ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT: A STRATEGY FOR ADDRESSING YOUTH
RESTIVENESS IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The subject of youth restiveness in Nigeria has assumed an alarming dimension particularly in the Niger Delta region of the country. Acts of violence, gruesome killings, hostage-taking, cultism, etc are some of the social vices that have characterized this region. The root cause of this menace can be traced to decades of environmental degradation arising from the oil exploration and production activities of the oil conglomerates. In order to address these problems, there is need for government, organizations, and able individuals to promote and support entrepreneurship. This paper therefore examines the importance of entrepreneurial development as a strategy for addressing youth restiveness in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The study revealed that acquisition of entrepreneurial skills will cause youths in the region to be self-reliant and independent thus curb the menace of youth restiveness.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Development, Niger Delta Region, Community Development, Youth Restiveness etc.

A. Introduction

The subject of youth restiveness in Nigeria has assumed an alarming dimension; particularly in the Niger Delta region of the country. Acts of violence, gruesome killings, hostage-taking, cultism, etc are some of the social vices that have characterized this region. The region which is Nigeria’s major source of foreign earnings plays host to multinational companies that engage in oil exploration activities has now been bedeviled by can be termed the seemingly unending Niger Delta crisis. The youths in this region are agitating for the restoration of their rights and privileges that have been denied them over the year by these oil multinational companies operating in the region and also the Federal Government of Nigeria.

The root cause of this menace can be traced to decades of environmental degradation arising from the oil exploration and production activities of the oil conglomerates.

Youth restiveness in this region has taken political, religious, and economic dimensions; and as future leaders if this trend is not urgently checked it will spell doom for the Nigerian state. The youths of any given state are the engine of development; therefore a society with educated, disciplined, well focused, and law-abiding youth will be heading for greatness but regrettable, this is not the situation in the Niger Delta region where fear and insecurity has become the order of the day.

It is imperative that in order to bring this situation under control, there is need to realign entrepreneurial development to reflect the interest of Nigerian youths. This forms the thrust of this paper. This paper seeks to examine the importance of entrepreneurial development as a strategy for addressing youth restiveness in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

B. Origin of Entrepreneurial Development

Entrepreneur is a French word first used in 1723. It implies qualities of leadership, initiative, and innovation in new venture design. Studies on entrepreneurship dates back to the works of Richard Cantillon and Adam Smith in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. In 1930s, entrepreneurship was studied by Joseph Schumpeter and other Austrian economists such as Carl Menger, Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek. According to Jimngang (2014), the term "entrepreneurship" was coined around the 1920s. Schumpeter noted that an entrepreneur is willing and able to convert a new idea or invention into a successful innovation which he "the gale of creative destruction". Thus, creative destruction is largely responsible for long-term economic growth. The position of Schumpeter has been widely debated, Israel Kirzner opined that majority of innovations are mere incremental improvements.
Richard Cantillon (1680–1734) considered the entrepreneur to be a risk taker wanting to maximize financial return. Cantillon viewed an entrepreneur not just as a risk taker but someone willing to deal with uncertainty but Alfred Marshall viewed the entrepreneur as a multi-tasking capitalist.

What is Entrepreneurial Development?

According to Uzoma (2011), Entrepreneurship is more than simply “starting a business.” It involves the identification of opportunities or needs and then allocating of resources in a manner that meet the identified needs. Entrepreneurship can be referred to as value creation; through the identification of opportunities. An entrepreneur can best be described as a problem solver or solution provider.

Entrepreneurial success is simply a function of the ability of an entrepreneur to see opportunities in the marketplace, initiate change (or take advantage of change) and creates value through solutions (Hisrich et al, 2008). For the Nigerian youth to survive in Entrepreneurship the following skills are required; he/she must be a high achiever, risk-taker, self-confident, resourceful, goal setter, task oriented, innovative, future oriented communication ability and technical knowledge. Schnurr and Newing (2007) justified the need for promoting entrepreneurship culture amongst youths in all societies because they possess the qualities needed for entrepreneurship development. Bennell (2010) maintained that governments, NGOs and international bodies seeking to improve youth should tap into their dynamism and risk-taking potentials.

