ENTREPRENEURSHIP STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINED PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION

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Abstract

The Niger Delta Crisis, which relates to unemployment and poverty, has renewed the current focus on entrepreneurship strategies towards revitalizing the region for peace, order and security. The unemployment level in the region is exacerbated by the high cost of living in most of the urban and rural areas on one hand and the rear – collapse state of the infrastructure like power and roads. The crisis has remained an enigma; officially it is describe d as a nightmare. In addition to its significantly high level of oil and gas reserves, the region is rich in biodiversity due to the presence of rivers, mangrove and freshwaters forests and abundance of aquatic and wildlife. But the region is perhaps the most under–developed in the country. No doubt, the persistent crisis in the region has an adverse effect on the state of entrepreneurship and potential foreign investors with negative implications for peace, order and security. Based on this, the researcher decided to carry this study to examine entrepreneurship strategies as an alternative mechanism for sustained peace and security in the Niger Delta Region. Secondary source was used for the information and data collection of this study. Among others, provision of micro – finance, training and development – both formal and informal, encouragement of manufacturing and professionalism, formulation of effective economic, social and political polices were recommended as the best ways for strategizing for entrepreneurship development.

Introduction

The Nigeria Minister of Youth Development, Senator Akinlabi Olasunkanmi at a forum in Ibadan, Oyo State identified the unemployment syndrome bedevilling the country as the cause of crime and other vices among the youths. Citing reports by the National Manpower Board and the Federal Ministry of Statistics, the Minister said "only about 10% of graduate released into the labour market yearly get paid employment" A recent survey carried out by the University of Nigeria, Nsukka revealed that about 76% of the graduates in the last six years were still unemployed. These reports have a commonality of the occurrence of unemployment and poverty in the country.

Nigeria has the third largest concentration of poor people in the world, after India and China. According to the world development indicator database, April 2006, seven out of every ten Nigerians live on less than US$1 per day. The country has experienced slow growth and is one of the weakest growing economies in the world on per capital basis. The housing situation is worsening and number of homeless persons has increased, while urban slums have been increasing progressively in number and size. Physical infrastructures have degenerated largely due to lack of adequate maintenance, coupled with a rapidly

growing population. Nigeria in recent time, has recorded wide crises that threatened human security arising from authoritarianism and bad governance.

The nation's recent political and economic history is characterized by corruption, lack of accountability and transparency, political deprivation, abuse of human right, environmental pollution and degradation, poor macro economic management. All of these have culminated in violent conflicts in the country. Disputes over government resources and control of crude oil drive the violence that has engaged part of the Nigeria's oil producing Niger Delta. For instance, Warri is a notable city in the Niger Delta. As the second major oil city after Port Harcourt, Warri is the centre of scores of oil installations and nerve centre of the operations of oil companies particularly the Chevron –Texaco. The insecurity in the region has lead to the shutdown of oil installations leading many to believe that the Niger Delta region is not a safe place for investment. After all, it is said that investors do not go to war zones. In the recent past, the militant groups have adopted a new tactics of capturing highly placed Nigerians or their spouses and expatriate oil workers hostage for several days demanding for huge sum of money before their release. One of the results of the unending crises in the Niger Delta Area is that Warri that used to be a booming commercial city has now become a literal ghetto, a mere shadow of its former self. Many companies have had to relocate to safer areas as the perennial crisis continue. Furthermore, the socio-political stability of the region ought to have been uppermost in the mind of the federal government. Curiously however, successive federal government seem not to have shown adequate commitment even though the oil wealth from the region constitutes the main stay of the nation's economy. Poverty has come to be common term in the region.

