

HOSTAGE TAKING IN THE NIGER DELTA: IMPLICATIONS ON EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN BAYELSA STATE OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The Niger Delta crisis has become a subject of discourse or debate recently in various gatherings. This study examine the implications of Hostage taking in the Niger Delta on educational development in Bayelsa State. As hostage-taking or kidnapping is still raging on, economic activities, have been stalled due to the insecurity in the Niger Delta region, implying that, this despicable act did a lot of damage to the Nigerian economy over the years. Also, educational activities are affected to a large extent as scholars and students from other regions were afraid of the area for research activities or admission purposes. However, for lasting peace and stability to reign supreme in the Niger Delta, this paper recommends that the government should expedite the construction or provision of social infrastructure, improve and expand educational facilities, vocational or entrepreneurship training for youths as well as increase in the 13% derivation to 50% in order to enable the Niger Delta States governments to meet the needs and aspirations of the people of the area.

Keywords: *Hostage taking, Niger Delta, Educational Development, Bayelsa State*

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is the largest petroleum producer in Africa and the sixth largest producer of sweet crude oil among OPEC member countries. Oil therefore, occupies a central place in the development of Nigeria's economy and it is the substratum of the economy. While the oil industry continues to receive considerable attention from successive Nigerian governments, foreign oil companies received the necessary incentives to ensure their continued presence, the land from where the oil is exploited and her people are neglected by successive governments (Khan, 1994) and with reckless abandon.

Crude oil was first discovered in commercial quantity in 1956 at Oloibiri in Bayelsa State. Indisputably, the Niger Delta region is the hub of Nigeria's oil production activities. This is against the backdrop that, the nation, to a large extent, depends on oil and gas produced in the area for economic survival. Oil is said to constitute 95% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings. It is estimated that crude oil

production from the Niger Delta region between 1958 and 2007 stood at 23,183.9 million barrels. This translated into cash receipt of N29.8 trillion (Tell, 18 February, 2008:28). With such enormous oil wealth generated from the Niger Delta area, the people expected that only few individuals would be living below poverty line. They also expected rapid socio-economic transformation of the region to what is obtainable in other oil rich countries of the world. Unfortunately, in the Niger Delta, the reverse is the case. The most painful aspect of the saga is that while the federal government and the oil prospecting companies count its blessings in trillions of naira from oil revenue, the helpless and hapless people, whose land bears the "black gold" bemoan the loss of their means of livelihood. Bright (2010) asserts that:

the poverty situation in the oil bearing communities of the Niger Delta region, in the presence of abundant wealth, evoked ill-feelings that became a time bomb in the conflict of all ramifications in the area.

However, in line with the foregoing, the point should be made that any society characterized with any form of violence will not be conducive for any social interaction in the form of teaching and learning. Education, according to Datta (1984), is the transmission of knowledge, skills, ideas, attitudes and patterns of behaviour. Therefore, education is seen as an instrument to improve the society which brings a return in the future or it is an attempt to develop the personality of the child and prepare him for the membership of the society. That is why the national educational goals are geared towards the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity, the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society, the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the society (NPE, 2004). In the same vein, Campbell (2008) and African File (2008) have noted that:

education cannot thrive in a violent atmosphere, as the threat of insecurity will constitute negative reinforcement since teaching and learning cannot take place in a precarious environment. Peace is a fundamental psychosocial predictor or motivation for teaching and learning. The cases of communal clashes, hostage taking or kidnapping in the Niger Delta is inimical to educational motivation, development and aspirations of children...

The combination of restiveness, communal clashes, hostage taking, political violence, etc, in the Niger Delta, particularly in Bayelsa State is a major setback in the education of the people. This study, therefore, examines the implications of hostage taking in the Niger Delta on the educational development in Bayelsa State.