Importance of Entrepreneurial Development to the Society and the Country at Large

- **Job Creation**
  Entrepreneurship drives people to their passion. It makes people job creator rather than job seekers. Through the process of job creation, entrepreneurship fosters economic growth. It makes it easy and possible for skills to be acquired easily and used to transform ideas into product or service.

- **Creates wealth**
  Entrepreneurs provide wealth by introducing their products at an affordable price. They introduce and sell their high-quality products at low price so as to attract customers. By so doing they create wealth for themselves and the nation at large.

- **Personal Growth**
  According to Siropolis (2007), Entrepreneurship brings about perfection as the entrepreneur keeps improving on his/her skill set. Through their creative and innovative skills, they continue to develop themselves personally. The flexibility of their work environment also create room for personal development.

- **Social Good**
  Entrepreneurs through their innovative skills identify problem areas in the society and proffer solutions that address these societal challenges. Entrepreneurs make society more habitable and a better place to live in through technological discoveries.]

The Niger Delta

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is the country’s main source of foreign earnings. Prior to 1956, this region was only prominent as the hub of trans-Atlantic slave trade decades ago; but since the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in Oloibiri, Bayelsa State, and Obagi in 1960 in Rivers State, the region now accounts for about 90 percent of Nigeria’s foreign exchange earnings and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The region which lies in the southern geographical zone is between latitude 4° 14’ and 5° 33’ North, longitude 5° 48’ and 7° 4’ East and extends to the Atlantic coastline from Benin River West of River Niger to Bonny River East of the River Niger (Rhuks, Lawrence, & Okonmah, 2009) plays host to oil multinationals. It is heart breaking to know that despite the abundant crude oil deposits and the presence of these multinationals, the region is still the most underdeveloped in Nigeria (Snapps & Hamilton, 2011). This region covers about 70,000 square kilometers of Nigeria’s total landscape. Its vegetation is a mixture swamp and rain forest.
The region is popularly known for its marine resources from the Atlantic Ocean and also for crude oil and natural gas production. The major occupation of the populace is farming, fishing, and trading (George & Kuye, 2012) with diverse ethnic groups and tribes within the region. The Niger-Delta region originally consists of Delta, Bayelsa, and Rivers states, but in year 2000 (former) President Olusegun Obasanjo expanded the region to include Abia, Edo, Cross River, Imo, Akwa Ibom and Ondo States. Some 2 million barrels of oil are extracted in the Niger-Delta; hence the region has accounted for more than 75% of Nigeria’s export earnings.

Youth Restiveness in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria in recent times has been experiencing violence, insecurity, and social unrest as a result of agitations from the youths for environmental degradation resulting from oil exploration activities of multinationals operating in the region. The youths who believe that with the advent of exploration activities by these oil majors life will be better have experienced disappointment and neglect. These multinationals operating in the region through their exploration activities has not only caused environmental degradation; there has been reoccurring cases of oil spillages that have continued to bring untold hardship on the populace. Rather than create socio-economic value for the inhabitants of the region through strategic corporate social responsibility, these multinational companies get involved in unethical practices results in communal crises leading to loss of lives and property (Snapps & Hamilton, 2011). The repeated oil spillages experienced in the region have adversely affected aquatic resources and the only source of livelihood of the populace. These companies through their activities discharge toxic industrial materials into the ocean and rivers thus exposing the inhabitants to diverse communicable diseases that has increased mortality rate in the region (George & Kuye, 2012). These companies have neglected and/or ignored the role of corporate social responsibility in creating business and socio-economic for organizations and society at large. Rather than identity the social needs of the region and meeting these need through CSR programs, these companies have made the region worse than they met it. The region is today the most underdeveloped with lack of basic infrastructural and social amenities. The people have been further impoverished because their source of livelihood is no more (Owualah & Lawrence, 2008). This show of irresponsibility by these multinationals have left the youths in this region with no other option than to resort to violence and other forms of social unrest. As a way of expressing their grievances, frustration, and discontentment for this injustice; youths in the region now engage in disruption of industrial activities, violent demonstrations, hostage taking, vandalism of oil pipelines, militancy, etc. it is worthy of mention that the activities of these youths have not only stall oil production of these multinationals, it has affected their profitability and the foreign earnings of the Nigerian government thus making the government to run deficit budget in the last few decades (Ubhenin & Enabunene, 2011).

