# Peace Education, a means for Better Adjustment of the Niger-Delta Youths: Implications for Counselling

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### ABSTRACT

*Peace education is the process of acquiring the values, the knowledge and developing attitudes, skills and behaviours to live in harmony with oneself, with others, and with the natural environment. Peace is often considered as the fundamental basis of stability, progress and development in human societies. Peace connotes tranquility, psychological consonance, physical and environmental stability and the sustenance of enabling circumstances that guarantee freedom from all sources of all individual and societal instability. This study primarily examines peace education as a means for better adjustment of the Niger Delta youths. Among other things, it goes further to explain peace agenda and national stability and stated some characteristics of Peace Education. The review also analyses as it major aim some social and psychological strategies for better adjustment of the Niger Delta Youths as well as its implication for counselling. To this end, the study recommends among others the introduction of peace education, which should adopt the formal and informal context to cover a wider range of individuals and the curriculum developers should imbibe the tenets of peaceful co-existence and religious diversity.*
*Keywords: Peace education, stability, Niger-Delta, educational reforms, psychological, counselling and adjustment*

## INTRODUCTION

Peace is virtue that individuals and societies continue to pursue with different degrees of attainment. Societies develop in peace, cultures promote peace, religions uphold and cherish peace and individuals prosper in peace. That notwithstanding, one knows that there could hardly be a society where total and absolute individual and societal peace exist. The alternative to peace is chaos, instability, upheavals, violence and in extreme cases, war. Scholars and activists have defined the concept and practice of peace with variations. For instance, the concept could be looked at from the philosophical, sociological, political, religious, psychological and even common sense perspectives. Education cannot strive in a violent atmosphere, as the threat of insecurity will constitute negative reinforcement since teaching and learning cannot take place in an unsecured environment. Peace is a fundamental psychosocial predictor or motivation for teaching and learning. The cases of communal clashes, hostage taking, kidnapping in the Niger-Delta sub region of Nigeria and aspirations of children (Oghiagbephan, 2014). Education is a fundamental human right worldwide. The quests of Nigerian government to give education to her citizens were demonstrated by such policies as Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the past, and the present Universal

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Basic Education (UBE). The UBE policy provides that all Nigerian children and adult must have the nine-year basic education (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2004 and Tahir, 2008). But from whatever perspective, peace is an important element that receives attention from every sector in the society. Thus, in this review, the author states the role of peace education in the building and sustenance of peace in Nigeria. Without doubt, Nigerians and Nigeria need to strengthen the existing basis of peace in the country to reduce drastically any form of "peacelessness" which tend to defeat, and in some cases, reverse our progress in the land.

## Peace and Peace Education

There are variations in the understanding and definition of peace. Peace is a natural, God-given state of human existence without the corruptive tendencies of man; it also refers to a condition of social harmony in which there are no social antagonisms; it is also regarded as a political condition that makes justice possible. Operationally, Ibeanu (2004) has described peace as a "process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within specific societies and in the wider international community". This scholar further opines that to understand peace, one need to note that it:

- relates to existing conditions, rather than an ideal state;
- is a dynamic process and it is possible to identify the factors that drive it;
- is not a finished condition, or said differently, it is never finished;
- increases and decreases depending on objective socio-economic and political conditions;
- can be measured as it increases or decreases; and
- is not a linear, unidirectional process, instead it is complex and multifaceted.

Francis (2004) views peace as the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence and about peaceful coexistence. To him, peace connotes the: absence of war, presence of justice and development; existence of respect and tolerance among and between people; maintaining a balance with the ecosphere and quite importantly, having inner peace and wholeness. Thus, from the discussion so far, it is clear that peace is a necessary requirement for individual and societal existence. The absence of it at any level is not desired, even though several reasons may be adduced to explain the current level of "peacelessness" being experienced in the country. Daily, people are bombarded with messages from the mass media on aspects of violence and "peacelessness" that pervade the society at different levels. One is also confronted with several forms of 'peacelessness' in interpersonal and intra/inter group relationships. Why does one experience such negative tendencies? Perhaps, that should be seen as a justification for the argument that peace is boundless, timeless and never finished. Here in Nigeria and Niger Delta in particular, one can easily categorize some of the major causes of 'lack of peace' situations at the individual, community and national levels. In the Niger-Delta, while one can say that the region is living generally in peace, it may not however be equally valid to say that the citizens, are experiencing absolute peace, particularly if one considers the occasional violent outbursts

in some communities and cities, deprivations, violations of human rights, violent exchanges in interpersonal relationships, high rate of family squabbles, rise in crime rates, etc. Generally, one can summarize some of the major causes of "absent of peace" in the region to include:

