

# PEACE EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*This paper was directed towards peace education as a tool for agricultural development in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. The author observed that everyone needs peace just like food, air and water. Various crises in the Niger Delta such as youth restiveness, oil spillage and government efforts at the eradication of militancy by the use of force have posed negative effects on the agricultural development in the area. The crisis is of high magnitude that peace education will provide a durable solution and enhance the rapid agricultural development in the Niger Delta area. In the paper, the author examined the significant roles of agriculture; the concepts of peace, education, peace education, development and agricultural development; the Niger Delta crisis and its impact on agricultural development, the importance of peace education; and the aims, objectives and contents of effective peace education programme. Recommendation includes the inclusion of peace education in the curriculum of all programmes across all levels of education; and rapid infrastructural development in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria by the governments.*

Agriculture is a key part of the Nigerian economy, and hence the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (2005) and Ukonze, Eze and Olaitan (2010) asserted that agriculture is one of the main sources of national wealth in addition to oil. Agriculture provides food (as one of the basic needs of man), employment to the unemployed, and raw materials to the industries. Wikipedia (2009) has observed that agriculture was the crucial factor which led to the rise of civilization in the husbandry and domestication of animals, cultivation of crops, creating food for the increasing human population. The branches of agriculture include: animal

production, crop production, agric extension, fish farming, bee farming, soil chemistry, agricultural engineering, soil science, among others.

Food scarcity can lead to susceptibility to diseases infection, retarded growth, poor intelligence quotient, malformation of some parts of the body, paralysis and even death. Indications of problems and shortfalls in the Nigerian agriculture started to emerge as from the first through the second decades of the nation's independence which is between 1960 – 1979 (Directorate for social mobilisation, 1987; Nwandu, 2002). These have led to the fall in the share of agriculture in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), increasing food supply short falls and rising food import bills, rising food prices, declining foreign exchange earnings from agricultural exports and in labour force required in agriculture.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Given the need for clarification, the concepts of peace, education, peace education and agricultural development were explicitly defined. According to Edikpa (2006), Olumokoro and Oyitso (2007); and Ominyi, Ogba and Igu (2009), peace refers to the presence of well being, social justice, gender equality and human rights characterized by trust, compassion, calmness quietness and justice. They added that peace involves non-violence, security, absence of conflict, strife and an absolute state of well-being.

Fafunwa (1974) in Okorodudu (2006) sees education as the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. Oyewole (2010) regarded education as an instrument for achieving social, economic, political, scientific and technological development.

With the idea of peace and education put together, there arise peace education. For Gumut (2007), Osan and Ekpo (2009), the concept of peace education connotes an effort to educate people in the dynamics of conflict and the enhancement of peace making skills in homes, schools, communities, and society at large using the channels and instruments of socialization. It provides education for global security and focuses on direct organised violence, specifically the institutions of war and armed conflicts, employing the framework based on recent theories of human society. Peace education initiates the idea of human dignity and human rights with specific reference to such values as economic equity, political undertakings, ecological balance and the formative principles relevant to international human rights standards. According to Akpan (2009), peace education includes different approaches which can transform the behaviours of people through the inculcation of desired knowledge, value, attitudes and skills for effective contribution to the cultural, social, economic and political development of their country.

The next important concept in this study is agricultural development. Agriculture is a specialised area of study concerned with the development and production of crops and animals including their by-products for human consumption. Njoku (1995)'s view of the idea of development means a process of harnessing and adapting the technology of industrial civilizations to achieve a high standard of living for the masses of the people, providing through it concrete solutions to the problems of poverty, ignorance, disease and food.

Aghadiuno (1997) views the concept of development to imply a socio-economic term. It is a kind of socio-cultural change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system in order to produce higher per capital incomes and higher standards of living through modern science and technology and improved social organisation. Development includes improvement in material welfare of the people as well as the eradication of mass poverty and its correlates of illiteracy, diseases and short life expectancy.