From 1999 youth restiveness in Niger-Delta took a new dimension. The new form of militancy and restiveness include, kidnapping of foreign oil workers, kidnapping of top notches in government and those supporting government, arson, assassination, and other forms of gruesome murder. Restiveness is a self-generating theory of conflict process within social groups. Any restive acts of groups whether inter or intra in the nature of contemporary history of Nigeria is synonymous with conflict. Intra group restiveness or conflicts occurs when there is a competition for an interest. The relative deprivation theory asserts that psychological variables and deprivation can cause conflict and restiveness of any kind. Coleman (2006) argues that the unequal socio-economic development of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria led to inter-ethnic and intra ethnic conflict. Once there is an uneven development in all or some facets of human existence within a given society, conflict situation is bound to arise. Asobie (2014) noted that there are approximately 300 spills per year in the Niger-Delta region, he blamed restiveness in the region on the oil multinationals that have neglected the plight of their host communities. He argued that the region has been militarized by the oil multinational corporations and Federal Government of Nigeria. Inequitable distribution of revenue and uneven development has been adjudged to be the root causes of conflicts in the Niger- Delta region. Development in the centre has been given much attention than the other levels of
government and that there is evident inequality in the developmental approach in Nigeria.

This phenomenon, though not exclusive, is predominant in the Niger-Delta region of South-South Zone of Nigeria where the bulk of the country’s oil revenue is obtained. Militant youth groups in this geo-political zone are reported to be over 200 in number within ages 15-46. This implies that they form the school age groups for Nigeria’s institutions of learning, especially tertiary level and working class.

The youths constitute a large percentage of the Nigerian population. A few of them appear to have access to formal education while a larger majority do not seem to have access to formal education nor opportunity to benefit from non-formal/vocational education and therefore do not possess skills necessary to guarantee their upkeep. Without proper guidance and promise for a better livelihood (despite the immense natural resources in the area and perceived benefits derived by the petroleum prospecting and marketing companies), some of these youths seem to engage in some destructive social vices as a way of registering their grievances. Many reasons have been adduced for the high spate of youth restiveness in our society. On the family front, parental neglect and/control have been listed as contributing to youth restiveness. ‘Most of our parents and guardians are not living up to expectation in teaching their children and inculcating in them norms and values’. The norms and values of any society are expected to be in the custody of the different levels of leadership in that society.

Youth restiveness, being a social phenomenon needs to be tackled at every specter of the society: Governmental (National, state and local levels); educational and religious institutions. Leaders at these different levels need a wide range of abilities and skills that would enable them work together with the people, perceive their dispositions and gain their confidence, in order to know how to deal with issues concerning them as they arise. At the school level, to play a leadership role accurately, the school administrator needs to have a fairly accurate perception of his role-expectation, which is an accurate perception of the kind of activities and behaviors he should engage in, in order to perform his job well. This is because; role perception determines the direction in which the individual applies his efforts.

Youths seem to see the leadership in the nation to have failed them. With the long years of military rule in the country and high spate of political crisis, rights of individuals such as to education, health, etc are being neglected. Unemployment becomes a common feature, and the youths seem to be the worst hit. There is, therefore a tendency for them to look at their plight as the making of a government/leadership that does not seem to care for them. Ofehe (2008) pointed out that the unemployment and sufferings among the Niger-Delta youths bring about youth restiveness which manifests in increase in armed robbery, hostility to companies’ staff and family, prostitution, ritual killing etc. There is high population of unemployed, semi-skilled, half educated youths in the Niger-Delta’, this makes a large number of them idle and vulnerable to negative influences. Many of these youths appear to be easily recruited by politicians as thugs, paid huge sums of money, armed, given promises for juicy packages and used for electioneering purposes. Only a few of them seem to be remembered after the elections are won, while many who may have squandered the money they got for the job are left to go back to their original poverty laden life conditions. The resultant effect is for them to revolt against the perceived injustice. Moreover, the arms that were given to them for the electioneering purposes often times do not get retrieved; in the absence of paid employment to keep them busy, the youths easily get attracted to wrong vices, with the acquired/un-retrieved arms as somewhat confidence boosters. This is often worsened by the fact that some of these youths seem to have easy access to drugs, which obviously influences them negatively. ‘Drug Abuse’ is becoming a pervasive problem and it is directly responsible for the increase in robbery, violence and youth restiveness being experienced in Nigeria today’.