Hostage Taking

Hostage taking simply refers to the act of forcefully adopting a person or group of persons with the sole aim of using such captives and circumstances or situations as a means of negotiation or to make a particular demand. It can also be defined as the

act of adopting a person or group of persons as a way of protesting or agitating against a particular policy including political and economic policies or as a reaction against perceived political aggression, oppression, suppression or subjugation and economic sanctions which is mostly perpetrated by a superior force against other inferior authorities, systems, states or countries (Ikuli, 2007).

Hostage taking is the forceful and unlawful seizure or detention of a person with a threat to kill or inflict bodily or psychological harm (on the seized person) or continued detention, indefinitely in order to compel a third party (family, state, or other natural or judicial person) to do or abstain from doing any act (including the payment of ransom) as a condition for the release of the hostage (Mba, 2008; Nwanna, 2008). It was also designed as a political tool to bargain for justice, development and mobilization. These initial ideals, however, have no place in whatever misguided struggle in or outside the Niger Delta. For kidnapping, There is always a wealthy victim, an informant, or negotiator and a hiding place.

Biblically, hostage taking is succinctly condemned as it is expressed in the book of Exodus (21:16). It states that ...he that stealth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death. Also, it is illegal under the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and punishable with ten years imprisonment. Section 368 of the Criminal Code says:

any person who - unlawfully imprison any person within Nigeria in such a manner as to prevent him from applying to a court for his release or from discovering to any other person the place where he is imprisoned or in such a manner as to prevent any person entitled to have access to him from discovering the place where he is imprisoned is guilty of felony and liable to 10 years imprisonment.

The creeks in Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers States and in particular, the cities of Warri and Port Harcourt, have in the last ten years or more witnessed a fair amount of security dilemma, aggravated by the apparent inability of the security forces to tackle it and further compounded by political patronage. Hostage taking, employed by militants since early 2006 to draw international attention to the Niger Delta crisis, has turned into a lucrative, criminally driven enterprise, with local politicians and their relatives frequent victims, instead of just the oil industry expatriates who were the original targets. Adeniji (2010) captures the above and remarks that:

Kidnapping is a familiar "game" to Nigerians, particularly to those residing in the Niger Delta. But now, expatriates, oil workers, relatives of influential and rich individuals in the society, politicians and celebrities were targets. But the addition of journalists and now school children to the list of victims seems to suggest that the masterminds of the dastardly act are saying that there are no sacred cows.

Before the present incidence of hostage takings in the Niger Delta, it was a strategy that was basically adopted by countries, religious sects or militant organizations as a negotiation instrument. This strategy was mostly adopted during warfare and other political situations that threatened diplomatic relations of the various parties that are

involved. In the Niger Delta, Ikuli (2007) made it very clear that:

the act of hostage taking is a recent development. Youths of the region resorted to it as a way of protesting, agitating and also expressing their grievances against the federal government of Nigeria that is accused of being insensitive to the plights of the people of the geo-political zone.

Elite Theory as the Theoretical Assumption or Framework

In considering the suitability of a theory in the explication of realities on hostage taking in the Niger Delta, it behooves on us to adopt the Elite Theory as the theoretical assumption or framework. Every discussion about Elitism centres on the relationship between the ruled and the ruler. Proponents of the Elite Theory are Robert Michels, Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca as well as St. Simon. Gaetano Mosca. Mbah (2006) maintains that in all societies, two classes of people appear (a class that rules and a class that is ruled). The ruling class is always a minority, and it performs all political functions, monopolizes power, maximizes its enjoyment of socially available values. The class of ruled or the mass is controlled by the rulers and supplies the rulers with their means to dominance. Above all, elites believe that political power like other social values is distributed unequally, implying that, we can place people by their share of any good wealth, skill or political power.

