and violence has increased tremendously in Nigeria with the twist of militancy, youth restrictiveness, kidnapping and *Boko Haram*. This situation has made households, communities and institutions to relocate for safety and survival. The South-South zone of Nigeria, the area that holds the financial strength of the country due to her oil wealth, has steadily witnessed conflicts and violence since 2010 resulting in downward economic trend with its attendant consequences. This ugly trend has therefore made the demand for peace education imperative. Information was obtained through secondary source. The ideas and opinions on peace education and sustainable development obtained were analysed qualitatively leading to the conclusion that peace education is one solution to the problem of the South-South region of Nigeria, and with the suggestion that it should be planned and domesticated to inculcate the culture of peace in schools and national life.

**Key words:** peace, peace education, violence, sustainable development

### Introduction

The lexicology of *peace*, like other words, could be understood by bringing into picture its sociological synonyms such as safety, justice, equity, harmony and love; and its antonyms such

as conflict, war, envy, greed and hatred. These concepts create disparities in societies: primitive and civilized nations; underdeveloped and developed nations; violent and non-violent nations; corrupt and less corrupt countries. This composition explains why societies which tilt towards the synonyms of peace are likely to be more developed than crises-ridden societies. It is often said that no meaningful development can take place without peace. What brings peace is the understanding that the next person, group or nation deserves justice and equity. Is peace a fluid concept? Is it possible in Nigeria if we understand that the combination of justice and equity is the springboard upon which lasting peace is launched? These questions appear unanswered in the views of many Nigerians hence the justification for this paper as it attempts to capsule the variation of peace education that can enthrone the needed social mantra for development in the South-South Nigeria. This discourse is even more apt giving the open embrace which the maxim, “if you want peace, prepare for war” has gained among Nigerians especially agitators in her various regions. The situation is even worse when the choice of violence has a biblical backing as in “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force”, giving justification and impetus to agitation by violent means. This paper, therefore, specifically x-rays (1) the level of development in South-South Nigeria, (2) the level of violence in the region vis-à-vis the impact of agitations through violence, and (3) peace education as an alternative mediation mechanism.

South-South (Niger Delta) geopolitical zone is one area in Nigeria that has suffered brazen injustice in terms of sustainable development. In the words of Ijomah (2016):

From the very beginning of our contact with the West, the Niger Delta has been a major factor in the political economy of the nation. It is the sustainer of the nation’s economy, first, in the slave trade, second, in the palm produce trade, and now in the petroleum and gas trade. Yet, and sadly, the Niger Delta has suffered. Slave trade destroyed vast territories, destroying towns and villages; millions of persons who could have contributed to the development of Niger Delta were carted away into slavery. No eternity will be long enough to wipe away the horrors of slave trade. There is yet another horror. The consequences of oil industry to human, land and animal ecology are yet to be appreciated (p. 171).

The above opinion describes a picture of injustice and lack of sustainable development. According to Obisike and Iloma (2018), it was this scenario that instigated *The Green Niger Delta Initiative (The Niger Delta Report to the RIO+20 Summit: United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development)*. The report clearly states:

In many cases, the conditions of rural communities where crude oil is produced are deplorable, with severe environmental degradation, and no access to safe drinking water, electricity, health services and other social amenities. What an irony of fate? Therefore, considering the historical nature and magnitude of marginalisation and neglect of the region in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, it is the view of the BRACED States that there are currently insufficient precincts upon which to enthrone peace and sustainable development in the Federation (Fubara, 2012, p.5).

BRACED means Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Delta states. Six years after the submission of the above report, the zone has remained an endangered species. Similarly,

the report of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on the assessment of Ogoni in August 2011 further corroborates the injustices which the zone suffers. The report recommends to the Federal Government of Nigeria to begin a comprehensive clean-up of Ogoni land, restore polluted environments and put an end to all forms of ongoing oil contamination in the region.

Azad, Crawford and Kaila (2018) gave a preliminary report of level of violence in South-South of Nigeria between 2010 and 2017; a collaborative project of National Bureau of Statistics and World Bank. The study explained the extent to which conflict-and violence-related events affected households. Their report is presented below.