Many attempts have been made and are still been made to put an end to this life terminating menace but it seem like all efforts are in vain as the people keep suffering from a lack of food, money and the necessary things, which enhances life. Poverty can be defined to include low level of income, the absence of medicare, poor sanitation, the absence of good drinking water, illiteracy, the ability to participate in decisions that affect an individual's life directly and the lack of security and protection from crime. The effect of poverty may include poor income, poor nutrition, metal illness, drug dependence, crime and a high rate of disease. In the midst of plenty, the Niger Delta region is perhaps not to be found in development projects but in the heavy deployment of State coercive apparatus. Today, the region can best be described as one at war with itself, the Nigerian State and oil multinationals with dire consequences of unemployment and poverty. The following are some key questions to guild the presentation of the paper. Which areas constitute the Niger Delta region? What is security in its ramifications? In an attempt to answer these questions, the objectives of this paper are stated as to proffer strategies on how to ameliorate the conflicts and institute sustainable peace and security through entrepreneurship in the region. This paper is divide into the following section 1 is the introduction, section 2 looks at the areas that constitute the Niger Delta and the concept of peace and

security. Section 3 focused on the alternative economic opportunities available. Section 4 highlights effects of entrepreneurship on poverty reduction and strategies for boosting it while the paper is concluded in section 5.

The Niger Delta Region and the Concept of Peace and Security

The Niger Delta region is made up of Abia, Imo, Bayelsa, Rivers, Edo, Ondo, Akwa Ibom, Cross River and Delta States. They collectively have the largest wetland in Africa and the third largest in the world (UNDP, 2006). The ecological condition of the region in terms of rivers, creeks, estuaries and swamps have been estimated to be rover 8,000sqkm and this has subjected the citizens of these areas to various challenges that has culminated in abject poverty, unemployment and other social vices. The region is surrounded with rivers, creeks and mangrove swamps and endowed with natural resources such oil and gas which accounts for about 97% of the nations today mineral exploitation and exportation (Iyayi, 2004). The availability of oil and other mineral resources in the region attracted several oil and gas multinational companies such as Shell, Chevron in some their major cities like Warri, Port Harcourt, Yenagoa and others. The activities of these companies have over the years caused some environmental and ecological degradation in these communities. The Niger Delta is highly susceptible to adverse environmental changes because of its location in the coastal region of the world which according to Awosika (1995) are already experiencing flooding due to rise in sea level and various environmental problems resulting from oil exploration and exploitation activities. The operation of these companies in the Niger Delta region today has been described as a curse rather than a blessing (Turner and Brownhill, 2004). This is largely due to social political upheaval arising from the reaction of the inhabitants of the area against activities of the oil companies in the region. Generally, opinions do not differ about the factors behind the surge of violence and civil conflicts in the Niger Delta (Ukeje, 2001). Naanem, (1995) identified land degradation, water pollution, acute scarcity of resources and creation of oil related infrastructure like refineries and petrochemicals as a result of increasing expansion of oil production activities in the Niger Delta. Aside of the intermeddling the oil companies with the people's traditional and social life, apparent lack of corporate social responsibility, the most devastating is the environmental hazards caused by oil pollution. Oil spillage and gas flaring have disrupted and destroyed natural resources central to local livelihoods. Agriculture that employed majority of the locals suffered many setbacks due to the degradation of the environment resulting in underemployment, unemployment, poverty and other social vices. The incidence of poverty in the Niger Delta has been increasing since 1980 after the oil boom. Table I shows that the rate of poverty has been on the increase from 1980 to 2004 in all the Niger Delta States.

Table 1: Incidence of Poverty in the Niger Delta, 1980-2004

Year	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004
Nigeria	28.1	46.3	42.7	65.6	54.4
Edo/Delta	19.8	52.4	33.9	56.1	Delta 45.35 Edo 33.09
Cross River	10.2	41.9	45.5	66.9	41.61
Imo/Abia	14.4	33.1	49.9	56.2	Imo 27.39 Abia 22.27
Ondo	24.9	47.3	46.6	71.6	41.15
Rivers/Bayelsa	7.2	44.4	43.4	44.3	Rivers 29.09 Bayelsa 19.98

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2004

Peace Building and Human Security

Peace building is a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the reoccurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflicts through reconciliation, institution building and political as well as economic transformation (Boutros- Ghali, 1985). In developing countries, the problems often include skew land property ownership structures, environmental degradation and unequal political representation (Zarkman, 1995; Markakis, 1998). The structural dimension of peace building focuses on the social condition that foster conflict. Stable peace must be build on social, economic and political foundations that serve the need of the populace (see*: http://cmtoolk.sais-jhu.edu/*). Economic peace building targets both the micro and macro level and aims to create economic opportunities and ensure that the basic need of the populations are met. On the micro level, societies should establish micro-credit institutions to increase economic activity and investment at the local level, promote inter-communal trade, equitable distribution of land and expand school enrolment and job training. On the macro level, government should provide and secure the economic foundations and infrastructures necessary for peace.