According to Mbah (2006), the elite are differently designated as the power elite, the ruling class, political entrepreneurs, the establishment, the governing minority, they have greatest access to, and control of values, and they are the holders of higher positions in a given society. In essence, the elites specifically are those who get access to power either directly or indirectly, play some considerable roles in government either directly or indirectly influencing strongly the exercise of political power or control the behaviour of others. It is pertinent to allege that the Elite Theory maintains that the elite rule their society by creating ideologies that legitimize their rule and consolidate their positions. Nzimiro cited in Okoh (2001) conceives the elites as:

Those who make decisions on how the economy will be administered, how amenities should be shared, who should enjoy this or that privilege, which major government projects should be set up and where, what sort of relationship should exist between the country and the foreign government, and how the army should be structured, whether the working class (peasants and women) should be mobilized or not and whether mobilization should start from the top to the bottom depending on how they regard the top/bottom politically and economically, what ideas should be sold to the masses or not. In other words, they are those who are in the commanding heights of the state powers.

Hostage taking and its implications on the educational development in the Niger Delta find strong expression in this theory as a basis or framework of analysis. The elites create laws that regulate the behaviour in the society. Thus, the character of management shown or given the fact that hostage taking is a reflection of the work of the elite, is partly a function of the elites in the Niger Delta. For instance, institutions

set up by government at various times, with the actors of the Niger Delta as chairmen of these institutions, to address the problem of underdevelopment in the region as well as those who hold elective or political appointments did not live up to expectations concerning the judicious use of resources meant for the region. Also, the enthronement of democracy in 1999 should have open a new chapter in the history of the Niger Delta. The federal government and the various states government are giving millions of naira to the National and State Assembly members to embark on constituency projects with a view to improving the lot of the people in their various constituencies. The fact is that if one visit the various constituencies in the Niger Delta, it is obvious that there are virtually no projects, and even if there are projects, they do not match or justify the money they have been collecting over the years. Therefore, hostage taking in the Niger Delta region is a function of the elites, politicians, administrators, oil multinationals, the Nigerian state (federal, state and local governments). The elite and the class that predominate over the dispensation of political largesse in the Niger Delta cum the Nigerian state and the oil companies lack the sophisticated political culture, will and attitude to respond to the needs and aspirations of the people and hence the resort to violence by aggrieved youths in the region.

The Genesis of Hostage Taking in the Niger Delta

The current spate of violence, militancy, crime and hostage taking in the Niger Delta is perhaps the last stage of transformation of "resource agitation" by oil-producing communities against oil-producing companies and the Nigerian state. The earliest protests were organized by environmental based civil society groups against environmental abuses by companies and unwholesome federal legislations, gradually followed by community based movements and forces that made conscious demands from the oil companies and the state on resource control, increased political participation and restructuring of the Nigerian state along fiscal federalism through a national conference of ethnic groups.

Since the Kaiama Declaration of December 11, 1998, the Niger Delta region has known no peace over the years. Immediately after the declaration, a joint task force was deployed by General Olusegun Obasanjo to raid or sack various communities in the region, particularly Odi in Bayelsa State where innocent people including the old and young were brutalized and killed. Peterside in Ikuli (2007) captured the above and argued that it was this repressive attitude of government that compelled the youths to take up arms against the state. In the words of Peterside:

Early protests by the people of the Niger Delta over oppressive practices of the state involved peaceful methods that yielded no results. As the pains and cries of poverty intensified, youth militancy emerged as an alternative approach to draw attention of the plights of inhabitants of the region. The state's response to this method of the struggle was massive deployment of military forces to crush popular pressures. To resist the deadly military might of the state, armed confrontation was adopted by the youths as a defense mechanism (Peterside cited in Ikuli, 2007).

For instance, Ken Saro-Wiwa, when he answered the call like Nelson Mandela of South Africa, began his campaign against the apathy or indifference of the oil multinationals, especially Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC) and the federal government by enlightening, orienting and re-orienting the people about the hazardous and pernicious effects of the oil exploratory and exploitative activities of Shell multinational to the present generation and unborn generations by using only negotiation and dialogue as tools. At a time during the struggle, he knew that his life was at stake and he never stopped to tell the agents of exploitation and oppression that you can kill the messenger but you cannot kill the message. That is, he adopted the Mahatma Gandhi non-violent approach in the midst of federal government maiming, raping, killing and wanton destruction of properties of the Ogoni people. Throughout the struggle in his life time, expatriates were not taken hostage as a strategy in the agitation for resource control or fair share of their resources.

