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ARTICLES

Alice Gabriel Etuk and Imaobong David Akpan: Child Rearing patterns and study habits of Home Economics Students in Public Secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area.

1 - 11

Cecilia E. Okon Ph.D and U. I. Archibong: teachers Ideological Beliefs and Student Achievement in Social Studies in Junior Secondary Certificate Examination.

12 - 16

Utin, Asuquo Yellow, Joseph Emmanuel Bassey and Akpan, Okoro Essien: Workshop Accidents, its severity and decree of Occurrence

17 - 24

G. J. Inyang and I. B. Ado: Teachers Variables and their Attitude towards Ecological Studies in Senior Secondary School Biology

26 - 32

Joseph Bassey Umoh and Uwe Augustine Nyom: Effects of Teachers' Industrial Action on Student's achievement in Mathematics in Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area.

33 - 41

Jeremiah Samuel Ph.D and Ojedapo David: Universal Basic Education and Curriculum Provision for the Physically Challenged in Rivers State.

42 - 50

Okotete S. Omoiho: Trend analysis of the Performance of Students in the Edo State Junior School Certificate mathematics Examination.

51 - 56

Udeme Timothy Akpan, Samuel Amos Ikpe and Christopher John Ndeh: School plans and Teaching of Introductory Technology in Junior Secondary Schools in Uyo Local Government Area.

57 - 71

Edet Okon Uko Ph.D: Quality Assurance of Teachers for Teaching Agricultural Science in Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State.

72 - 82

Dominic Albert Akpan Ph.D: Niger Delta: - Environmental Security and Sustainable Development beyond Oil

84

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NIGER DELTA: ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BEYOND OIL

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Abstract

For more than 50 years the region has witnessed atrocities meted to it as a result of oil exploitation. Oil exploitation is seriously propelling the degradation of the physical environment (ecosystem) through oil pollution and gas flaring. The physical environment has lost its utility. Before the discovery of oil the land and water provided means of livelihood through farming, fishing and lumbering. There was food security as both local staples and tree crops were grown. However, oil money to a large extent has changed the economy of the Niger Delta better than pre 1958. Many people have become very wealthy and standard of living improved, while majority are still wallowing in abject poverty and squalor. One day the oil will finish. After oil how would the Niger Delta look like – peoples living conditions, physical environment and economy? The paper, therefore, suggest that the physical environment (ecosystem) be rejuvenated and protected to provide room for farming by curbing oil spills and gas flaring, empowerment of youths through massive education, building and equipping health centres, work and develop bio-fuel technology to replace oil, wind energy be develop as alternative power; cottage and agro allied industries built to create employment; Oloibiri and other important oil production sites developed as tourist areas. The paper was historical analysis as methodology. The paper concludes that if Niger Delta is not given priority it deserves after oil wild conflict may ensile. Sustainable development beyond oil would be a plus to Nigeria and the Niger Deltans.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria Delta is an environment to watch. Since 1958 when crude oil was first exported from Oloibiri local and International attentions have been focusing on this region. Oil export has brought stupendous wealth for Nigeria but the over 12 million people of the region it is a tale of woes. The environment from where the nation's wealth is obtained has been physically abused and bastardized owing to the inhuman exploitation activities of multinational oil companies doing business in the region. The activities of these companies which is unregulated by the Nigerian State have left the region degraded and impoverished. The once forested environment has today turned to near scrubland-it is no longer what it used to be. Besides, the problem of the region is compounded by persistent neglect and abandonment.

Niger Delta is facing many problems, the most pressing which, needs urgent attention is hunger. Hunger is a fall-out of environmental (ecosystem) abuse resulting from oil

activities. The land no longer supports food crop nor fishing. The issue of environmental security was not taken seriously in Nigeria until the koko toxic deposition in 1988. At the international level the issue of land degradation was regarded as mean until the work of the Brundtland Commission of 1983. Brundtland Commission stimulated discussion on the environment in many countries and organizations including Nigeria. In 1989 the G7 also focused at length on the global environment at their annual summit in Paris, and since then organizations and governments have begun sponsorship of environmental initiatives (Porter and Brown, 1991; 1-2; Akpan, 2009:312). Now that oil is being exploited in the Niger Delta, the environment and people are worst off, when oil shall finish how would the region look like in Nigerian Project. The paper focuses on the concept of environmental security, state of the Niger Delta before oil discovery, problem of oil exploitation in the zone, and suggestion after oil.