- There was a steady rise of violence in each year from 2010 to 2016.
- 22% of households in the zone were directly affected by conflict events or violence since 2010.
- 87% of the conflict events were attributed to criminals, cultists and individuals.
- 37% of the affected households had at least one member who was displaced or migrated.

They described the South-South zone in these words:

This area is renowned as Nigeria's source of oil wealth; widely perceived as the economic force driving Nigeria forward. Nevertheless, this resource wealth has not translated to economic success for most inhabitants of these states. Instead, the region suffers from ecological degradation as a result of oil spills, high rates of youth unemployment, and extensive inequality between local population and employees of oil companies (p.8).

The above described injustices play a major role in making the region a beehive of agitations, alongside the fact that the social nature of man makes him vulnerable to crisis, because he is constantly in competition with others in his environment. Again, over militarization of the Nigerian State has misled people to think that ethnic agitations can only be addressed through violent means, blood shedding, terrorism, kidnapping, vandalism, etc. Hence, Ijomah (2016, p.339) defined peace as "a suspension of conflict between or among people cast in social relations".

However, man's susceptibility to conflict could be reduced if the values of justice, equity and love are entrenched in society. These values are the nexus of education. According to Rank (2012), peace education is targeted at developing more peaceful societies, which also change culture of violence to culture of peace and it is a lifelong learning (from childhood socialization to adult education). Peace education would infuse in the society the culture of due process, respect for constituted authorities, respect for the laws of the land, and above all, it would inculcate an attitude of religious and political tolerance.

Accordingly, National Policy on Education, FRN (2008) clearly designates education as an instrument for peace and national development. There is the need for peace education to be fully integrated not only in the school system but also in the national life so that the social matrixes that engineer violence in society can be curtailed. Building on this connection, this paper sees peace education as a veritable tool for sustainable development in Nigeria. In sum, this paper aims to conceptualize peace education and sustainable development, and the

imperativeness of the former as one solution to the problem of the South-South region of Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper leverages on the functional role of education in conflict and crises management. Hence the sociological perspective of structural functionalist theory is as canvassed by Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons adopted here. The theory is basically concerned with the functions of education in the maintenance of social order. The functionalists see society as a whole which is sustained by its constituent elements such as the school, family, traditional institutions, etc. through their cohesive roles. School, for instance, should complement the roles of the family by transmitting core values and social control or the regulation of deviant behaviour (Haralambos & Holborn, 2004; Azikiwe, 2008). This paper is also anchored on the Social Learning Theory which holds that children learn social behaviour (e.g. violence) by observing others and imitating them. Albert Bandura and his associates demonstrated the power of social learning through a classic series of experiments. In one of their experiments, children replicated aggressive actions of an adult whom they had watched. This experiment gives support to the fact that violence begets violence; people learn by the simple process of watching others (Aronso, Wilson & Albert, 2010). Consequently, a child who grew up in an aggressive environment is likely to be violent. The same child has the potential to be peaceful if he grows up in a peaceful environment.

The foregoing discourse underscores the need for peace education to be fully integrated not only in the school system but also in the national life so that the social matrixes that engineer violence in society can be curtailed. Building on this connection, this paper sees peace education as a veritable tool in the fight against violent-related events. In the light of the foregoing thesis, the need to have conscience-driven approach towards realization of sustainable development in South-South of Nigeria has become inevitable, and is it achievable if education is retooled towards it?

### **Concept of Peace Education**

This is an education which is aimed at teaching students issues of peace, how they can resolve conflicts without resorting to violence. It inculcates the spirit of harmony, equity and justice by engaging the mindset of the learner to see victory through the lens of peace. Ekpiwre and Aliyu (2014, p.256) define peace education as “educating learners on the consequences of conflict and violence, informing them on the benefits of peaceful co-existence and imparting in them the skills and attitudes needed for them to prevent and resolve conflict peacefully, whenever it does occur”. In the words of Gumut (2012):

Peace education is the deliberate attempt to educate children and adults in the dynamics of conflict and the promotion of peacemaking skills in homes, schools, and communities throughout the world, using all the channels and instruments of socialization. It provides education for global security and focuses on direct, organized violence, particularly the institutions of war and armed conflicts, employing the framework based on recent theories of human security (p.165).

