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## **Zion Brand Cherubim and Seraphim Churches in the Establishment of Primary Schools in Bayelsa State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper investigated the role of the Zion Brand Cherubim and Seraphim churches in the establishment of primary schools in Ekeremor Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The study established that 21 schools representing 29.6% out of the 71 primary schools in the Local Government Area were established by these churches. The challenges faced by these primary schools were lack of adequate qualified teachers, physical facilities and the poor condition of classroom buildings because the schools operate from temporary structures or inside the church buildings. The implication was that the graduates of these primary schools will lack qualitative*

*and functional education because of the challenges they face. The prospects of these schools were that many children of school age now have access to education closer to them. It was recommended that government should send qualified and well motivated teachers to such rural schools; build permanent classroom buildings and properly regulate the establishment of such schools as a means of quality control.*

## **Introduction**

Primary education is the basic introductory schooling for children in an institution starting from the age of six years and continuing to ten to twelve years (Asaya, 1996 and Martins-Umeh, 2003). The curriculum of primary education is geared towards the inculcation of literacy and numeracy, and the study of science; and civic and social studies where social norms and values of the local and the country are taught. Primary education is therefore, the bedrock of any education system, since education at this level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system of education (Asaya, 1996). It is for these reasons that primary schools are established in the nooks and crannies of the country to afford the child the basic educational knowledge.

However, formal western education at the primary school level was pioneered by the Christian Missions. The reasons for the establishment of these primary schools were to provide basic education and to convert the people to Christianity. Most of these schools were housed either in the church or within the church premises (Dienye and Kosemani, 1989). The first primary school in Bayelsa State was established by the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) in Twon-Brass in 1868. The Catholic Mission took a queue from the CMS and established primary schools also. In 1916, the government had also opened schools in most of the towns. The communities also followed and established primary schools to take care of their individual educational needs. It was the general belief that only the missionary churches, government and various town

communities that were responsible for the establishment of primary schools.

Apart from the CMS, government and the communities that established primary schools, the Zion Brand Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Churches was another salient group that played a prominent role in the establishment of primary schools. From the foregoing, it became pertinent to find out the origin of Zion Brand Cherubim and Seraphim, the reasons for their interest in establishing primary schools, the challenges they face and the prospects specifically in Ekeremor Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

### **The origin of the Zion Brand Cherubim and Seraphim**

In the 1920's, conflicts between the foreign missionaries and the indigenous converts over doctrinal as well as church governmental issues led to many breakaways. This led to the establishment of African indigenous or independent churches. One of such breakaway churches was the Zion Brand Cherubim and Seraphim Church (C&S) established in the Yoruba land in 1926. In 1948, the Zion Brand C&S was founded in Igbo-Nla in the present Ondo State of Nigeria by Late Rt. Rev. Lena E. Ogunfeyimi. Less than ten years later, an Ijaw man from Ezetu Town in the present Southern Ijaw Local Government Area known as Apostle Williams who was afflicted by a strange ailment went on health tourism to Igbo-Nla for healing. He was healed spiritually and became possessed by the Zion spirit. He returned home to establish the first Zion Church at Ezetu in 1956. The Zion Brand C&S church has now spread to so many Ijaw towns and villages in Bayelsa State. The secret of this wide-spread popularity was because of its syncretistic formula and the church allows elements of traditional culture such as polygamy and other types of traditional life style, and the drinking of alcohol (Christian Counselling Centre, 1999). In this regard, Falk (1997) also reported that, the Zionist Churches are syncretistic and retain such traditional practices as reverence of ancestral spirits, purification rites, and polygamy; and

although they are syncretistic, they combat certain elements of animism, such as demons and magic.

The Zion C&S Church leaders and their followers started building churches at the outskirts of the mother village or town when they realized that, the population of the membership had increased and the mother village or town can no longer accommodate them. Their new settlements carried the look of a religious people who do not want to be contaminated by non-members. Every adult convert and their families build their living houses and cluster them around the main church building. They carried out their farming, fishing and trading activities in or from these new settlements. They establish their internal political administration with the founder of the individual churches as the spiritual and political leader of that community. However, they are not divorced from the mother communities in the wider political administration since they come from various families and compounds in the mother community and therefore partake in whatever benefits that accrue to the mother community. They are still subjects of the traditional ruler of the mother community.

