

## **The Role of Higher Education in Developing a Culture of Peace in Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** *The paper discusses the role of higher education in developing the culture of peace in Nigeria. The meaning of peace was highlighted. The reason why a culture of peace should be developed in Nigeria was discussed. The importance of higher education generally was analysed based on the training of young professionals, future leaders and the creation of knowledge through research activities and the provision of outreach programmes. The paper was discussed on four major sub-headings.*

*Teaching – The training of teachers to inculcate the values of and attitudes that foster tolerance create respect for cultural ethic and religious diversity as well as known rights. Encourage peace from early years of childhood to primary and secondary education.*

*Development of Modules on peace and conflict Resolution for three year undergraduate courses*

*Research:- Research can be carried out to assess the underlying courses of a particular conflict in the region. Research on origins and management of conflicts can inform policy makers on how to achieve peace.*

*Services to the community through organisation of conferences, workshops and public lectures is a way of imparting information and sensitising the public on issues related to peace.*

*Conclusions and Recommendation were made on how peace can be achieved through Higher Education*

**Keywords:** *Peace, Culture, Conflict, Higher Education, Sustainable development*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria is one of the most diverse countries in the world not only in terms of ethnicity but also in terms of culture, geography religion and class. As diverse as the peoples of Nigeria are, they still share significant commonalities. The diversity in terms of ethnicity, culture, languages, and religion has its negative effects culminating in the difficulties in coming to agreement on most issues.

Religion is a key aspects of the life of Nigerians and it has greatly influenced many, especially in the political and education arena. In the Northern part of the country, Religion cannot be divorced from politics. Hence various insurgencies have been reported in the North claiming many lives due to differences in Religion. In recent times, cases of Boko-Haram killing and kidnapping are daily reported.

Ethnicism and tribal rivalries have resulted to crises, and conflicts in many states. For example Niger Delta Area poses a security threat not only to Nigeria but also to the international communities. Kidnapping and hostage-taking of foreigners have become the order of the day.

Education as a human right was enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human rights in 1948, a document that can be rightfully be described as one of the highest pronouncements of our time. Education is therefore the right of all citizens of Nigeria to enjoy.

In today's knowledge-driven society, Education is perceived as a vaccine that solves all problems. Education therefore, serves as a catalyst for economic well-being, democracy and good

governance, social justice, environmental preservation, peace building and others in this age of globalisation and in the realisation of the UN millennium Development Goals.

Since education is a catalyst for peace, what is peace? A narrow interpretation of it means freedom from or cessations of war, civil disorder. It can also be described as non-violents, resolution of conflict and the establishment of universal values such as respects for life, human rights, liberty, equity and justice. It means the ability of all components of the population of a country such as Nigeria to lead a decent and healthy life in a safe and sustainable environment with opportunities for economic, educational, social and cultural development.

Reports showed that Nigeria like any other countries in Africa is where peace is severely threatened. Salawu (2001) has identified ethnic tensions and conflict as one of the major factors hampering the stability and development of Nigeria since independence. The challenges to national stability and development is not only limited to ethnic problem. Isirame (2003) noted that development is unattainable in an atmosphere of massive destruction, corruption, bitterness and religious conflicts. Report showed that Africa alone accounted for 6 million of the World's 13 million refugees in 1996 (Nwakwa.1.1997). By 2000, internal conflict and repression had generated 13 million refugees worldwide. In addition nearly 25 million people were displaced within their own countries. Hence where conflicts occur, there would be no peace. (USAID 2004).

Nigeria is not left out of the challenges of refugees. There is a rise in religious fundamentalism where thousands of peoples are being massacred every day. Establishing a culture of peace has become a priority in the country.

Higher educational institutions generally and universities in particular, train young professionals and future leaders through teaching programmes, create knowledge through research activities and provide community service through outreach programmes. Universities in Nigeria can therefore play a meaningful role in developing a culture of peace and in redressing the present situation in Nigeria. In doing so, they can assist politicians, community and religious leaders, international organisations and the United Nations in achieving the goal of peaceful food life. This is because peaceful atmosphere is a necessary pre-requisite for the pursuit of development in its broadest conception (Adetula 2006).

This paper aimed at discussing the role of universities in developing the culture of peace in Nigeria. The paper is discussed under these sub-headings.

- Promotion of peace through teaching
- Services to the community
- Conclusion and Recommendations

## 2. TEACHING

**Teaching:** The training of teachers for primary and secondary schools is one of the major activities of colleges of education and universities in Nigeria. It is a known fact that the values, skills and knowledge imparted by teachers largely determining the quality of education and also influence the attitudes of the students.

At the primary school level, the early years of childhood are the most significant in the development of attitudes and social skills. Teachers at this level must inculcate the values and attitudes that foster tolerance, create respect for cultural, ethnic and religious diversity as well as human rights and encourage peace.

To equip teachers for this task they must offer courses in multi cultural education, and method of co-operative learning. These courses must be made compulsory for all teachers in the Colleges of Education and National Teachers Institute. They must ensure that school curricula address Local, Regional and International issues regarding peace and human rights.

