

Journalism Education and Sustainable Development in the Niger Delta Region: A Focus on Bayelsa State

Florence Nodinim Okon

Ministry of Information, State Secretariat, Port Harcourt, Rivers State
Corresponding Author: Florence Nodinim Okon

Abstract: This study draws its thrust from the fact that journalism is extremely crucial to the world because of societal complexities and the limitations of man. The supposition in this regard is that journalism in every organic setting enables an individual react intelligently to his environment and adapt knowledgeably to his society. The core objective bordered on the need to illuminate discourses on journalism education with a view to ascertaining an association link with sustainable development using Bayelsa State as a point of focus. Document analysis and participatory Cluster Observation (PCO) formed the bedrock for methodology. Findings from secondary data analysis (empirical review) affirmed an association link between journalism education and sustainable development. Findings further revealed that Bayelsa State ranks the least, on a scale of three South – South states, in terms of institutions of higher learning with journalism offering. The imputation therefore is that knowledge and attitude are the core embellishments of journalism education that can most certainly bring about the actualization and optimization of human potentials. It was therefore recommended that there is need to develop a framework for journalism education that allows for constructive engagement so as to engender sustainable development.

Key Words: Education * Journalism * Mass Media * Niger Delta * Sustainable Development

Date of Submission: 25-01-2018

Date of acceptance: 15-02-2018

I. INTRODUCTION

The thrust of this study draws attention to two intermingling variables – journalism education and sustainable development. For reasons that border on clarity and comprehensibility, a separate and in-depth look at these concepts becomes most pertinent.

Etymologically, the word journalism originated from the French Word *Journalisme* at about 1781 and it represents the “diffusion of intelligence or opinions by means of journals or newspapers and periodicals” (www.finedictionary.com/journalism.html). Journalism in actual sense goes beyond mere writing but encompasses the art of condensing socio-political, socio-economic as well as socio-cultural intelligence in a context that gives them meaning. Such condensations however find expressions through forms that can be aptly described as the mass media. The inference from the foregoing is the burden of public concern often borne by the journalist.

Journalism is so crucial to the world we live in today because of societal complexities and the limitations of man. Man truly is limited by time, space and ability. The imputation as Okon (2015) notes is that “journalism (mass media) through content and portrayal can condense events beyond one’s immediate physical environment, bring those events into an individual’s private sphere and thus enable that individual to connect with the world” (p. 98). The supposition in this regard is that journalism in every organic setting enables the individual react intelligently to his environment and adapt knowledgeably to his society.

Realistically, mainstream journalism has become the predominant source of information in the society. Many people learn about events in the society through journalistic output in the mass media. Journalists in this regard are perceived to be information minded. In life, nobody gives out of nothing thus making such outputs flow from the informed to the uninformed.

Okon (2015) espouses that journalists by professional inclinations belong to the knowledge industry. Their role prescription, when viewed within the social system parameters, places them ahead of other professions on the information/awareness spectrum.

Viewed from a spectrum of professions, journalism remains a foremost profession that can enthrone a viable culture of moral rectitude and open a vista of professional values quite capable of repositioning Nigeria’s polity in line with international best practices. Interestingly, the Nigerian constitution aptly acknowledges this as captured in **Section 22 of the 1999** constitution:

...the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times... uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and the responsibility and accountability of government to the people.

Interestingly, this awesome responsibility of holding the government accountable is placed on the journalist. This no doubt is an honour that carries undeniable obligations. McQuail (2005) in his definition of journalism sees it as a product of work of professional news people. The imputation as Udoakah (2017) notes is that “journalism is practiced by people with proper educational training in the art of news identification, gathering, processing and production” (p. 24). A synthesis of the foregoing will reveal that education is an indispensable ingredient in the making of a journalist. This unequivocally underscores the need for a discourse on journalism education.

II. JOURNALISM EDUCATION

A discourse on the subject matter naturally dovetails within the purview of epistemology and pedagogy. UNESCO recognizes the fact that sound journalism education meaningfully contributes towards professional and ethical practice of journalism. Such journalism is better suited to foster democracy, dialogue and development (www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/mediadevelopment/journalism). Journalism education goes beyond mere writing but entails the acculturation of resourcefulness and constructive reasoning. It liberates the mind from parochialism and irredentism while inculcating in an individual the quest for egalitarianism. When these ingredients are so mixed in a journalist, he begins to manifest the following attributes.

