

Youth Restiveness in Niger Delta rural areas: Lesson for .Contemporary Nigerian Society

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ABSTRACT

This study reviewed the youth restiveness in Niger Delta rural areas as lesson for the contemporary Nigerian society. The study was based on secondary sources of information. The study identified youths in the area as people between the ages of 15 – 40 years. Youths possess viable characteristics for rural development which if mismanaged results into restiveness. The study showed that the primary causes of youth restiveness in the area were proliferation of arms, misuse of the military to suppress protests, misappropriation of benefits from crude oil, youth unemployment and environmental degradation. Consequences of youth restiveness among others included loss of life and properties, rural-urban migration of the farm families, breeding defective future leaders, disruption of oil and gas activities and food insecurity. In order to eradicate youth restiveness, the contemporary Nigeria society should check the rate of arm proliferation, misuse of the military to suppress youth protests, misappropriation of benefits accruing to the communities, youth unemployment and environmental degradation.

Keywords: Youth; Restiveness; Niger Delta; Rural area; Nigeria.

1 INTRODUCTION

Out of the Nigerian population of 167 million people as at 31st of October, 2011, the youth population according to [1] is more than 60% of the population. The population and strength of the youth are important factors in progressive development of any place. However if the youth is manipulated to take side with retrogressive tendencies as in the case of restiveness, the outcome is damaging given their population and strength. Youth restiveness is described as the unwillingness to be controlled by the youths because they feel bored and unsatisfied with the current status of things involving them specifically or the society to which they belong in general. Several cases of youth restiveness took place in the Nigerian Niger Delta region.

The Niger Delta region is located in South-South region of Nigeria. The nine states that made up the region are Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. The region is marked with ecological degradation, pollution and devastation by acid rain which results from oil exploration and exploitation [2]. Niger Delta Development Commission [3], added that over two million of the youths in the region were unemployed and have lost hope, faith and dignity in life. This source added that the region had one of the most crushing poverty in the world. The youths in response to his environmental degradation started reacting since the early 1990s by being restive at this unfavourable environmental condition which began since the late 1950s. Irrespective of the fact that youth restiveness in the region has currently reduced to its barest minimum in recent time because of the

various developmental activities put in place by the Federal Government to put right the wrong that was perpetuated in the region, its lessons for the contemporary Nigerian society cannot be over-emphasized. It is on the basis of this fact that this study was conceptualize with the objective of reviewing the causes, actors, consequences and remedies of youth restiveness as a lesson for the current Nigerian society.

2 THE RURAL YOUTH

Many religious institutions have defined the youth to be people between the age range of 15 – 40years [4]. This is because to them, youthfulness is in the mind. This accounted for the reason of having people up to 40 years in youth organizations of some churches and mosques. For the Nigerian Youth Service Corp (NYSC), the maximum age limit for youths is thirty 30 years. This implies that the youth age terminates at 30 years according to the NYSC context. The United Nation (UN) has defined the youth as people between the age range of 15-24 years old [4]. This classification puts the world youth population at about 20% of the total world population of about eight billion people. The UN definition is the one widely accepted by many. In this study, the above three definitions are taken into account in the delineation of the youth, because many youth organizations in this study area are made of people of this age category. Examples of this youth bodies are the Ikwerre Youth Movement (IYM), National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), The Aborigine of Okrika, Niger Delta People Volunteer

Force (NDPVF) and the youth bodies of the registered political parties in the state. In view of the foregoing, the rural youth is defined as a person within the age range of 15 – 40 years, who may be married or not, but resides in the countryside. Youths of this age range manifest the same natural characteristics.

3 CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL YOUTHS

In every rural society, it is easy to distinguish the youth from other members of that society. These distinguishing features formed the bases for identifying the characteristics of the youths. According to [4], and [5] the characteristics of rural youths are seen from the point of view of traditionalism, group identity, industry, vision, strength, intelligence and faster reaction, high social propensity and innovativeness. From the traditionalism point of view, the rural youth adhere tenaciously to issues of cultural heritage and traditions more than their urban counterparts. Traditional ways of doing things like, wrestling competition, dancing, farming system, beliefs and other indigenous knowledge systems are better preserved by rural than urban youths. In the area of group identity, rural youths form peer groups more easily than other members of the rural society. In the rural setting, peer groups take the form of age grade organizations, co-operative societies, vigilante groups and others. These groups are important in progressive rural development. However, they can be counter productive if they are mismanaged.

Industrially, most rural youths are very industrious and involved in multiple income generating activities. It is common to see a youth crop farmer who is also involved in fishing, hunting,

hired labour and trading. The same youth still has time to participate in some other rural activities like dancing and other social functions.