### **Reasons for the establishment of primary schools by Zion Brand C & S Churches**

When Zion C&S Church settlements became populated with many children of primary school age, they clamour for the establishment of primary schools separate from the ones established by the government in the mother community. This is because the Zion C&S Church settlements are continually engaged in one form of economic, social and political activities. In the opinion of Binafeigha (1989), the communal efforts in the establishment of schools became prominent as the average Nigerian became aware of the fact that western education was a means of emancipation. They are also compelled by a collective sense of need such as the desire for community progress and development. Some reasons advanced for the establishment of primary schools by the Zion C&S Churches were religious, proximity, socio-political and economic factors.

Religious factor contributed immensely to the establishment of these primary schools because since this brand of church is a spiritist movement (Christian Counselling Centre, 1999), and they have their own traditional life style and would not want their religious beliefs to be contaminated; and therefore would like to be relatively detached from their town folks. This means that, their children of school age are also detached from the town. For this reason, it was pertinent that, they establish their own primary schools for children of their faithful devotees in the new settlements.

Proximity to the available schools in the town was another factor; and since the churches are relatively far from the mother town, the children had to trek long distances before getting to the schools in the town. Apart from the long trek; during the rainy season, the access roads are either flooded or muddy and impassable. The only means of getting to school in the town during the flood season is through the river by paddling the local dug-out wooden canoe (Amasuomo, 2001) and hence there was the need to establish primary schools in the new settlements.

Socio-political factors also played a part in the establishment of primary schools. People saw education as a vehicle for social mobility for its citizens (Williams, 1973). Politically, no illiterate person can effectively play an important role and the possibility of such a person to be put in apposition of political power is remote (Amasuomo 2001).

Schools are established for economic reasons, and this factor is pertinent because in most big businesses such as import and export trade, banking and finance and other areas of commerce, only the educated can manage them. The relationship between education and economy are therefore geared towards meeting the social needs of the hour (Fafunwa, 1974).

### **Pupils' population in primary schools established by Zion Brand C & S Churches**

In Table 1, the number of primary schools established by the Cherubim and Seraphim Churches was 21 from a total of 71 primary schools in Ekeremor Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. This represented 29.6 %. Further, these primary schools had a population of 15,002 out of the total pupil population of 70,307 representing 21.30%.

**Table 1:** Number of primary schools established by Zion Churches and pupil population

Schools established by	Number of schools		Pupil population	
	Number	%	Number	%
Government	50	70.40	55,305	21.30
Zion churches	21	29.60	15,002	78.70
Total	71	100.00	70,307	100.00

Source: Bayelsa State Ministry of Education, 2012

### **Challenges of the primary schools established by Zion Brand C& S Churches**

The challenges faced by the primary schools established by Zion Brand C&S Churches basically funding, teachers' supply and physical infrastructure. In terms of funding, the Zion Churches provide the initial funds for the establishment of the schools through self-help, levying of taxable adults, church offerings, lunching and vows made by individuals as well as monetary gifts from those who come for spiritual healing in the church. With a committee set up for this purpose, monies collected were disbursed through the committee for the construction of the initial classroom buildings, provision of school furniture, stationeries and staff accommodation. They also recruit the initial take-off teachers and pay their salaries. The period it takes government to take-over the schools depends on government's

readiness to foot the bills. In this regard, Binafeigha (1989) reported that, as community schools, the assumption are that, they are run and financed by the communities. In a large measure, that is true. The government merely employs post and pays the teachers but has little involvement in the day-to-day affairs of the school. From the foregoing, it was very obvious that, the Zion Churches do not have enough funds to run the primary schools effectively.

Provision of school buildings and physical facilities was another challenge facing the primary schools. The school had no permanent structures as classroom buildings, and adequate physical facilities such as libraries, good writing desks, and recreational facilities among others. Most classes were held in temporary structures or inside the church buildings which in most cases were also in temporary structures as shown in Table 2.

The classrooms do not provide any environment conducive for teaching and learning; and the health and safety of the teachers and pupils were not assured. The buildings were either roofed with thatch or zinc roofing sheets, while the walls are constructed with mud, zinc or timber planks; and most of the classroom floors do not have cement/sand screed, and therefore always damp. During the rains, thatch roofs leak and the mud walls sometimes collapse. Periodic replacement of materials of construction is always required. In this regard, Omoniyi (1989) noted that, the learning process is facilitated and made more meaningful when students study in classrooms of suitable size, well ventilated, well lit, tidy and adequately equipped with furniture and teaching aids. In the same vein Salami (1995) opined that, the psychological effects of poor physical facilities on teachers and students in terms of job satisfaction, motivation, attitude to work and pupils deprivation of good school environment are better imagined than described.