According to Rank (2012), peace education is targeted at developing more peaceful societies, which also changes culture of violence to culture of peace and it is a lifelong learning (from

childhood socialization to adult education). Peace education would infuse in the society the culture of due process, respect for constituted authorities, respect for the laws of the land, and above all, it would inculcate an attitude of religious and political tolerance. The peace education principles empower students with knowledge, attitudes, values and behaviours to live in line with themselves, others and their environment. Moreover, peace education will enhance the development of the necessary life skills to resolve situations of injustice, conflict and to disseminate the culture of peace.

The importance of peace education has been underrated and it is now overdue to integrate it into the national educational system as it plays a fundamental role in nation building. Indeed, since the youths form the pillars of society, they are the ones who will bring about a revolution, whether constructive or destructive. Thus, the teaching of peace education, which will allow them to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence, is a robust idea.

### **Peace Education in Nigeria**

The volatile situation in Nigeria, orchestrated by political tensions, ethnic militias, religious and tribal violent conflicts, underscores the importance of peace education as a catalyst for development. It is often said that no meaningful development can thrive in an atmosphere of acrimony and rancour. To state the obvious, there is a correlation between peace and development. According to Gumut (2012, p.167), “peace education is now the subject of UN policy, research and training by UNESCO, the Council of Europe and ministries of education; various universities throughout the world...” because conflicts have crippled global economy.

Consequently, it is necessary to domesticate peace education in the national curriculum to empower the future generation with the necessary skills to resolve issues of *Boko Haram*, militancy and other forms of violence. Their understanding of the notion of peace is very poor; to the majority of youths, violence is the only way to resolve conflicts and achieve their goals; and they do not consider, or even know, any alternative ways to approach the issues they are facing. As they grew up in environments that were encouraging violence; bombing of places or kidnapping people are not problems for them. The curriculum in which they have been educated can be qualified as dysfunctional since the education could not teach students to avoid resorting to violence. Therefore, there is a need to restructure the educational system of the country to integrate peace education that will help to prevent the youths from engaging in violent behaviours.

According to Akinyemi (2015), the goals of peace education in Nigeria are:

- to educate the students, in both primary and secondary schools, on the issues of peace, non-violence and tolerance and enable them to develop skills of active listening and critical thinking.
- to help the students to change the attitudes they have been taught by their parents towards the use of violence to resolve a conflict.
- to develop mediating and anger-management skills in students so that they can resolve issues.
- to present the consequences of violence on people and society and the non-violent approaches to resolve the issues.

- to help students improve skills that built their confidence and constructive attitude towards peace.
- to present to students constructive elements, and to have occasions to put their positive behaviours in practice through different exercises.
- to encourage students to see themselves as citizens of one single nation rather than to divide themselves along ethnic lines.

The above goals can be achieved by incorporating peace education into the school curriculum and taught alongside school subjects like Religion, Geography, History, Science, Social Studies, Literature, etc (Gumut, 2012). The values and attitudes for sustainable peace education according to Ogunsola (2005) and Aja (2007) are love, respect for others regardless of gender, age, race, class, nationality, appearance, physical and mental abilities; political and religious belief, commitment to social justice and equity so as to shun violence; empathy (that is understanding and accepting other people's views or standpoint); preservation of human rights, including the prime sacredness of life and liberty. Thus, peace education should be preached and taught to children and youths in their everyday lives by parents and older adults in the family, church, schools, workplace, market places and through the media.

However, since violent behaviours stem from the minds of the children and the youths or individuals via thinking (cognition); therefore, inculcating the values of peace education in the minds of children, youths and adults will bring a lasting and enduring solution to the menace of community-based violence and other forms of violent behaviour or activities.