The Concept of Environment

UNESCO defined environment as the physical and social resources available to in a given location for the satisfying of human needs and aspirations. The environment, therefore, comprises the land, water and other living and non living resources. By implication, an environment represents the total surrounding biological, physical, chemical and others impacting on the life and activities of man in his day to day interaction with nature (UNEP, 2005). Environmental security is explained as aims to protect people from the short-term and long-term ravages of nature, man-made threats in nature and deterioration of natural environment. In developing countries such as ours, lack of access to clean physical environment, access to clean water resources (in oil exploring and exploiting areas owing to oil spills, air pollution owing to gas flaring, global warming, are environmental security issue (United Nations Development Programme (1994).

Concept of Sustainable Development

This refers to economic growth that does not deplete resources and destroy ecosystem so quickly that the basis of that economic growth is itself undermined (Goldstein and Pevehouse (2008:386). Sustainable development here means people's interaction with the social, political, economic environments without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their needs (Alhassan, 2002).

Concept of Environmental Security

The 1970s saw the beginning of international summits on environmental issue, and a proliferation of international agreements on environmental issue. Thus the first major global environmental summit was the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment

(UNCHE) held in Stockholm in 1972. That conference invited a number of intergovernmental investigation meetings, and agreement on global environment problems. These meeting led into the investigations on development and common security, and culminated in 1987, in the World commission on Environment and Developments WCCD 1987 report titled our common future. The WCED popularized the theme.

'Sustainable development and', and introduced the theme 'environmental security' (Collins, 2007: 185).

In this connection, environmental security can be seen as being about the impact of human activities on the environment. Or often times it could also be interpreted to mean 'ecological security. Meaning that it is the ecosystem and ecological processes that should be secured, which the principal threat to ecological integrity is human activity. Human activity within the environment in turn affects the survival of man itself (Collins, 2007:188).

Economy of the Niger Delta Communities before the Discovery of Oil

The people prior to the discovery of oil lived on land and water. Put differently, their means of livelihood centred and sustained on agriculture, fishing and lumbering. There was enough food for themselves and exchanged with the nearby communities. In other words there was food security as the people grew yams, rice, cassava, vegetables, etc; they also grew tree crops such as oil palm, rubber, pears, etc (Helleiner, 1966:91-106; Iloeje, 1972:39-41; Ekundare, 1973: 180; Ndarake 2004). The people were self-employed since they engaged themselves in subsistence agriculture, fishing and lumbering and other trades. They were able to use the proceeds from their farms and rivers to sustain themselves physically and send their children to school or to learn trade. With the discovery and exploitation of oil in the late 1950s and now, the new economy totally dislocated the traditional means of livelihood of the people. The process of the dislocation is through frequent oil spills and gas flaring by oil companies into farmlands, rivers and streams. Thus farmlands, rivers and streams no-longer support agriculture, fishing is no longer lucrative. Apart from killing the aquatic lives fish caught usually smell oil and unfit for human consumption (Ndarake, 2004; Osagie, 2007).

Indeed, oil money has transformed some individuals within the region and Nigeria at large. The misery is that many Deltans do not have access to these transformations – no access to good roads, water, housing and even good food. They suffer from deprivations and effect of oil spills and gas flaring. Forests have turned to semi-scrubland. Conditions of living of the people are terrible. They have remained poor after many years of oil exploitation. Their frustrations have led to violent agitation and the need for them to control the resources in the region and then develop at their own pace. The question is, now the oil is being exploited

living conditions remain the way they are, what will happen when oil finally dries up? It is against this background that this essay is addressing.

Indeed, the environment is degraded on daily basis through oil spills and gas flaring. Few days ago, the minister for Environment John Odey informed Nigerians that between 2006 and 2010 Niger Delta has recorded about 3, 203 oil spills; and for gas flaring it is a continuous process (Odey, 2010). That is the State of the region. One can then imagined the tons of oil spilled into water and land since 1956.

Government's Efforts at Solving the Niger Delta Palaver

It is important to note that the Federal Government have been trying to address the spatial economy of this region since independence, but it would appear the political will was lacking. It may sound as conclusion, but far from it. Following Henry Willink Commission at the eve of independence and considering the peculiarity of the region, Niger Delta Development Board was established in 1961 to cater for the unique needs of the region. The commission achieved nothing until it crashed into oblivion during the civil war. In 1976 the Niger Delta Basin and Rural Development Authority came on board, and nothing to show. In 1981, the Presidential Task Force (PTF), allowed 1.5 percent of the Federal Account for the Development of the region. That too yielded no possible change in the region. Again in 1992, the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission OMPADEC took over from the PTF and yielded very little effort. In 2000, the Niger Delta Development Commission was established. NDDC was specifically mandated to develop the oil-producing areas with a clear mission to:

Facilitate the rapid, even and sustainable development of the Niger Delta into a region that is economically prosperous, socially stable, ecologically regenerative and political peaceful (Emordi and Azelaman, 2009:176).