- poor understanding of individual and collective self identities by the citizens;
- degeneration of individual and group values;
- poor/inadequate understanding and low respect for the human rights of citizens by individuals and the government;
- prevalence and persistence of poverty, deprivations and other unfulfilled needs; and
- bad governance as manifested in corruption, injustice to deliver services, insecurity, etc. (Fasokun, 2004; Francis, 2004 and Amaechi, 2008).

One of the effective methods for the mainstreaming of peace in the society and indeed promoting the process of peace building is through the instrumentality of formal and informal education. There are various socialization avenues that have been widely known to engage in peace education and peace building. In so doing, individuals and communities learn violence, and tolerating, understanding, accommodating and feeling for each other. Peace education has different interpretations depending on the background and context of those making them. Peace education is regarded as an issue of changing mindsets; with the hope of promoting understanding, respect, and tolerance for those considered as enemies. Peace education in its best form, "attempts to change the individual's perception of the other's collective consequently about one's own social self, as well as come to practically relate less hatefully and more trustingly towards the collective 'other' (Fasokun, 2004).

Gumut (2004) in her opinion says peace education is the deliberate attempt to educate children and adults in the dynamics of conflicts and the promotion of peacemaking skills in homes, schools and communities throughout the world, using all the channels and instruments of socialization. She observes that peace education concerns itself with human and social dimensions of peace. It is about the creation, sustenance and management of positive attitudes to peace among and between different levels and segments in the society. Based on the foregoing, it is clear that, peace education, whether taught formally or mainstreamed informally is about the building and sustenance of positive attitudes and instilling of values and skills coupled with emphasis on elements of peace among the different individuals and segments in the society. Peace education is expected to yield four interrelated dispositional outcomes; accepting as legitimate the other person's position and its implications; a willingness to critically examine one's own groups' actions toward the other group; willingness to experience and show empathy and trust toward the "other"; and a disposition to engage in non violent activities (Fasokun, 2004).

**Integrating Peace Education in Nigeria**

Peace education stands out as a tool in social reconstruction and restructuring. According to Ibeanu (2004) and Oghiagbephan (2014) integrating peace education can be in the formal or informal context, the strategic design will create maximum impact among people of different ethnic groups. It can also be done by targeting segments of the society in specific ways based on their characteristics, contexts, relevance and possible impact such

as the family, the community, social institutions – schools, religious bodies, the media, government institutions among others. The objectives of peace education in the schools focus on increasing the knowledge of the recipients, helping them to develop positive attitudes and acquire the skills to become peace builders in life. Peace education should be an ongoing and life-long learning process which is disseminated in a formal learning process (Oghiagbephan, 2014).

## Promoting Peace Education in Nigeria

Peace education could be formal or informal. But at whatever level or in whatever context, the author believes that peace education in Nigeria should be strategically designed for maximum impact among the different people's and communities. Without doubt, Nigeria needs that in her effort to develop. Thus, the strategic promotion of peace education will require the targeting of segments of the society in specific ways. For instance, one may have to identify the following segments for effect targeting based on their characteristics, contexts, relevance and possible impact for each segments, there may be some unique gaps that may be addressed, which over time may yield positive behavioural orientations and collective peace for all. A rough segmentation may include:
- the individual;
- the family;
- the community;
- socialization institutions – schools, religious bodies, the media, etc.;
- the government and its institutions; and
- the country at large.