### **Concept of Sustainable Development**

The concept of sustainable development can be viewed from different angles depending on the issue on which an author seeks to address, but its overall intention is to create balance in nature so that approaches to actualizing human needs do not result in far-reaching environmental consequences. The term, *sustainable development*, was first used by the World Conservation Strategy in 1980 and its most popular definition was given by the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, under the auspices of the World Commission on Environment and Development (Jhingan, 2011). According to the Brundtland Report, sustainable development is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Scott & Marshall, 2005, p.652). They further state that economic growth and modernization have been pursued vehemently by countries as "a means not only of satisfying basic material needs, but also of providing the resources necessary to improve quality of life more generally". Succinctly put, sustainable development focuses on creating awareness for safe environmental, social and economic activities.

The global community under the umbrella of United Nations' General Assembly at its 64th session reiterated that sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental aspects is a key element of the overarching framework for United Nations activities, and that there is the need to ensure a balance among economic development, social development and environmental protection as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development. It further states that sustainable development is an indispensable requirement for eradication of poverty especially in developing countries, including Nigeria, and that concerted efforts are required at all levels of government to achieve sustainable development.

Naturally, development is driven by one particular need, without fully considering the wider or future impacts. We are already experiencing the damage this kind of approach can cause, from large-scale environmental pollution crises caused by irresponsible industrialization, to changes in global climate. The longer we pursue unsustainable development, the more frequent and severe its consequences are likely to become, which is why we need to reeducate the society.

It is necessary for us to focus on sustainable development because of its broad advantages of meeting the diverse needs of all people in communities, promoting personal well-being, social cohesion and creating equal opportunities. Sustainable development provides an approach to making better decisions on the issues that affect all of our lives.

### **Relevance of Peace Education in the Sustainable Development of South-South, Nigeria**

As earlier stated, peace thrives in an atmosphere of justice and love. This condition of life attracts development in all ramifications. According to Olusegun (2014), peace education would assuage the spate of youth restiveness, ethnic and religious conflicts, communal and political violence in different parts of Nigeria, since appropriate informal means of inculcating moral values has failed. Kidnapping cases recorded in South-South Nigeria has made the region unsafe for investors. This explains why oil companies have refused to relocate their headquarters to the region despite government's pronouncements in that direction. As a result, the rate of unemployment has continued rise in the region.

Essentially, over militarization of the Nigerian State has misled people to think that ethnic agitations can only be addressed through violent means, blood shedding, terrorism, kidnapping, vandalism, etc. The concept of peace education is aimed at reversing this ugly trend. Therefore, it is crucial to positively engage the youths at every stage of their development. Starting from their childhood, the concept of peace should be explained to them, accompanied by presentation of ways to amicably resolve conflicts, and how such positive behaviour can benefit them for sustainable development. To state the obvious, this variation of peace education underscores practical entrenchment of dialogue in the life of the child. This can be achieved by encouraging and orientating teachers and students to engage themselves in the process of dialogue in decision-making and by so doing the society will be transformed, which is the purpose of education. This form of transformation makes the society less volatile, less unjust; its cognitive impact on the child will change his world view towards rights and agitations.

### **Conclusion**

The multifaceted nature of conflict-and violence-related events is one of the challenges facing the South-South of Nigeria. One way to overcome this challenge is to domesticate peace education by developing and implementing its curriculum in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. By this means, notions related to peace and the different ways of resolving a conflict without resorting to violence, the youth will grow up in a positive environment and will be encouraged to act for the good of the entire country.

### **Suggestions**

The foregoing discourse has established the interface between peace education and violence. This paper therefore affirms that peace education is a panacea for conflict-and violence-related events, and suggests that peace education should be planned and domesticated to inculcate the culture of peace in schools and national life. Specifically, peace education should be:

- 1 used as a tool to encourage and support students to discover their own personal potentials.
2. galvanized to help students develop practical concept of peace through all activities in school.
3. spread to youths and adults outside the confines of school in order to have a wider coverage, making it a national culture.
4. schemed to help students develop listening skills and to adopt a tolerant attitude towards others.
5. geared towards helping individuals to become good citizens and to respect diversity.
6. non-sectarian and non-religious in its nature.

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