Niger Delta after Oil: WAY FORWARD

Environmental insecurity and unsustainable development are panacea to conflict. The few years of militancy in the region aptly explains the condition that would befall it if measures are not taken to address the wrongs done to the region. Environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta has bred poverty, unemployment. The region and people need serious compensation for the years of injustice and to prepare them for the future when the oil shall finally dry up.

To avoid crisis and conflict and to make the Niger Deltans feel a sense of belonging within the Nigerian project after oil, the following need be done or suggested.

- Man is the centre of the environment. To maintain the physical structure (ecosystem) of the environment, it needs to be cleaned up or rejuvenated and protected to provide room for small and large scale farming. The people of this region before oil lived on land and water. The people grew local food crops and tree crops such as cassava, yams, plantains, oil palm, rubber, cocoa, coconut among others. They also engaged in fishing and lumbering. The region can still return and take her pride of place in Nigeria. This should be done by immediate curbing of gas flaring and oil spills into water and land. The people of this region should return to farming – fish farming, agronomy, animal husbandry, silviculture among others. Every farming sector is productive and sustainable and those to be involved require some form of training and supervision, besides they need some mobilization in the form of soft loans, modern farming tools or implements. Farming has gone mechanized for large turn-over and sustainability. However, apart from other sectors of agriculture silviculture be highly integrated. Silviculture or tree planting is cardinal of recent because of its role within and international context. Silviculture is important because trees hold the soil firmly against erosion, releases oxygen to counter carbon dioxide (in short in checking global warming) and in the long run these trees become money spinning for the people. However, it is important to note that the agricultural sector of any economy is a base on which other sectors anchor. It is the base for food security, raw materials, employment generation and for foreign exchange earnings. For agriculture to have meaning, the Land Use Act be reviewed through an enabling law to allow people have access to land for development.

- Productive youths are the future of every nation. Many youths not only in the Niger Delta are unemployed and they become security risk to the region and nation. Youths who do not have access to education should be empowered through free and compulsory education to the university level. Education has an important role to play in human development. Employment facilities be created for other jobless youths. Or there is need for social security for this group by government and that should be possible through enabling laws. In addition, there are many industries in many Niger Delta States that have closed shop – in fact in Akwa Ibom State there are over ten industries that closed shops in the past ten years. Other states may also experience same. If the government reactivates these industries, it may reduce the unemployment ratio, that one thinks government should do it. Besides, cottage and agro-allied industries built in various senatorial districts to mob the excess unemployed population especially the youths and the highly underprivileged groups.

- Majority of the people of Niger Delta are not healthy at all. There is a high correlation between healthy population and productivity. There is really no statistics to show the poor and unhealthy conditions of the people of this region. But Nigeria is ranked 187 out of 191 countries in the world in terms of healthcare performance. There is a low life expectancy of 48.8 years in Nigeria (76 years in the developed world (Olaoye, 2010), Niger Delta Region falls within the bracket of this health care performance. It is also reported that over 70 percent of health expenditure is borne out-of-pocket by healthcare seekers in Nigeria. In this connection, health centres be built and equipped and spread across all local government areas. Medical treatment be made free by government, since majority of people living in this region cannot afford the high cost of medical treatment within and outside Nigeria.

- Development of Oloibiri and other important oil production sites into tourist areas be given attention. There are lots of waterfronts within the region that could be developed into tourist sites. Tourism is a service driven economy. River and seaports within the region be given priority in areas of development and make them competitive with what is obtained in other parts of Nigeria and indeed the world. For instance Koko Port, Calabar Port are under-utilized. Maritime industry is one of the biggest ventures that bring prosperity to nations. This sector too would assist in generating employment for the teeming youths.

- In the energy sector, working and developing bio-fuel and wind energy to replace oil. Bio-fuel can only function with the adequate supply of products from the farm. Agricultural products become the base.

CONCLUSION

Environmental Security and Sustainable development are all about the development of man. The people of the Niger delta have for a long period suffer from deprivation owing to oil exploitation in their region. Many have died in the struggle to better their conditions and that of others. The oil will finish or may no longer command international respect it has today in the international market if alternative source of energy is found. Hence human security can be denied if there is environmental insecurity. Environment security is a propeller of human and sustainable development. For the region to survive after oil good development polices be formulated. Let there be political will on the part of the leaders to return the region into a viable and sustainable workshop. Strong economic and social institutions built, this to a large extent may curb conflict. After oil, there will be continuity and survival of the people and region stable.

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