The individual Nigerian is the first and most important target for any peace education. It is often said that the perception of the individual determines his/her state of mind and direct him/her on possible actions to take. Therefore, it is reasonable to start early enough to inculcate the values of peace in the individual within the context of his immediate and distant environments (Albert, 2002). The family is the "primary vital cell of society". It is the primordial school where human beings learn the "civilization of love". A critical examination of the institution of the family in the country would reveal that the family system is experiencing considerable stress characterized by squabbles, disputes, deprivations, poverty, divorces, domestic violence, abandonment and other elements of 'peacelessness' caused by human and environmental factors (Albert, 2002).

Religious institutions, for instance, are exceptionally known for the promotion of peace and peace building. The two major religions in Nigeria (Christianity and Islam) are categorical in their promotion of peace even though there have been cases when differences in understanding and interpretation by adherents had led to violent disruption of peace in the country. But a careful understanding of the teachings of the two religions would show that they mean peace, promote peace and seek to build peace in the heart of man and society (Albert, 2002). Equally, the mass media institution is an important pillar in the promotion of peace in the country. One can easily recount instances of peacelessness caused by the actions of the media. However, generally the media have been actively

engaged in informal peace education. Other platforms like the civil society and work places are reliable avenues for continuous mainstreaming of peace education for peace building in the country especially within the Niger Delta region. What may be desired is for them to have a clear understanding of their expected roles in the enthronement of the culture of peace and rejection of all actions and inactions that undermine peace in the behaviour of individuals and society. Government is the general custodian of the society that creates the enabling environment for peace to flourish. Equally, government through its policies can undermine peace education as promoter of the concept, sponsor of the efforts and creator of the enabling environment where rights of citizens are respected, sources of poverty, deprivations and other unfulfilled needs addressed for the inner contentment of the citizens and the building of societal peace (Gumut, 2004).

## The State of Education in the Niger-Delta

Apart from major cities and towns like Port Harcourt, Warri, Yenagoa, Sapele, Benin, etc., the Niger Delta has a lot of villages along the creeks and difficult waterways. In many of these difficult riverine areas, there are no primary or secondary schools. The long distance of water ways to schools makes it difficult for the children in these rural communities to have access to the Universal Basic Education. Another cog in the wheel of educational progress in Niger Delta is the value of education. Lack of employment for school leavers, and inadequate remuneration of the educated elite not working in oil companies has negatively affected the values placed on education by youths in the Niger Delta. The lifestyles of their contemporaries in the oil and gas sectors have created the desire to live luxurious lives in the mind of the youths. 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 (Amaechi, 2008).

The epileptic school attendance during the period of crisis has significant effect on the quality of education received by the children in the Niger Delta. During the conflict, some youths who were prevented from going to school, no longer value going to school and have become drop outs. The sad consequences of such crisis on these school drop outs by maintaining that the non enrolling in schools made the youths "more likely to commit acts of violence". The National Policy on Education in its introductory part provides that Nigerians desired education, which will meet the needs and aspirations of the individual Nigerian as well as the country. The present educational system seems not to be meeting this noble idea. The present state of education in the Niger Delta as well as that of the whole country only tries to make one literate but the aspect of providing entrepreneurial training or vocational skills is not embedded in the school curriculum. Even those youths who attained the basic education were not prepared to be self employed. Thus many of them are not qualified to work in oil and oil servicing companies, because they lack the skills needed to enter into such world of work. Yet, they desired what those working in such blue chip companies are enjoying. Armed militancy is the only way by which these youths can obtain money that can enable them participate and survive in life.

## Educational Reform in Nigeria

Nigeria urgently needs to reform her educational system. The quest to provide education that will meet the needs of the people, as well as the country can only be achieved if entrepreneurial or vocational training should be given to all the students. This will make Nigerian graduates at all levels to be self sustaining, employer of labour and not job seekers. The present quest for technology for self reliance can only be achieved if youths are trained to meet the needs of the contemporary technology driven world.  Our teachers and educators should be observant. They should help to identify the types of intelligence inherent in all their students, and then prepare them for taking future careers in such areas of strength. Specialized training can also be given to youths who do not meet the admission requirement into higher institutions. They could be trained in their areas of strength, and thus removing them from poverty level.