We therefore believe that hostage taking is an expression of the way and manner the Nigerian state cum the oil multinationals responded to the call for justice, equity and fairness by the youths of the Niger Delta concerning the sharing of the oil revenue and also the frustration, poverty, disempowerment and unemployment suffered in a region that produces oil that is the bread winner of the Nigerian economy. The ruling majority and the oil companies always maintain the notion that the Niger Delta has a terrain that is too difficult to develop. However, Ejituwu and Enemugwem (2007) did not mince words when they admitted that "the Niger Delta terrain is terribly difficult, but under the terrible terrain is buried a large quantity of oil, which has turned out to be about 95% of Nigeria's source of revenue." Also, Okowa (2007) captured the above and opined that in spite of the difficult terrain, God in His infinite wisdom put oil resources into it to enable the region fund the construction of roads and canals to enhance accessibility and therewith economic activities and development. According to him, a Nigerian state, controlled by the ethnic majors has taken over the oil wealth which is inequitably distributed to the disadvantage of the people of the Niger Delta.

Most of the Niger Delta communities still drink from horrifying dug out wells and pass excretion at open waterside wooden toilets. The economic fortune of oil producing communities or countries in other climes has improved tremendously but the case of oil producing communities in Nigeria is a different story. For instance, all oil bearing Middle East countries are smiling to the bank and they are outpacing western economies in infrastructural development because the oil boom has translated to tremendous prosperity. Middle East families are sending their children to the best schools in the US, UK, Switzerland, etc. How would you then explain the fact that less than 4% of communities in the Niger Delta have access to electricity in spite of the trillions of volumes of gas flared each year? The fact is that the plight of the people of the Niger Delta is not of particular concern to the government and the oil companies. As long as they can get oil flowing, and as long as the political engine is being oiled by the resources of the Niger Delta, nothing else matters.

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that the act of hostage taking in the Niger Delta is seen as a combination of various factors. Available evidence indicates that the federal government had tried to solve the problems of the Niger Delta, by first, setting up agencies like the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). According to Ejituwu and Enemugwem (2007), the problems remain apparently because the operators of the policies are not genuinely sincere and sympathetic to the problems of the Niger Delta. They were institutions established to serve as just drain pipes to feather the nest of its officials rather than utilizing allocated funds for development projects in the area. Second, oil companies who in a bid to provide employment for idle youths in the oil producing areas, in line with sustainable community development requirements, arm the youths to secure oil installations. In line with the above, Naanem (1995) argues that:

the structural and constitutional weaknesses of the post colonial Nigerian state were exploited by sections of the country who use their numerical strength and privilege access to the existing opportunity structure, the dominant class in the majority ethnic groups infiltrate the multinational corporation, thereby, constituting the comprador class that mediates between the corporation and the local society.

The region has become ridden by hostage taking and violent conflict which causes the wanton destruction of its people and valuable property and left millions of dollars unrealized due to deferred production as a result of crisis and work stoppages. The crisis of Ogoni (1994-1995), Ijaw-Ilaje (1998-2000), Odi (1998-99), Warri-Urhobo-Itsekiri (1952, 1981, 1987, 1997-2002), Ogbel Ijaw-Itsekiri (1995-2004), just to mention a few, contributed to the stoppage of oil production for a while, leading to loss of millions of dollars.

Again, the high exploration of oil in the Niger Delta has helped to expose the area to the dangerous pollution of water, land, air cum oil spills which have endangered aquatic life, the entire ecosystem, etc, what Ibeanu (2006) referred to as a gruesome murder of the ecosystem. The problem of deforestation has led to loss of biodiversity in the mangrove swamps, and to the killing of fishes, crabs, oysters and periwinkles. This has therefore destroyed artisan fishing which is of great importance to the economy of the Niger Delta.