The problem of youth restiveness has been a burning issue in the minds of concerned citizens of the Nigerian society because it is inimical to peace and development of the nation in general. In recent time, the menace has taken dangerous dimensions like oil pipe line vandalization, kidnapping of expatriates and politicians, etc. Komonibo (2014) posited that this could be as a result of poverty and communal disputes while Fubara (2006) attributed it to socio-political instability and lack of employment opportunities amongst others; but the case in the Niger Delta is largely due to deprivation, neglect, destruction of the ecosystem by oil
multinationals operating in the region. A situation the youths view as unfair and unjust. Fubara noted that these restive youths are in possession of dangerous weapons with which they carry out these nefarious activities.

**Causes of Youth Restiveness in Nigeria Niger Delta region**

Previous studies conducted in this region have identified some factors responsible for youth restiveness to include peer motivation, perceived victimization by oil conglomerates, lack of social welfare package for the citizenry, lack of government presence, unemployment, lack of quality educational facilities, etc (Elegbeleye, 2015 & Ofem and Ajayi, 2008).

**Bad Governance**

It can be said that in Nigeria bad governance has accounted for the marginalization and deprivation experience by the people of this region. Even though the region is generating a significant portion of the country’s foreign earnings, the regions is still the least developed. In most of the host communities to these multinational where the exploration takes place, there is no federal government presence. There are no motor able road, schools, hospitals, pipebole water, etc. the people live in abject poverty. It can also be said that there are no laws regulating the operations of these oil conglomerates because even where these laws exist, they are not operational. It is visibly clear that there is misallocation of the nation’s resources and lack of transparency in decision making by the government. Onyekpe (2007) observed that government officials divert the nation’s resources to their private accounts for personal use.

**Unemployment**

Unemployment in most developing countries like Nigeria is getting worse by the day as more graduates are produced annually. The frustration that comes with joblessness and the fear of a bleak future have also forced some youths into becoming political tugs and promoters of social vices. Unemployment has caused Africa youths to be manipulated by politician, greedy multinationals, and some traditional rulers just for their selfish ambitions. The future consequences of unemployment if not checked can be disastrous (Zakaria, 2006).

**Poverty**

Poverty which can be described in simple terms as the inequality in the purchasing power between the rich and the poor is clearly visible among the people of the Niger Delta regions. It can be said that most people in this region live in abject poverty. They survive on less than US $1 dollar a day (Zakaria, 2006). This situation that seems hopeless has forced a lot of Nigerian youths particularly those Nigeria Delta to indulge in unethical practices like, kidnapping, bunkering, vandalism, etc. Aworawo (2010) and Zakaria (2006) posited that there is a strong relationship between poverty and youth restiveness.

**Inadequate Educational Opportunities and Resources**

There is a direct relationship between quality education and development of a nation. In Nigeria, the cost of acquiring quality education is so high that only the rich can afford it. A sizeable number of youths aspiring to be educated cannot because these educational facilities are never made available by the government. The resultant effect is that these youths who become disorientated roam the streets and get influenced by their peers and they end up in the hands of miscreants who use them to carry out their nefarious and antisocial activities (Onyekpe, 2007).

**Lack of Basic Infrastructure**

It is quite unfortunate that most rural communities and urban slums in Nigeria lack basic infrastructure like access to potable water, health facilities, electricity, etc. the situation is worse in the rural communities of the Niger Delta region where people still drink from the stream and bath in the river. There are no roads leading to most of the reverine communities, people still paddle long distances in boat to move to and fro city centres. The absence of these facilities have also contributed largely to social unrest and youth restiveness in the country as the youths are now agitating for equitable distribution of resources.

**Inadequate Communication and Information flow**
Communication is support to be a medium through which ideas and opinions can be shared but regrettably, in Nigeria there is communication between the government and the governed. Information sharing between these two extremes is almost at zero level. The government has not provided any platform that creates opportunity for the people to express their thoughts and feelings. This has also created a gap in the decision making process. The citizenry are left behind in the decision making process. The representatives in the legislative arm of government barely feel their purse because they are not in touch with the people.