Youths possess greater vision about the development of the rural society. This is because the role of the youth in rural development is like the role of the farmer to the farm. As the farm cannot be developed without the farmer because the farm belongs to him, so would the rural area not be developed without the youth because the youth is an important stakeholder of whom the rural communities belong. Youths possess greater strength because of their muscular built, physical energy, strength and agility. When their strength is directed at creative venture, it yields development to the society. This is because youths have energy and ideas which are society's great potentials [6]. In times of crises as in the case of youth restiveness, their strength is highly counter productive.

Intelligence and faster reaction are in born traits which show more during the youthful stage of life. Youths are often faster in reaction to unfavourable environmental conditions. The youth is a major determiner of peace and stability of the nation because they are the most active segment of any society [7]. The youths are generally more sociable, creative and innovative than children and the aged in the society because they have faster yearn for desirable changes. They show higher propensity to adopt development interventions. Irrespective of the good characteristics of the youths as so far discussed, these same characteristics have been known to lead to youth restiveness when they are not well harnessed. The lesson to note by the contemporary Nigerian society from the characteristics of the youth is that

these qualities should be harnessed, mobilized, utilized for productive than destructive tendencies.

4 MEANING OF YOUTH RESTIVENESS

Youth restiveness is defined as a sustained protest embarked upon to enforce desired outcome from a constituted authority by an organized body of youths [8]. Youth restiveness is marked by violence and disruption of lawful activities in which ever society it occurs. Corroborating this definition [9] added that to be restive means the inability to stay still or unwillingness to be controlled, especially because one is bored or not satisfied with certain decisions, changes and or existing laws considered to be unfavourable. Cases of youth restiveness which took place in the study area occurred mainly in the rural areas of the region. Some of these cases were in Umuechem and Ogoni communities in 1990, Bonny communities in 1992, Nonwa area in April 1993, Obite community in 1998, Ogbogu community of Egi clan and Choba communities in 1999 and Ogoni saga of November 3, 2003.

5 CAUSES OF YOUTH RESTIVENESS

The causes of youth restiveness in the Nigerian rural areas were many. Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution [10] and Bassey [11] classified causes of conflicts which also constituted the causes of youth restiveness into security, political, economic and social factors. Security causes included such things as proliferation of arms, presence of vigilante groups and the misuse of the

military to suppress protests. Political causes resulted from struggle for political power, succession and dethronement arising from chieftaincy struggles and territorial (boundary) disputes. Economic causes were from such factors as misappropriation of benefits from crude oil, land and fishing settlement disputes. Social causes on the other hand included such factors as unemployment of youths, low level of education, break down of social values and unequal allocation of development projects. Other social causes included the destruction of the rural environment by oil and gas companies without adequate sustainable rehabilitation programmes, excluding members of host communities from participating in tapping natural resources in their environment, insensitivity of the government to the needs of the rural dwellers, general poverty and inequality.

Specific causes of youth restiveness in the rural areas of the Niger Delta were enumerated by [12] as:

1. lack of sense of ownership, participation and benefit from oil and gas industries operating in their communities.
2. lack of viable income generation opportunities provided for the people by the oil and gas industries,
3. high level unemployment, especially among the youths,
4. employment of outsiders and excluding indigenes of the communities in the employment scheme at all levels by senior staff who are not indigenes,
5. exclusion of host communities from service provision to oil industries,
6. lack of provision of social services like water, electricity, health, education roads and boats to host

communities to oil and gas companies,

7. degradation of the rural environment leading to collapse of traditional occupations such as fishing and farming,
8. threat to livelihood with high risk to health,
9. disillusionment with the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC),
10. harassment of rural residents with military presence from the government and oil companies and
11. worsening condition of poverty as the region is below national average.

The contemporary society should be at alert to deal with these causes of youth restiveness provided by [10] [11] and [12] whenever they tend to arise.

6 SPONSORS OF YOUTH RESTIVENESS

According to the [10], sponsors of youth restiveness in Nigeria were grouped under such classifications as security, political, economic and social actors. Security actors included security agencies, ex-servicemen, mercenaries (external and local allies) and vigilante groups. Political actors of restiveness in the rural areas were political elites (godfathers), political thugs, political aspirants and traditional rulers. Economic actors of youth restiveness in rural areas were the multinational oil companies, as in the case of Shell Petroleum Development Company Limited in Ogoni land. Social actors were the youths themselves, cultism and militants.

7 CONSEQUENCES OF YOUTH RESTIVENESS IN RURAL AREAS

The consequences of youth restiveness in the rural areas for a better understanding of this study are grouped under security, social and economic consequences [10] and [13] *et al.* Security consequences were in such areas as loss of innocent lives and properties, insecurity of people, kidnap of persons, restriction of movement, and proliferation of arms and explosives. Social consequences included such factors as destruction of public buildings (schools, churches, town halls, health centres, etc), destruction of living houses, migration of the rural households and the farm families and the incidence of rural poverty increased. Other social consequences were rise in cases of cultism, ganstarism, hooliganism, disregard for law and order, rape, breeding of defective youths, breeding of defective community leaders of tomorrow and lack of maintenance of rural public utilities such as electrification lines, schools, health centres and roads. The economic consequences of rural youth restiveness included such factors as disruption of oil and gas exploration and exploitation, vandalization of oil pipe lines, disruption of farming and fishing activities, leading to food insecurity, disruption of marketing activities, looting and destruction of personal properties.