1. **Diligent Search/Inquiry:** This is also known as proper investigation which whittles down the possibility of baseless information while allowing for the projection of only facts and figures. In other words, an individual who has undergone sound journalistic education can never be given to overblown sensationalism and hasty generalizations. In this regard, there can never be any alternative to the truth.

2. **Pointing out needs and solutions:** Sound journalism education endues an individual with the burden of not only pointing out social needs but recommending possible solutions as well. The responsibility expected of him in this regard is to light the way and drive for action. How similar situations were solved in other societies may be highlighted. Commendations may also come in handy especially when they relate to significant community accomplishments.

3. **Helping the society make sense of topical issues/event:** Issues are best comprehended when they are aligned within ideological perspectives. The buzz word in the Nigerian polity today is restructuring. It is only journalism education that can facilitate a ventilation and pontification of such issues with a view to helping individuals digest their essence and import.

4. **The spirit of Mass Mobilization:** This invariably is premised on the need to rally support for a just cause by openly laying the cards on the table so as to encourage non-coercive compliance since no meaningful development can take place in an abyss of ignorance.

No doubt sound journalism education places media operations on a platform of egalitarianism because many scholars have lent credence to the proactive role of journalism in the development of any organic society. A few instances may suffice:

Bernard Shaw notes that “hostile newspapers are to be feared more than a thousand bayonets”. Thomas Jefferson also espoused that “were it left for me to decide whether we should have a government without newspaper or newspapers without a government, I will not hesitate a second to prefer the latter”. Kelvin Phillips, a political scientist, also observed, within the context of the political culture of the United States, that “the contemporary US is the world’s first press state”. John F. Kennedy was quoted as saying that “no top policy maker in Washington starts his day without reading the *New York Times*”. Lenin also declared that “ideas are much more fatal things than guns”.

Udoakah (2017) aptly summarizes the foregoing. According to him:

Oftentimes, people underrate the potentials of journalism. But journalism is a lethal weapon that can destroy society. Journalism practice, like medical practice, is a matter of life and death. But journalism exerts more power on society than medical practice and therefore journalists should be treated with more care than those in medical practice. For instance, a doctor’s error might engender only one or a few lives while wrong and inaccurate reports can destroy a whole community (p. 64).

He further posits that “no government should ever think of brushing aside the journalist and no journalist should wield his pen carelessly without recourse to the possible consequences of his action” (p. 65). It is only journalism education that can help a journalist analyze the probable impact of his action. By extrapolation, therefore, journalism education is indeed a precondition for sustainable development.

The Notion of Sustainable Development

Rodney (1974) viewed development from a multi-sided perspective. According to him; Development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity. The presupposition here is that, at the national level, development may mean growth in economies while at the international level; it might mean global peace and harmony. The concept of development was further illuminated at the start of the United Nation's First Development Decade where Uthant aptly phrased it as "Development = economy + social change".

For Dudley Sears, development involves the creation of opportunities for the realization of human potential. The underlying issue here is that the individual remains central in every definition of development. This is so because the individual growth contributes to societal growth without which there can be no development.

The obvious thing to note about development is that it is a beneficial change for the individual. This therefore means that every concept of development must revolve around changing the individual for the better. The development of the individual is therefore a precondition for the development of the society.

In summation, therefore, development has been defined in this piece as "the emancipation of the individual from poverty to prosperity with a view to enabling him realize his potentials in order to attain more human dignity, security, justice and equality". These no doubt are the core values of journalism education.

By extension, sustainable development entails dialogue, participation, co-operation and the sharing of knowledge and information. From a systems approach, an imbalance in a singular element/component alters the operational dynamics of the entire system. Participant cluster observation (PCO) reveals that so far, an overt missing link in the chain revolves around the dearth of knowledge and information about development initiatives. This is indeed a vacuum that only journalism education can fill.

The Setting

Like Virgin Islands, the Niger Delta region has been explored and exploited. Oil prospecting and exploration has taken the center stage in this region. This on its own has attracted huge economic and industrial activities to the region. The macro – economic implications of the foregoing are indeed far reaching. Ideally, it is expected that with the influx of petroleum up and down stream industries at the onset, job opportunities will abound for the people of the region, development will be sparked off in the communities where the companies operate such that it could be likened to the oil rich deserts of Kuwait, Brunei, Dubai etc, with a corresponding sense of well being amongst the populace.