Development has several dimensions but its central focus is the achievement of the capability of satisfying the needs for food, health, portable water, shelter, clothing, education, defense/security, communication, energy and leisure. A society that satisfies these needs to a large extent in her citizens is regarded as developed. Akpomedaye (2002) has defined agricultural development as a progression from a lower and often undesirable state of agriculture to a high and preferred one. It is a process whereby concerted efforts are made to facilitate significant increases in agricultural productivity with the overall objectives of enhancing the incomes of the farmers and the nation and increasing employment opportunities.

### **The Niger Delta Crisis and its Impact on Agricultural Development**

The Niger Delta is a labyrinth of swamps, forest and creeks as well as huge crude oil deposits. It is located along the central coastland of Southern Nigeria (Ifovwo and Akpomedaye, 2007). The reports of the Niger Delta Environmental Survey (NDES) (1995) in Ifovwo and Akpomedaye (2007) indicated that the Niger Delta is Africa's largest Delta area covering a 70,000 square kilometres. About third of the region is made-up of wetlands and contains the third largest mangrove forest in the world.

According to Akinniyi (2010), the Niger-Delta territory of Nigeria comprises nine (9) states and 185 Local Government Areas. The States include Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa, Imo, Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo and Ondo States. The Niger-Delta is a great flood plain which covers a 25,640km<sup>2</sup> of the Nigeria's land mass. Ovwigho and Ifie (2004) asserted that the Niger-Delta region has been bedevilled by youth crisis and natural environmental challenges. Nwaubani (2009) and Ibeanu (2008) noted that the

most significant part of the crisis is as a result of agitation over resource control and complaints of socio-economic marginalisation which has assumed dangerous dimension of kidnapping of expatriate oil workers and prominent Nigerians, including frequent attacks on oil installations. These result in loss of lives, properties, incomes and stoppages of crude oil production, severe damage to the ecosystem of the environment, threat to aquatic lives and poisoning of drinkable water, destruction of infrastructure among others.

A study carried out by Akinniyi (2010) showed that the Niger Delta ecological region is a deplorable one. The oil companies' exploration activity in the area has led to air, land and water pollution. There are frequent oil spills, and gas flaring which constitute both health risks, hunger, poverty and a waste of resources. Alakpodia (1997) asserted that about 7 million Nigerians live in the Niger-Delta area and they suffer the brunt of environmental impact of production and pollution from other human activities that include agriculture, oil and forest resources exploitation as well as demographic changes. The climate is of tropical rain forest type but gas flaring from exploitation of oil in the area creates a particular microclimate around the gas flares. This calls for urgent attention as the health of the residents is in danger. This affects the manpower input in agricultural production. The soils of the area have been impoverished and generally low in nutrients as such agricultural production in terms of crops and livestock cannot be at its maximum output unless agro-chemicals are used which are relatively expensive.

Ifowwodo and Akpomedaye (2007) has summarised the effects of youth restiveness on agricultural production in the area to include destruction of farms/home, food poisoning, loss of manpower for economic development/mass death, loss of government revenue, including cost of replacing damaged properties, unemployment, food insecurity, damage of food crops and aquatic lives, livestock and food deterioration as well as destruction of general infrastructures. The above problems are of great significance that there is an urgent need for peace education. Peace education will promote rapid agricultural development as well as the actualisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) especially as regards the eradication of hunger and poverty in the Niger Delta.

### **Importance of Peace Education**

Agricultural production cannot be successful in an atmosphere of crisis. People need peace as much as they need air, food and water, for there can be no happiness without peace and the cardinal way to development is peace (Osam and Ekpo, 2009). Meizieobi and Meizieobi (2009) emphasized that the situation in the Niger-Delta area is ideal enough for peace education meant for the total citizenry of Nigeria. An attempt to inculcating citizens with cohesive social, economic and political values for harmonious

co-existence and raising of their consciousness of to internalize, should recognise that Nigeria is an indivisible geo-political entity, capable of achieving meaningful and effective nation building through the convivial aggregation of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria in the quest for building an articulate nation.