At University level there are various ways of promoting the culture of peace among youths. 'Peace and Conflict Resolution courses can be included in existing courses in various fields in the system. These courses can be offered from 100 level to 200 level by students and must be made compulsory for all students in the University regardless of their area of specialisation. Peace education is being offered in some universities in Nigeria, such as University of Ibadan, Ekiti

State University and others. In some universities in Eastern Africa, Centre for Refugee Studies are established to cater for refugees problems in that region. In Nigeria where incessant strike of 'Boko Haram' occurred this course can be taught in the universities in the affected area. At the post-graduate level courses can be mounted to address targeted problem related to peace and conflict Resolution. One year diploma courses can be organised for youths in the management and prevention of conflict. For example in South Africa, it was reported that university of Durban-West ville has drafted a three year undergraduate course and a one year course in conflict studies has been modelled on similar courses offered in the U.S, Europe, Asia and Australia. This can be emulated by Nigerian Universities who have not done so.

Another approach to developing a culture of peace is through 'regionalising academic activities. That is, students from each region should be made to understand the interdependence of each region from a political, economic, social, cultural and ecological standard. All students should follow in each year of their course an optional module related to language, religion of each region or state. By having understanding of the country they would later be in a better position whatever their career or profession, to address issues affecting peace in Nigeria. The case of National Youth Service programme where students from tertiary institutions are made to serve one year compulsory service after graduation is a laudable programme for developing the culture of peace and harmony in Nigeria.

### **3. RESEARCH**

Africa as a nation, has been riddled with so many conflicts. Nigeria is not exempted from conflicts since independence. A rich field of research on conflict management and origins of conflicts are opened to academicians and policy makers. Experiences have shown that so many conflicts resolutions have been practised for decades, these have not been properly researched and documented. Such research is vital for management of future conflicts.

Another area of research is the problem of displaced people in an affected area where there are conflicts or crises. It is important to research on root causes and consequences of population displacements, the management of refugee camps, the role of women, the education of refugee children and the resettlement of refugees in their towns or cities at the end of the conflict. Researchers in Universities in Nigeria can research on established centre for refugee studies in the affected areas. UNESCO through its culture of peace programmes has given a significant boost to research and other academic activities in peace studies by the creation of UNESCO chairs for culture, the culture; of peace. Universities in Nigeria can make use of this opportunity to research focus and promote peace studies in their various faculties. Findings from researches on increasing rate of crime and insecurities in cities, in Nigeria, causes and why this religious fundamentalism is on the rise in the Northern part of Nigeria, and the factors that cause division and hatred than peace and harmony. All these are fertile grounds for research for universities and research institutes. Their findings can assist policy makers in taking necessary steps to promote a culture of peace.

### **4. SERVICES TO THE COMMUNITY**

Culture of peace can be promoted through conferences, workshops, seminars and public lectures organised by universities. Imparting information and sensitising the public on various issues related to peace will help in promoting peace and harmony in the country. For example, university of Juba in Sudan organised a conference on peace and development in 1993. Recently Nigeria Open University organised its first international conference on peace. The conference was an opportunity for frank discussion on a number of sensitive issues regarding peace in Nigeria.

Universities could also organise short courses of a few days duration on various topic, concerning management of conflicts, human rights. The target groups for these courses could include parliamentarians, military personnel, religious leaders, community leaders civil servants, Youths and officers of NGO's. Relevant modules on the course can be given to these interested groups.

Also international Conferences for academics in Africa and beyond can be organised to enlighten the leaders in Africa on the need for peace in the continent and in Nigeria especially the idea that war is a biologically necessity can be replaced by developing the culture of peace.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, through their teaching, research and outreach programmes higher institutions (universities) in Nigeria can assist in developing the culture of peace by ensuring that society develops the right attitude of tolerance and understanding that is free from prejudices and misconceptions.

Since many universities have embarked on peace programmes a thorough survey of all peace related activities can be shared so that other higher institutions can benefit from them. It must be realised that universities are a reflection of the society in which they are located, universities in Nigeria should take on the responsibility for promoting a culture of peace and find solutions to internal conflict affecting the country.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The development of Nigeria has been slowed down by crises, religious and political conflicts. The productive sector of the economy are thus being deprived of the necessary resources, support for sustainable development. The role of the universities for sustainability and peace cannot be over emphasised.

- For peaceful development, the following are recommended. Recognising that peace is not only the absence of conflicts but requires a positive dynamic participatory process where dialogue is encouraged. A spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation is needed. This spirit should be encouraged by the universities and the community.
- Education at all levels is one of the principal means to build a culture of peace. In this context, human rights education is of particular importance.
- Civil Society should be involved at the Local, Regional and National levels to widen the scope of activities and culture of peace.
- Involving children in activities for instilling in them the values and goals of a culture of peace should be the task of all educators.
- Ensure equality of access of women, especially girls, to education is necessary for peace development.
- Encourage revision of educational curricula including textbooks on the need to promote the culture of peace.

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