Ironically, what is on ground is a far cry from the ideal picture painted above. There is wide scale unemployment with poverty taking a second index. Infrastructural development is below a commendable level. Their capital cities cannot assume the status of metropolises talk less of megalopolises as one would have expected. As a basic calling, the people are agrarian in nature taking primarily to fish farming and crop farming. This economic activity on its own has suffered severe setbacks due to the ever present oil exploration activities. There is widespread ideology that the huge exploration activities have polluted the water ways, making aquatic life and sustenance unviable while the arable lands have become devoid of crop nutrients thereby making it impracticable to cultivate at a level above subsistence.

It is this interplay of ideal and real that has given illumination to paradoxical expressions like "*poverty in the face of abundance*" and "*monkey dey work, baboon dey chop*".

The Synthesis

According to Mene (1992), "*When you treat people responsibly, they act responsibly*". The highest degree of empowerment is delegation. The process of granting decision making of some issues to the grass roots while at the same time developing their potentials and abilities is a bold step in the right direction. The overriding goal here is to see power distribution as a means of increasing productivity. Each step in this direction is to increase the degree of participation of groups of individuals who hitherto had no sense of belonging. Empowerment as used in this context may sound theoretical but it is driven by perseverance for according to Randolph (2001).

...while the keys to empowerment may be easy to understand, they are hard to implement. It takes tremendous courage to start sharing sensitive allocations; it takes strength to build more structures just at the point when people want more freedom of action. It takes real growth to allow groups to take over certain processes. Above all, it takes perseverance to complete the empowerment process.

The idea here is that the clamour for resource control to some extent should be community driven rather than state driven since this could lead to another vicious circle of intrigues and intricacies. Commitment is more likely to influence people to co-operate when they rely on consultation and strong rational persuasion rather than pressure and coercion.

Structurally, this also shows that previous attempts by government at resolving the Niger Delta crises have often taken vertical dimensions rather than a horizontal one. The best no doubt is the horizontal approach, which is predicated on the principles of dialogue. The advantages of this approach are indeed far reaching. The form and number of pressure/protest/interest groups in the Niger Delta are diverse and fuzzy. Their mission and vision sometimes become undefined and blurred. As long as many of these groups remain unfocused, violence in the area will remain unabated. Interestingly, sound journalism education can to a very large extent create, in the face of this scenario, a platform that allows for:

1. Mutual respect
2. Mutual trust: This is geared towards building an atmosphere of confidence that no group will take any action that is purposely intended to short circuit the other person.
3. Openness
4. Mutual benefit: Coalitions should in a civil manner strategize so that everybody wins

To this end, journalism education will engender an attitude that allows journalists to:

1. Monitor the news
2. Get the facts
3. Create daily briefings and
4. Point out the wrongs in a society with a view to proffering solutions

It must however be realized that the ideal situation must be the welfare and interest of the generality of the people. The imputation is that the practitioner must at all times be guided by the cardinal notions that accord nobility to the journalism profession.

Noteworthy also is the fact that journalism ideals are often premised on the moral principles of public interest outweighing at all times other sundry interests. Inference from this common place reasoning will show that if natural courses are circumvented, disasters often become inevitable consequences.

Bird (2008) outlines the following as nuggets of journalism education in the face of sustainable development:

- i. Make sense of the subject matter being reported
- ii. Communicate to your audience in a highly understandable way
- iii. Explain what is being done
- iv. Filter out exaggerated claims
- v. Keep skeptic's comments in context

Empirical Evidence

A recent correlational study by Van, Staveren and Webbink (2012) confirmed the hypothesis that: "a stronger journalism framework engendered by education will positively contribute to poverty reduction and democratization (sustainable development).

The study focused on transformative agencies such as civil society, including media organizations, and practices which facilitate citizen's involvement in public policies and decisions. Findings showed that:

organic interventions might become even more poverty reducing when it would stimulate civic activism which means in particular by supporting free press in order to enable people's objective information gathering about what is going on in the world through newspapers, radio, TV, internet etc.

The study concludes that the reason why free, pluralistic and independent media contribute towards reducing the level of corruption in any society is because of:

- i. Their provision of verifiable information in the public interest
- ii. Placing voices and issues on the public agenda
- iii. Raising the level of public scrutiny of national development policies.

Figure 1 provides a graphic illustration of this correlation.