Edikpa (2006) reports, indicated that when student teachers are properly educated on social competency, peace values and attributes, they will in turn pass same to the young students in both primary and secondary schools. In the classroom, peace education aims to develop skills, attitudes and knowledge with cooperative and participatory learning methods and an environment of tolerance, care and respect. Ominiya, Ogba and Igu (2009) noted that the inclusion of peace education in the curriculum of teacher education involves the promotion of civil values; and when student teachers imbibe these values, they are ready to develop more cooperative relations and work collaboratively to achieve common goals.

Mezieobi *et al.* (2009) has summarised the importance of peace education to include promotion of national unity, creation of national awareness, stabilization of socio-political systems and for rapid national development. Peace education will also promote rapid agricultural development, and in fact, overall accelerated transformation, growth and development of all sectors of the Nigerian economy.

### **Aims, Objectives and Contents of Effective Peace Education**

Globally, peace education has been accepted as one of the main avenues of ensuring effective conflict resolutions (United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1998). The United Nations Organisation (UNO) (2000) reports showed that the broad aims and objectives of peace education include assisting the child to understand the ideas of peace and conflict, have insight into the nature and origin of violence and its possible effects on both victims and perpetrators with a view to equipping them with necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to prevent and resolve conflicts. The aims and objectives of peace education according to Harris and Morrison (2003) were to: appreciate the richness of the concept of peace, address fear, provide information about security systems, understand violent behaviours, provide for a future orientation, teach peace as a process, promote an idea of peace followed by social justice, stimulate the respect for life, and end violence.

The International Bureau of Education as cited by Nwafor (2007) recognised seven groups of values that formed the goals of peace education such as: values and attitudes related to human rights and democracy, cooperation and solidarity, preservation of culture, internationalism, the protection of the environment, and spirituality. The content of peace education according to Ikwumelu (1994) and Akuma (2009) include: respect for human rights; economic and social justice; culture and

peace; competition and cooperation; information, communication and peace; individual and collective defence; health and habitat; population studies; language of peace; and environmental pollution. It is expected that values, skills and attitudes will be inculcated in the learner to assist him in achieving peace culture. The contents should cut across all levels of the education system with the content developed to suit the age level of the learner.

### **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that peace education is of immense importance in the agricultural development of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and even beyond. Recommendations made in this paper should be diligently implemented to ensure a long lasting peace and rapid agricultural development in the Niger Delta.

### **Recommendations/Strategies to Use Peace Education as a Tool for Agricultural Development in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria**

The following recommendations are very essential as regard peace education as a tool for agricultural development in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria.

1. For the fact that everybody needs peace as they need air, food and water, peace education should be included in the entire curriculum at all levels of studies. That is, at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education, there must be peace education built in and tailored towards the age level of the learner. This should be done particularly in agricultural science and to all other subject areas in general.
2. There should be rapid infrastructural development in the Niger-Delta. This should include roads, bridges, water, health, production companies; agricultural products processing companies and marketing facilities and so on to open up the area for elaborate business activities.
3. Education training is the best legacy that can be given to anybody. There should be massive training of the Niger-Delta youths in various occupations. These include modern techniques in animal and crop production, processing of agricultural products, agricultural engineering, agricultural marketing, medicine, law, architecture, computer engineering and many other fields of study. This would make them to be gainfully employed in all sectors of the economy and prevent them from the idea of the idle mind being the workshop of the devil.
4. The Niger-Delta is the goose that lays the golden egg. As a result, sizeable percentages of all employable positions should be reserved for the Niger-Delta people in Nigeria governments.

5. The Niger-Delta oil exploration activities and crisis has resulted in air, water and land pollutions. The government of Nigeria and the oil companies should ensure urgent cleaning up of the systems. They should also give loans to the farmers in the area to improve on their farming businesses and raise their standards of living.
6. To promote agro-business in the area, the Federal Government through its agencies should provide the farmers with farm inputs such as fertilizers, farm tools and machines, improved and high yield crops and animals and chemicals at highly subsidized rates.

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