Anikpo [12] further enumerated the specific consequences of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta Region to include at least 1,500 deaths a year, 20,000 to 100,000 internally displaced persons yearly, lack of investment due to insecurity and subsequent huge oil revenue losses to the Federal Government of Nigeria.

A critical view of the above enumerated consequences shows that youth restiveness had far and more reaching consequences on the rural households and the wider society. It should therefore be avoided by the contemporary Nigerian society. This implied that the adoption of a good means of conflict management and resolution should be exploited by rural stakeholders to tackle similar conflict cases that may arise. This is important irrespective of the seeming and immediate benefits that may be derivable from youth restiveness.

8 MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION OF YOUTH RESTIVENESS

Management and resolution of youth restiveness is the process of controlling youth related violent conflicts before, during or after such conflicts must have taken place. This definition was corroborated with the assertion of [14] which explained conflict management as the elimination and neutralization of conflict from erupting into crisis or to cool a crisis in eruption. The aim of conflict management is to limit and avoid future violence by promoting positive behavioural changes in the parties involved. Management of youth restiveness is more of a long term arrangement involving institutionalized provisions and regulative procedures for dealing with youth super headed conflicts whenever they occur. This was the approach adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria by the amnesty granted the Niger Delta militants during the administration of the late president of Nigeria, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. The militants were rehabilitated and empowered by the government for a

more productive life style. The management and resolution of rural youth restiveness addresses its causes with a view of limiting and avoiding a future violence by promoting cordial behavioural changes among hostile youths. The procedures for the management and resolution of conflicts which also applies in youth restiveness are judicial, power-politics, conciliatory and problem-solving approaches.

The judicial approach is the process of managing and resolving restiveness within a legal framework [14]. Here a third party is given a kind of power of attorney by the restive party to assume the responsibility of evolving an effective solution to the cause(s) of the conflict. The legal approach resolves restiveness through the process of litigation. According to [14], in the power-politics approach, a third party takes the initiative to manage a restive situation out of concern bordering on realizing its own vested interest, rather than the interest of the restive party. The third party throws its weight against the restive youths not necessarily for the benefits of the youths, but for its own benefits. An example was the use of the military actions by the Rivers State Government and Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) against restive youths in Ogoni land in 1993. According to [15] the above example by these two agencies was to pave way for SPDC to continue with its oil and gas exploitation in Ogoni area.

The norm of the conciliatory approach is that a third party tries to bring the restive youths to agreement through the process of improve communication. In the view of [14], third party assists the hostile groups in interpreting the problems causing the conflict and explores avenues through

which peaceful settlement can be achieved. Through this process deep routed negative emotions are systematically replaced with positive ones which are capitalized upon for the resolution of the causes of the restiveness.

The ethic of the problem-solving approach is that the restive group and its offender by themselves or with the assistance of a third party find solutions to the problem through dialogue. Problem-solving approach is highly participatory in orientation. It is not judgmental in character. The restive party with its purported offender jointly analyzes the causes and collectively works out strategies of finally resolving them. This is the best form used by conflict scholars and practitioners world wide [14].

9 REMEDIES OF YOUTH RESTIVENESS

Anikpo, [12] advanced some remedies which would have acted as the springboard for resolution of conflict among the restive youths of the study area as follows:

1. government should ensure that benefits from oil trickle down from the state to host communities,
2. contracts should be secured to host communities by oil and gas industries,
3. oil industries should upgrade and accept services from local business operators,
4. enhanced commitment by both Federal and State Governments in the development of the region should be followed,
5. Federal and State Governments should create enabling environment for transparent management of

resources and infrastructural development of the Niger Delta,

6. improvement of transportation and communication in the region should be enhanced and
7. corruption and bad governance by the leadership should be checked.

10 CONCLUSION

The youth has important qualities which if harnessed are viable tools in the wheel of rural development process. The same way if these qualities are misused the result is a tale of woe in the society as in the case with youth restiveness. Some major causes of your restiveness were proliferation of arms, misuse of the military in suppressing protest, misappropriation of benefits from crude oil, unemployment, environmental degradation due to the activities of crude oil exploration and exploitation and underdevelopment. In order to eradicate youth restiveness in the contemporary Nigerian society, it is needful to check the rate of arm proliferation, misuse of the military to suppress youth protest, misappropriation of benefits accruing to the community, unemployment among youths, degradation of the rural environment and underdevelopment.

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