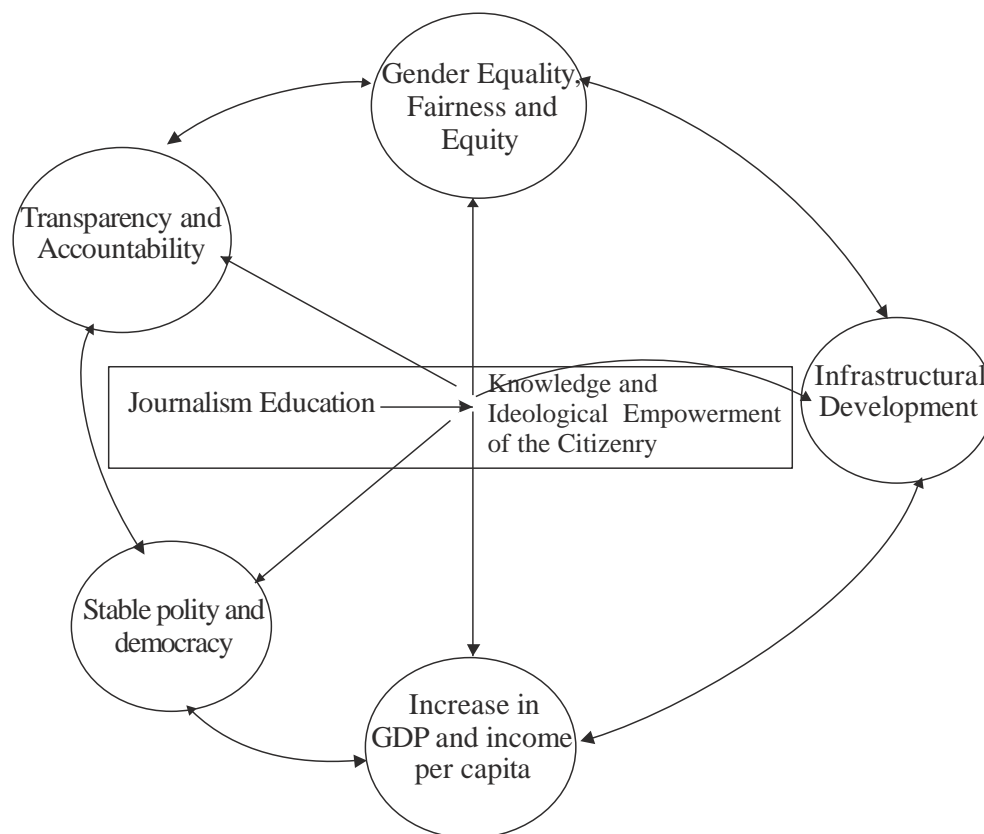


Figure 1: Knowledge and Empowerment Cycle. Source: Okon (2017)

Our Focus – Bayelsa State

Bayelsa is one of the states that make up Nigeria’s south-south geo-political zone. It has interstate boundaries with Rivers State to the west and north-west, Delta State to the east and south-east. The gulf of Guinea lies to its south with Yenagoa as its capital.

The state was created in 1996 from part of Rivers State. Bayelsa State has one of the largest crude oil and natural gas deposits in Nigeria. It has a riverine and estuarine setting. Most of the communities are surrounded by water thereby making them relatively inaccessible by road. Its total space is about 21,110sq.m. According to 2006 census figures, the state has a population of about 1,998,349. The people are mainly of the Ijaw ethnic stock.

In terms of tertiary education that can only be accessed through UTME, the state has the following in relation to journalism education as shown on table 1.

Table 1 - Journalism Education in three south-south States

State	Number of universities/tertiary institutions	Offerings on journalism education	%
Akwa-Ibom	4	4	100%
Bayelsa	7	2	28%
Rivers	6	5	83% =

The table shows Akwa Ibom State as having the highest offering for journalism education with Bayelsa State having the least on a ranking of three south-south states. This however highlights a vacuum which inevitably creates a cause for great concern.

III. DISCUSSION

The inference from the data primarily illuminates a correlation between journalism education and sustainable development. Journalism ideals no doubt border on enthroning sound values in the face of debilitating vices in the society. This is in line with Okon(2017) who posits that “the surveillance function of the mass media in an ideal sense entails the collection of news, pictures, facts, comments and opinions required in order to enable the citizenry understand and react knowledgeably to environmental, national and international conditions while being in a position to make informed decisions”(p.152).

Stretched on a continuum, it becomes quite glaring that the more institutes of journalism a state has, the greater the level of organic and inorganic development in that state. The crux of the matter is that journalism output affects cognition which in turn forms the bedrock of attitudinal conditioning.