Human security on the other hand means safety for people from both violent and non-violent threat. It means freedom from threats to people's basic right, safety and lives. The UNDP for example, "human security can be said to have two main aspects, it means, first, safety from such chronic threat as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the pattern of daily life: whether in home, jobs or in communities (UNDP, 2000). They identified seven dimension of human security, namely: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security.

Economic security requires and assured basic income for individuals, food security requires that all people at all time have both physical and economic access to basic food, health security aims to guarantee a minimum protection from disease and unhealthy life styles, environmental security aims to protect from the short and long term ravages of nature, man made threats in nature and deterioration of the natural environment.

Political security assures that people live in a society that honour their basic human right, community security protects people from loss of traditional relationship and values and from sectarian and ethnic violence while personal security protects people from physical violence (from which ever source) and domestic abuse. This author noted that in spite of the State's deployment of troops to maintain peace and order in the Niger Delta region, violence keeps breaking out. It is not surprising that the conditions of life of many residents in the region have been deteriorating featured by limited access to health services, poor and inadequate housing, limited access to safe water, limited access to education in the urban and rural areas and poor road networking, limited access to employment limited access to agricultural inputs, implements and machineries, limited access to income generating activities among many more.

Alternative Economic Opportunities

1.   Beside white-collar job, there are alternatives activities available in the Niger Delta and these can be in biodiversity. Although the Niger Delta is biologically the least known ecosystem in Nigeria (Ogbe, 2005), it has Africa's largest mangrove forest (Olomukoro, 2005). Olomukoro (2005) reported that the Niger Delta has the most extensive fresh water swamp, forest than central Africa and most Nigeria remaining forests. Biodiversity is an important foundation for food security. Food security ultimately depends on the protection of the cultural and natural ecosystems as well as the knowledge and the materials needed to provide food and drinks. Biodiversity provides immerse economic value in the area of eco-tourism and sustainable livelihood of local communities and for conservation of natural environments. This was recognized internationally when the united Nations declared 2002 as the international year of tourism. Eco-tourism represents one of the areas where the link between economic development and conservation of natural areas is potentially clear and direct. Eco-tourism could help generate benefits to locate communities in employment. It could also provide for infrastructure such as road and electricity or provide proceeds for community projects such as schools and health clinic (Ogbe, 2005). Biodiversity allows for the establishment of forest reserves, natural parks and games reserves including wild life, bird sanctuaries, special ecosystems and habitats e.g. sacred groves, streams and lakes or sites that are reserves by local communities for their spiritual, recreational and other social economic values. Eco-tourism is a sub sector of the tourism industry catering for tourist who which to visit natural areas to observe wildlife, natural landscapes and traditional cultures. The economic benefits of tourism and eco-tourism in the country cannot be under scored. There is a general demand in Nigeria and Niger delta in particular for tourism development. The forester could establish a close partnership with the local people and take into serious and full consideration, their opinions and emotions so that the communities will have a sense of belonging (Shuncheng 1998).

Inhabitants should have access to forest reserves, wildlife sanctuaries and national park to obtain non-timber forest to produce. Ekeke and Nwonuala (1999) reported that bare areas created in mangroves by oil workers could be successfully revegetated with adapted indigenous tree and shrub species.

2.   Education of rural communities on the natural role and importance of biodiversity can increase their awareness and open avenues for better utilization of forest resource (Idumah, 2001). Development of integrated forest and food production to boost local employment; forest products and income so as to reduce poverty among the rural dwellers is another way of poverty reduction. Strengthening of the local people's capacity to adopt sound sustainable agro forest practices with a view to improving production at minimal cost through improved soil nutrients is necessary. Community participation in forest activities could be used as a strategy for poverty alleviation (Idumah etal, 2003).