The area has been denied the much needed development of social and economic infrastructure such as electricity, road, health and pipe borne water. It is no gain saying the fact that the Niger Delta states experience relatively high rates of both rural and urban unemployment. Others are high level of poverty, communal and oil company conflicts, inter communal conflicts over land compensation, decay in societal values, poor roads and transportation networks, high cost of fuel, paucity of housing and infrastructural facilities, moral decadence and crime rate. These problems have been said to be located within the revenue sharing principles and practices of the federal government which have starved the Niger Delta of much needed funds (Okoh and Egbon, 1999).

Okowa (2007) was keen to succinctly note that development is the critical instrument in the eradication of poverty, and poverty is central to the problem of crime and terrorism in the world. He went further to posit that the war against crime and terrorism, both domestically and internationally, can only be successfully prosecuted if an effective war against poverty and its correlates of disempowerment, frustration, anger, angst, bitterness, social alienation, nihilism, etc, is waged. As noted before, earlier protests were non-violent. But today, most youths have resorted to hostage taking, which they claim is part of strategy in the contemporary Niger Delta struggle. It is now driven by selfish tendencies and it is politically motivated. Many politicians now use hostage taking as a political avenue in order to gain relevance in the political terrain.

Implications on Educational Development

Classical philosophers such as Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, John Dewey, Jean Jacques Rousseau and the contemporary philosophers recognized education as an instrument for personal growth and economic development and social change in societies. Ojetunji Aboyade in Dike (2006) noted that the development of human capital has long been established historically and analytically as the real foundation of economic growth and social transformation in any nation. Therefore, if the youths are not properly educated they will not have the skills and knowledge to compete in the global labour market, and they will continue to suffer mass unemployment and poverty and crime will increase.

The creeks and hinterlands of the Niger Delta are domiciled by so many communities and in these communities, there are no primary and secondary schools, and if they are there, they are not equipped in any form for effective teaching and learning. The goals of Universal Basic Education (UBE) are to universalize the access to basic education, engender a befitting learning environment and eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria within the shortest possible time. The long distance of waterways to schools, coupled with crises in the region made it difficult for the children in these rural communities to have access to the Universal Basic Education. Obanya cited in Olusegun and Olufunmilayo (2010) while discussing the implication of crisis in Somalia, Liberia and Sierra Leone posited that education will be affected since there could be no meaningful education in a worrying society. According to Olusegun and Olufunmilayo (2010), the typology of situation which Obanya saw as an obstacle to the realization of Education For All (EFA) goals is a future of the realities in the crisis ridden Niger Delta.

Another impediment to the progress of education in the Niger Delta is what Taiwo (2007) itemized as the intrinsic and extrinsic problems to include: inadequate physical facilities both in quality and quantity; inadequate trained, skilled and committed teachers; inadequate teaching facilities, decline in the quality/standards of teaching and research; decline in discipline, increase incidence of fraud in admissions and examinations and other malpractices, ...and the extrinsic problems were listed as poor/inadequate funding, interference of government in management

and administration of universities with consequent undermining of universities autonomy; interference especially in employment and deployment of staff and admission of students; unstable and sometimes inconsistent human resources development policies. In addition to the above and in particular to the Niger Delta region is, poor remuneration for teachers who do not have access to the oil companies has negative impact on the values placed on education by youths in the Niger Delta. Amaechi (2008) and Olusegun and Olufunmilayo (2010) remarked thus:

The access to guns and ammunitions has resulted into criminal behaviour. Youths who benefit handsomely from the proceeds from ransom taken will not see the "idea of beauty" in education.