A collaborative effort should be made by the oil companies, local, state and federal governments to establish technical and vocational training centres in the Niger Delta region. These institutions will assist to train the youths in such fields as welding and fabrication, plumbing, drilling technology, and other skills that will qualify them to work in oil and gas industries and their servicing companies. This novel step will drastically reduce unemployment and provide alternative source of income for the youths and by implication, reducing the high rate of crime in the Niger Delta. Efforts should also be made to find alternative vocations and jobs for the militants. This will prevent them from disrupting the peace in the Niger Delta. A commission of both local and international experts should be set up to critically study their situation, and then come out with workable ventures that will be acceptable to the militants and youths in the Niger Delta.

## The Niger Delta Peace Agenda

The Niger Delta conflict was a sour point which the Nigerian government struggled to pacify. The seldom attitude to marginalization, degradation and general underdevelopment of the region were the grievances of oil bearing communities. These gave birth to youth restiveness and eventually the more destructive arm struggle and militancy. A sharp delay before the presence of government was felt, escalated the scenario and made it seem impasse. The creation of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the Niger Delta Ministry and finally the amnesty and the rehabilitation project to reconcile the militant with the civil society are both short and long term measures for peaceful integration of members. The Niger Delta scenario depleted ideological differences and provides opportunities to examine alternatives by facilitating discussion and choose alternative positive decisions to resolve differences. A replica of the delay of government attention in seeking conflict resolution at the wake of the Niger Delta conflict is now repeated in the "Boko Haram" insurgency in the north and has led to social dislocation, the establishment of refugee camps and displaced communities. The once peaceful, economic and socially robust northern region, has now exploded into a volcano of war with the rhythm and melogy of violent conflicts been sang in refugee camps more frequently (Oghiagbephan, 2014). As a democratic contribution, the author here wished the government use the

collective bargain and consensus approach in order to foster a long term peace solution to ending the Niger Delta, northern and some other parts of the country's insurgency. This can be achieved through identification of key players and allow negotiation to prevail amidst counselling and re-orientation of member groups through peace education campaign (Oghiagbephan, 2014).

**Characteristics and Imparting Peace Education**
From any angle one looks at it, peace education is geared towards peace building with the following characteristics. According to Fasokun (2004), these characteristics are:
- speaking for a peace;
- listening attentively and reflectively;
- promoting self esteem, dignity for oneself and respect for the feelings and rights of others;
- speaking about oneself instead of the other person; and
- understanding possible barriers for effective communication and how to diffuse them.

Peace education is an on-going and life-long learning process. It could be disseminated formally as in the school system or informally at the family or community levels. In the school system, elements of peace education are incorporated and taught as part of existing curriculum of subjects at the different levels. Generally, the objectives of peace education in the school focus on increasing the knowledge of the recipients, helping them to develop positive attitudes and acquire the skills to become peace builders in life (Gumut, 2004; communication and leadership, 2008). It must also be emphasized that school children at whatever levels should be exposed to histories in the country to further strengthen their sense of appreciation of the dynamics of existence within the Nigerian landscape. At the informal levels, which offer wider platforms for peace education, the process is multifaceted, less organized but quite effective in the gradual building of peace in the society.

**Social and Psychological Strategies for Better Adjustment of the Niger Delta Youths**
There are numerous social and psychological strategies for better adjustment of the Niger Delta youths; some of these are:

*Educational/Academic Counselling:* The Niger Delta youths need to be given an educational and academic counselling by the guidance counsellors or psychologists which will enable them to choose appropriate school programme, acquire appropriate study habits or skills, this will enable these youths launch into educational programmes consistent with their interest and abilities (Amagbogu, 2001).

*Vocational Counselling:* This is the achievement of economic independence which can be done through realistic career planning, preparation and entry into appropriate occupation. Majority of the Niger Delta youths want to work in the oil companies to earn high pay, while most of them do not possess the entry qualification required in these companies the vocational counselling would plan and prepare them for appropriate occupation.