Journalism education is the only instrument that can import the ideals of modernization into a traditional society and by so doing, cause the people to embrace best practices. This in summation typifies the dynamics of sustainable development. Drawing from the focus of the study as espoused in Table 1, it appears that Bayelsa State, when viewed against the backdrop of the three states under review, stands on shaky grounds when it comes to issues that dovetail within the purview of sustainable development. The deduction may not be farfetched based on the data in the table earlier stated.

In an earlier study, Okon (2013) upheld that “the mass media are indeed endowed with capacities to wield an enormous influence on the people through widespread enlightenment and awareness”(p.65). What this invariably means is that the core role of journalism in the entire value chain of sustainable development is anchored on education and awareness. Interestingly, sustainable development becomes dysfunctional in the absence of these core elements.

IV. CONCLUSION

With an incontrovertible correlation between journalism education and sustainable development, it can be deduced that journalism education is indeed a precondition bearing in mind the fact that its output engenders a favourable disposition in the minds of the people. If the matrix of knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) holds sway, it therefore becomes quite glaring that the take – off point for sustainable development rests on the first two elements in the matrix and these elements interestingly, are the core embellishments of journalism education that can most certainly bring about the actualization and optimization of human potentials in the Niger Delta region.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Journalism education is no doubt anchored on cognate teaching dynamics in the nation’s conventional institutions of higher learning especially those with journalism offering. This being the case, it is projected that the following recommendations, if and when implemented, will lay a solid foundation for sustainable development in the Niger Delta region:

1. There is need to develop a framework for journalism education that enthrones courage, boldness and integrity with a view to averting journalistic inertia while reinforcing salient provisions of the FoI Act.
2. The curricula for journalism education should uphold the fundamentals of mentoring and following such that core values of journalism can only be taught through personified examples. This no doubt will enable the institutions to raise journalists who profess truth and epitomize it.
3. Journalism education in our institutions of higher learning should be garnished with modules that allow for periodic monitoring and evaluation so as to square classroom teachings with dynamisms that characterize organic societies.
4. Manuals on journalism education should be designed to functionally allow for a framework that focuses on the need for constructive/ideological engagement rather than hype on primordial sentiments like ethnicity and religion.

Post Script

With the nation state of Nigeria gradually slipping into a state of disillusionment and bewilderment, what is needed however is a force to emancipate and transpose the nation into a state of incontrovertible actualizations. That force is a brand of journalism driven by the quest for equity, fairness and justice as accentuated by iconoclastic journalistic teachings and practice. The undeniable role of journalism education is therefore preconceived in the foregoing.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Bird, E., Lutz, R. & Warwick, C. (2008). *Media as partners in education for sustainable development: A training and resource kit*. Paris: UNESCO
- [2]. McQuail, D. (2005). *McQuail’s mass communication theory* (5th ed). London: Sage publications.
- [3]. Mene, P. (1992). Power, politics and the human resource professional. *Human resource planning*. 4(1), 68 – 79.
- [4]. Okon, G.B. (2013). Voter education by the Nigerian broadcast media : A normative appraisal of three radio stations in Port Harcourt metropolis. *Journal of media studies*. 28(1). 57 -81.
- [5]. Okon, G.B. (2015). Contextualization of non-communicable heart disease in select Nigerian newspapers: Approaches and patterns. In O.F. Ike & S.E. Udeze (eds). *Emerging trends in gender, health and political communication in Africa*. 97 – 109. Enugu: Rhyce Kerez Publishers.

- [6]. Okon, G.B. (2015). Journalists' understanding of the ideological differences between the two dominant political parties in Rivers State: A survey of Port Harcourt city. *KSU journal of mass communication*. 4(1), 74 – 90.
- [7]. Okon, G.B.(2017). Gas flaring in the Niger Delta region and its reportage by select Nigerian newspapers and magazines: A normative appraisal. *Nigerian journal of oil and gas technology*. 3(1). 151 -171.
- [8]. Randolph, W. (1995). Navigating the journey to empowerment. *Organizational dynamics*. Spring. 31 – 47.
- [9]. Rodney, W. (1974). *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. Kenya: East African Pub. House.
- [10]. Udoakah, N.J. (2017). *The political economy of Nigerian journalism* (the 5th Inaugural Lecture). Uyo: University of Uyo.

IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Florence Nodinim Okon "Journalism Education and Sustainable Development in the Niger Delta Region: A Focus on Bayelsa State." IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) , vol. 23, no. 2, 2018, pp. 01-07