Odili (2014) identified some of the causes of restiveness in Niger Delta as follows:

1. Blame trading. Both the government and the governed trade blame and see the other as the “enemy”.
2. Personal prevention: the government having no regard for the citizens and they view the citizens as less humans.
3. Personal gain: The political class and traditional rulers working for their self interest. They are more interest in themselves, immediate family members and close associates.
4. The citizens try to protect their cultural heritage and their existence from any form of external interference because of lack of confidence in the legal process.
5. Inequitable allocation of oil wells.

The Role of Entrepreneurial Development in Addressing Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

The increasing pace of unemployment in Nigeria has brought untold hardship amongst citizens and this has propelled youth restiveness (Okala, 2013). The situation has continued to grow from bad to worse with no visible solution in sight. It is expedient therefore that the youths develop their entrepreneurial skills through business education programme.

Educational qualification alone is not sufficient for business growth and development. There is need for creative and visionary skills (Nyanabo & Abukannah, 2012). Through entrepreneurial development, interpersonal and managerial skills are developed. These skills which include problem solving and decision-making will not only assist entrepreneurs manage and organize their processes but also enable them work efficiently in the work environment (Gainer, 2008).

The objectives of business education curriculum will include:

1. Exploratory: To afford all students opportunity to explore relevant areas of interest.
2. Consumer Education:
3. Occupational Knowledge: Create awareness in the students about the various vocations.
4. Economic Understanding: Develop individuals that understand the economic system.
5. Personal Use: Develop in the students saleable skills in their chosen field.
6. Vocation: To help students choose and prepare for occupation of their choice.
7. Semi-vocation: To train students for various business activities
8. University Preparation: To enable the students understand business courses in the university.

The business education programme will enable beneficiaries acquire the necessary skills needed to pursue their life aspirations and proffer solutions to societal problem by being employers of labour and not job seekers (Nwaokolo, 2012).

Entrepreneurial skills that beneficiaries of the business education programme will acquire will include the ability to Plan, organize, source for fund, keep proper accounting records, develop human and public relations skills, operate the business within the ambit of the law, effectively supervise and coordinate both human and material resources, effectively utilize profit for growth and expansion of the firm, and develop broad base investment planning and implementation skills (Ubulom, 2013).

In order to be successful entrepreneurs, the youths need to be creative and visionary. They must possess good interpersonal and managerial skills that will enable communicate effectively with clients, proffer timely solutions to problems and make valuable business decisions whenever the need arises.

C. Conclusion and Recommendations

The role of entrepreneur, small scale businesses, skill acquisition and vocational training in curbing youth restiveness and fostering economic development cannot be over emphasized.
Countries like Japan, China, and India among others achieved industrialization through the promotion of entrepreneurship, small scale industries and vocational training among others. According to Hassan (2013), the small industrialization sector offers the opportunity for the development of indigenous entrepreneurs, skill acquisition, vocational training, domestic savings, utilization of local resources, modernization of the rural sector, and creation of self-reliance. The promotion of entrepreneurship in the Niger Delta region will help curb youth restiveness within the region.

Government should treat entrepreneurship as enterprise creation so as to help youths develop new skills and experiences that can be applied to many other challenging areas in life. The government of Nigeria, NGOs and international bodies should focus on improving the youths through entrepreneurship development. Government should explore the dynamism and risk-taking spirit of the youths. Entrepreneurial development should be used for employment generation amongst youths in the Niger Delta region. Government should create awareness amongst the youths about the existence of government incentives. More youths within the region should be made to benefit from government-sponsored training, seminars, and trade exhibitions. Government should make the documentation requirements for its incentives more flexible. Government should learn to formulate sustainable entrepreneurial development policies that will aid business formation, development and growth. Government should be consistent in its policy formulation and implementation; and these policies should encourage citizens to patronize home-made goods. Corrupt government officials should be checked and prevented from embezzling funds meant for entrepreneurial development programmes. The government should provide low cost funds for youths with entrepreneurial skills. Banks in the country should be made to support entrepreneurial development as most banks in Nigeria today do not support start-ups. Government should provide the needed infrastructure and enabling business environment that will support, promote, and reduce cost of doing business for young entrepreneurs. Government should grant tax holiday to young entrepreneurs. They should establish agencies and research institutes that will help promote business growth. The implementation of these recommendations will encourage and engage youths in the Niger Delta region and this will not just stimulate growth within the region but the nation as a whole.

References