3.   The aquatic ecological problems of Niger Delta region should be improved to alleviate the rural poverty level of the inhabitants. Fishing is the mainstay of economic activities of most inhabitant of the region apart from farming. Efforts can be made to improve the aquatic life of the people. Aqua culture and pisi-cultural environment should be developed. The tourist potential of the mangrove swamps forest should be fully exploited for maximum revenue generation since the aquatic and wildlife resources typically represent the region. Government and oil companies should fully integrate the host communities in their poverty reduction programmes. These may include building and rehabilitation of schools, primary health care services, community water supply, adult literacy classes, family planning, free and basic community education, skill acquisition centres, vocational training, food security and nutrition and others to empower the youths of the areas and create jobs for the inhabitants which will reduce tension, unemployment and other social vices in the region.

4.   Improvement of human capacity through training by extension workers is another way poverty can be reducing in the Niger Delta area. Agbamu (2006) was of the view that agricultural and vocational knowledge among the rural dwellers to equip them with capacities will enhance their economic activities. He further states that higher productivity is attainable by using more knowledge in the production process. The capacity for entrepreneurship would be significantly enhanced through the provision of micro finance services to enable them engage in production activities and be more self reliant, enhance household income and increase wealth. Since the 1980s, non-governmental organizations have emerged in Nigeria to assist the cause of the micro and rural entrepreneur. An example of a programme that has been created by government to reduce poverty is the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) with the mandate of providing financial services to alleviate poverty but much success has not been recorded. The place of entrepreneurship will be much more appreciated in the

Niger Delta given the necessary incentives and encouragement. Over the years with the development of entrepreneurship, graduates are encourage to go about creating something of value and making their services available for use by the general public. These must be sustained.

The Effects of Entrepreneurship on Poverty Reduction

Some of the factors that could hinder the success of entrepreneurship in a country are: inadequate finance, infrastructure constraints, poor manpower training and development, lack of professionalism, poor implementation of government policies, entrepreneurs personal problems in identifying and satisfying the needs and wants of the customers, among others. According to Hwang and Powell (2000) cited in Maduagwu (2005), entrepreneurship refers to the creation and new and small business driven by the desire for reward. The term also denotes the desire for independence, self-realization and creative activity. Entrepreneurship is negatively correlated with poverty. It has the capacity to positively affect the level of poverty by helping to reduce considerably. Some of the effects of entrepreneurship on the level of poverty are:

1. Entrepreneurship increases outputs of goods and services, which leads to improved availability at affordable prices.
2. Entrepreneurship leads to an improvement in standard of living and social well being of the people in a community or country.
3. Entrepreneurship leads to creation of more jobs thereby reducing the rate of unemployment of a country.
4. Entrepreneurship boosts the gross domestic production and gross national product of a country.
5. Entrepreneurship enhances the level of confidence, moral and responsible citizenry.

Micro-Finance Banks and Entrepreneurship

Taking into account the measures taken by the government to ensure easy access to micro-credit facilities with the aim of encouraging the set-up of businesses, it will be seen that the government is aware of the impact of micro-finance on entrepreneurial activities. Indeed it is recognized that the creation of micro-finance banks is in itself a growth strategy to increase the volume of entrepreneurial involvement and investment. The existence of micro-finance bank has affected entrepreneurial growth through economic empowerment of the poor, employment generation; increase savings opportunity and poverty reduction.

Manufacturing and Professionalism

Government at all levels must encourage and sustain the people's interest in manufacturing and professionalism. In view of the availability of raw materials from the agricultural sector, government can establish cottage industries for the production of intermediate and finish goods. It is recognized that government

because of its bureaucracy is not disposed to effective management of industries; this author is of the view that government because of their much availability of resources can establish these cottage industries with a view to privatising them within a short period.

There is need also to encourage consulting services by our qualified professionals. Government can set up revolving funds to assist intending lawyers, doctors, pharmacists, accountants, agriculturists that want to set up private firms.

Conclusion

The federal and state government need to take special and direct interest in the social-economic development of the Niger Delta area. The present declaration of creation of the Ministry of Niger Delta is commendable. There is need to establish and sustain entrepreneurship inducing institutions that can mobilize all employment seekers in the Niger Delta region.

Recommendations

The federal and state government must come to terms with the express needs of the people of the Niger Delta region and make conscious efforts to meet them. Governments at all levels must encourage wide consultations, discussion, debates and honest exchanges of ideas to engender popular participation and ownership of ideas. Policy makers at all levels must inculcate transparency in project location, funding and management to eliminate the thought of political domination in the minds of the people of the region.

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