Idumange (2002) as cited in Ikuli (2007) carried out a study on the attitude of parents and students towards non-formal education in Rivers and Bayelsa States of Nigeria and discovered that the two states were lagging. Obviously, the patronage hitherto enjoyed by the tertiary institutions in the region may diminish as expressed in the students' choice of universities in the University Matriculation Examination (UME). According to Nwanna (2008), there is severe under-enrolment of students in post primary schools in Rivers State. The 2006 census figures for the state is put at 5,184,400 and as a matter of conventional statistical protocol, 12% of this population or 622,000 are supposed to be in the secondary schools. But the reality is that only 373,951 or 60.1% students are in the 245 public schools in the state. Therefore, about 248,049 or 39.9% of students are out of school. The trend is worse in Bayelsa State where enrolment is even lower. For instance, the table below shows the pitiable situation concerning students' enrollment in WASC/SSCE in secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

Table 1: Enrollment of Students in WASC/SSCE in Secondary Schools in Bayelsa State

Academic years	Males enrollment	%	Female enrollment	%	Total
1997/98	14,143	61.1	9,998	38.9	23,141
1998/99	14,157	58.6	10,019	41.4	24,176
1999/2000	19,894	58.2	14,264	41.8	34,158
2000/2001	23,479	57.6	17,315	42.4	40,794
2001/2002	21,375	55.9	16,855	44.1	38,230
Total	92,048	57.4	68,451	42.6	160,499

Source: Nwanna (2008:101)

From the table 1, it is obvious that the number of male enrolment has fallen considerably from 2000-2002 from 57.9% to 55.9%. This is as a result of crisis in the region. In addition to the above, the implications of hostage-taking in the Niger Delta, particularly as it affects educational development in Bayelsa State are itemized below:

- i The surge in strife and conflicts has immensely discouraged scholars from other areas from collaborating with their counterparts in the region.
- ii The proliferation of private schools and withdrawal of pupils from public schools is as a result of poor quality of education, insecurity and poor instructional facilities for learning.

- iii Most multinational companies in the region have deserted and moved their base to a more peaceful environment. This movement is not only peculiar to companies alone but also schools. For instance, in the late 2007, the expatriate children school of the Shell Petroleum Development Company was burnt by unknown men that resulted in the closure of the school. This also has an economic implication as job opportunities for our youths were lost.
- iv Some expatriates collaborating with Nigerians in the area of scholarship and development of knowledge in the region have all withdrawn for fear of being kidnapped.
- v The resources meant for the development of education in the region, in most instances, now go for security, particularly maintaining the Joint Task Force (JTF) deployed to major cities in the Niger Delta.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Hostage taking and education are two different concepts. Protracted crisis, in the form of hostage or kidnapping in the Niger Delta has helped to reduce Nigeria's economic fortune over time, hinder the smooth development of petroleum resources as well as disrupting educational progress or development in the Niger Delta. This is because education cannot thrive in an atmosphere of rancor, bitterness and acrimony. The history of over two decade of crisis in the Niger Delta has placed untold misery in the lives of innocent people, thus disrupting education and educational yearnings of youths and children in the Niger Delta. In the light of the above, this paper recommends the following strategies as a way out of the quagmire:

- i The federal government should embark on speedy development of the Niger Delta in terms of provision of good roads, electricity, pipe borne water, houses, well-equipped hospitals and good schools.
- ii There should be adequate, equitable or proportional representation of the ethnic nationalities in employment, resource allocation, admission into educational institutions, location of industry and social infrastructure.
- iii The government should, as matter of urgency, rehabilitate and equip public schools in the Niger Delta region to compete favourably with the best schools anywhere in the world.
- iv The government should give educational grants, scholarships, bursaries and other incentives such as research grants to indigenes of the Niger Delta to make teaching and learning effective, attractive and interesting.
- v Facilities in tertiary institutions in the Niger Delta should be expanded and improved upon to allow for more intakes of students.
- vi The federal government should increase the current 13% derivation that accrues to the Niger Delta states to 50% to enable the state governments to meet the developmental challenges in the region.
- vii Government should partner with non-governmental organizations to train these youths in different trades in order to make them self-reliant.

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