**Table 2:** School building conditions and available physical facilities

Types of classrooms	No.	Conditions of classroom buildings	Conditions of other physical facilities
Church building	15	Constructed with zinc roofing sheets, mud walls, cement/sand screed floors; the hall partitioned with movable bamboo mats or plywood. During church service the partitions are removed. The sizes of the classrooms were not standard, ventilation and day lighting was poor.	No toilets for pupils and teachers. Football fields Play grounds, library, staff offices, science laboratory, standard classrooms, first aid boxes, storage facilities, writing desks were not available.
Temporary structure	6	Constructed with zinc roofs or thatch roofs; the walls were either mud or timber planks, the floors were either of cement screed or bare mud floor. The thatch roofs leaks often and the floors became damp during rainy seasons. The classrooms sizes of were not standard, ventilation and day-lighting was poor.	No toilets for pupils and teachers; football fields play grounds, library, general staff offices, storage facilities, first aid boxes, primary science laboratory and standard classrooms, writing desks were not available.

Source: Authors field trip

The supply of adequate and qualified teachers was another challenge that faced the Zion established primary schools. A look at the teachers' supply, and teacher to pupils' ratio in Table 3 revealed that, the ratio of teachers to classrooms is 1:2 (one teacher to superintend two classrooms) instead of a teacher to a classroom. This showed that, there was gross inadequacy in the supply of teachers. There were challenges of supervision because, while a teacher is in one classroom, the other two classes are left unattended to (Amasuomo,



1999). In the area of teacher/pupils ratio, Table 3 further revealed that, one teacher was expected to teach 233 pupils at a time (1:233), instead of one teacher to between 35 to 50 pupils for effective supervision. The need for adequate supply of teachers was to give pupils equal exposure to learning. Adesina (1977) in this regard stated that, teachers constitute the single most important fabric upon which hangs the success of the whole educational edifice. Therefore, adequate supply of teachers is very vital in the development of primary education.

**Table 3:** Teachers supply and teachers-pupils ratio

	Total number	Average per school	Teachers-pupil ratio or teachers-classroom ratio
Pupils enrolment	15,002	714	
Teachers supply	65	3	1:223
Class rooms	126	6	1:2

Source: Author's field work

### **Prospects in the primary schools established by Zion Churches**

The challenges mostly identified with the primary schools established by the Zion Churches were in the areas of adequate supply of teachers, classroom buildings and physical facilities. However, these schools have also brought smiles to both parents and children because; education was brought to their door steps. This group of pupils would have been deprived of basic education considering the fact that, the churches and the settlements are located relatively far away from the mother communities. In addition, over time, the number of such schools recognized by government also increased. That means government recruits teacher for them and also pay salaries of those teachers. This scenario marks a bright future for these primary schools. Therefore, with time, government is likely going to provide permanent classroom buildings, more teachers and physical facilities

for these schools. When this happens, the initial sacrifices made by the Zion Churches in the establishment of primary schools were a worthwhile venture.

### **Conclusion/recommendations**

While credit is usually given to the early Christian Missionaries and government for the establishment of primary schools in the state, available statistics have indicated that, the Zion Brand C&S Churches were also active players in the education industry. They brought succour to the little ones who may not have been afforded basic education at the primary school level. Invariably, they have assisted in no small measure in providing basic education to the citizens of the local government in particular and Bayelsa State in general.

However, since the primary schools established by the Zion Churches lack the basic requirements in terms of adequate supply of qualified teachers, classroom buildings and other facilities such as school furniture, library, science and handicraft workshops as well as recreational facilities, qualitative education at this level is not likely to be achieved. For this reason, it is recommended that:

1. To achieve adequate supply of teachers, government and the communities where these schools are established should award scholarships to indigenes to read education in tertiary institutions with a bond making it compulsory for such beneficiaries to teach in the primary school for a particular number of years.
2. Efforts should be made by government to provide standard classrooms buildings and other facilities such as school furniture, libraries and primary science laboratories. Public spirited individuals and companies should be impressed upon on the need for them to assist government and the communities in providing some of the facilities.
3. The inspections unit of the Ministry of Education of the state should ensure that the minimum requirements prescribed for

the establishment of primary schools by communities or individuals should be strictly adhered to, so that the problems of teachers supply and provision of physical facilities is reduced to an acceptable level.

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