***Personal and Social Counselling:*** The Niger Delta youths crave for independence or freedom, which they cannot get from the parents or caregivers, the results are that the youths become frustrated, unhappy, worried and end up in the development of inappropriate behaviours thereby causing problems for themselves and the society. This type of counselling will enable them to develop appropriate self-concept, self-image, self-adequacy, high achievement, motivation that will make them live adult life free of feelings of inadequacy in terms of their psychological, social and emotional states which will invariably influence their education and aspirations positively.

***Behaviour Modification:*** There are different types of behaviour modification techniques that can be utilized in dealing with anti-social behaviour of the Niger Delta youth, they include reinforcement, systematic desensitization and aversion therapy.

***Environmental Psychotherapy:*** The Niger Delta youths practice grievous antisocial behaviours, hence the psychotherapist, counsellor or social worker may suggest to the parents or guardians to adopt this strategy, in this situation, the youths may be compelled by the prevailing crisis in the Niger Delta and the antisocial behaviour of their youths to change their environment. The crisis which happened in this area had become hazardous to both the psychological and social development of the youth which invariably had brought negative returns to the educational development of the youths. The change of environment may be temporary such as rehabilitation homes where they learn the skills or vocation that suit them, hostels or travels like the case of the Chevron Texaco company that made some Niger Delta youths to learn vocations at St. John Bosco Vocational Training Centre in Ondo, Ondo State.

***Re-Education:*** A system of re-education can be embarked upon by the psychotherapist or counsellor where the Niger Delta youths are made to clean up the antisocial behaviour that has been learned. The strategy that could be used is the Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) originated by Albert Ellis (Ibukun, 2006). Efforts are made by the guidance counsellors, psychotherapists, psychologists, or social workers to change the negative ideas and irrational thinking of the individuals by helping them to behave in more rational and rewarding manner.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Peace is a necessary ingredient in the survival and development of societies. Conscious or deliberate efforts may be required to inculcate the attitude, spirit and skills of peace and peaceful coexistence for the enthronement and sustenance of the culture of peace in a diverse and conflict prone society like Nigeria. Crisis in the Niger Delta has placed an untold hardship in the life of the innocent people, thus, disrupting education and educational aspirations of youths and children. Similarly, the present poor state of education, and lack of educational institution in hundreds of the riverine communities calls for both local and

international concern. Therefore, it is recommended that the country adopts and strengthens existing strategies of peace education, both formally and informally, to expand the opportunities of peace building and reduce the threats of 'peacefulness' in the Nigerian nation. All of these can only occur in an enabled environment that is sensitive to the identities of individuals, address their unfulfilled needs and promote their human rights in a just environment. Nigeria especially the Niger Delta region, will hopefully witness a better and peaceful future with secured lives and property and removal of anxieties and political upheavals will be put in place if the following recommendations are considered:

i. The adoption and strengthening of peace education will serve as a foundation bases in resolving the pockets of violence across the country;

ii. The introduction of peace education should adopt the formal and informal context to cover a wider range of individuals;

iii. The curriculum developers should imbibe the tenets of peaceful co-existence and religious diversity;

iv. Educators should take cognizance of the affective domains of learning and utilize its benefits during teaching and learning;

v. The government should be rational with resources allocation to the formal and non-formal education system;

vi. The National Orientation Agency should be given abundant free air time by the government radio and television stations, to broadcast reformative materials that would re-orientate the youths. This will help to instill in them the need to drop their arms and accept both local and international reform strategies, that are designed to help them;

vii. Religious institutions should not shy away from their responsibility of preaching the sacredness of human life and blood. In their radio and television broadcast, and also their house to-house ministry, they should preach peace, and also discourage armed lifestyle of the militants;

viii. UNICEF, Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), federal, state, local governments and other stakeholders should set up a collaborative effort to establish schools in all the rural areas in the Niger Delta;

ix. All stakeholders should team up to develop the oil producing areas by providing infrastructural facilities that would improve the lives of the people of the area.

x. Our teachers and educators should be observant to help identify the types of intelligence inherent in all their students, and then prepare them for taking future career in such areas of strength. Specialized training can also be given to youths who do not meet the admission requirements into higher institutions and thus removing them from poverty level (Oghiagbephan, 2014).

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