

CHARTING PATHWAYS TO DEVELOPMENT IN THE RIVERINE AREAS OF NIGERIA'S NIGER DELTA REGION

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Abstract

Development is a multi faceted concept that encompasses the physical as well as the mental. As such it is inappropriate to conceive of development only on infrastructural terms without reference to the socio-psychological and vice versa. This paper takes a look at the Niger Delta and argues that development in the region has been lopsided as emphasis has, more often than not, been on infrastructural or physical improvement. Thus this paper argues that the inability to make the aborigines of the Niger Delta relevant in society through relevant skills acquisition and adaptation to modernization after being displaced from their environments and livelihoods ought to be the focus of development in the region. Therefore, focus should be placed on human resource development of the Niger Delta people just as much as is on infrastructure. This paper then posits that to achieve this, there ought to be an increase in both formal and informal education to enhance the rural peoples ability to adapt to and be relevant in the changes of a modern world as well as curb the 'quick money' mentality encouraged by politicians and Multi National Corporations (MNCs) which has been etched into the mindset of youths of the Niger Delta and thereby making them productively redundant.

INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta has been described as one of the world's largest and Africa's third largest drainage area. This flood plain is home to over seven million people, grouped into several nations or ethnic groups – the Ijaw, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Isoko, Efik, Etche, Ibibio, Andoni, Ikwere, Ogoni, Edo, and Kwale-Igbo. The bulk of these groups inhabit the heart of the delta which is

spread over three states in present day Nigeria namely, Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers states. These states take up about 80% of the area.

The Niger Delta has been a topic for intense debate since the 90s due to the local and international awareness created by Ken Saro Wiwa of the regions 'cursed blessing'. In the words of Ibaba (2005:3):

The Niger Delta Region of Nigeria is an odd paradox. Despite its evident and abundant resources which include the nation's oil wealth, the area represents one of extreme poverty and underdevelopment. The Niger Delta is not only underdeveloped, but is also experiencing a crisis of developmental instability.... Infrastructural development is very low, poverty level is about 80% and unemployment level ranks 70%. Access to basic social amenities is very limited. For example, over 80% of the coastal or riverine communities source water for drinking, cooking and other domestic uses, from rivers, streams and lakes that are equally used for disposing of human and other forms of waste. The upland communities largely drink from shallow wells that are contaminated. Indeed, the Niger Delta region falls below the national average, in all measures or indicators of development

More often than not, most literature on the Niger Delta place the blame of underdevelopment on the conspiracy between the MNCs who milk this region of its resources and the federal government which is the end beneficiary of this wanton exploitation. Most arguments here border on environmental degradation and conflict creation and exacerbation in the Niger Delta by the MNCs as well as policy insensitivity, social exclusion and infrastructural neglect on the part of the federal government. In a bid to correct this anomaly, private enterprises and government agencies operating in the area have been encouraged to live up to their corporate or role responsibilities. This clamour is justified when one considers, as noted by Watts and Okonta (2003) and Ikelegbe (2008) that "nobody should be under any illusion that the oil companies and the federal government are not the most important factors driving ... underdevelopment, poverty, marginalization, oppression, inequitable and unjust treatment, repression and violence in the region." Thus, it is only befitting that they play leading roles too in developing the area and peoples of the region.

Assessing the success of their efforts in transforming the areas of the Niger Delta is not the focus of this paper, but rather what this paper attempts to address is the fit these developmental efforts (wherever they have been carried out) leave in their wake and the social displacements that ensues. The end result of this process is the high degree of unemployment, underemployment and restiveness being witnessed in the Delta as its aborigines, being ill-equipped to cope with the changes in their environment, vent their frustration on a system that has necessitated their social displacement. Consequently, this paper posits that for development in the Niger Delta to be meaningful for its inhabitants, genuine efforts ought to be made by the responsible agencies to ensure the provision of formal and non-formal education which would enable absorption of and cushion the impact of the changes brought by physical development.

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

Peoples of the core Niger Delta have for long complained about marginalization and neglect in the distribution and utilization of the country's resources. The Izon, presumably believed to be Nigeria's largest minority group and the largest of the ethnic groups in the Niger Delta claim to be the most affected. With the advent of development in the region in the wake of violent agitations by the people for a fair share of the nation's proceeds from oil which is sourced from their grossly underdeveloped towns and villages and the effects of which impoverishes them even further, it becomes ironic and worrying to note that in new and budding Niger Delta towns such as Yenagoa, idleness among the indigenous workforce (youths) seems to be at its highest. The same also applies to many oil producing communities. The result of the refusal of the native youths to apply themselves to labour, is that, the provision of services becomes completely dominated by non indigenes.

In view of this scenario, this paper aims at first identifying the reasons for this increase in human resource wastage amid increasing development programmes. The essence of this is to identify gaps in development strategies meant for the Niger Delta and consequently point decision makers in the right direction of situating development programmes within the context of the environment and its peoples.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

This paper is anchored on Human Capital theory which, as proposed by Gary Becker (cf. Lohrentz 2006), was the basis for many development efforts in the early 1990s in the United States. This theory is a combination of *human resources management* and *workforce development theory*. *Human resources management* is concerned with how people who work for an organization are managed bearing in mind these people have feelings, thoughts, needs and aspirations. This aspect of the Human Capital Theory proposes an approach that takes into account the needs of the organization (which in this paper is the state), and the needs of the people. It contends that individuals have their own needs and aspirations and as such emphasis should be on endeavours through which persons within the organization can improve themselves. Human capital theory therefore relates to every aspect of the way in which the organization/state interacts with its people through the provision of training, skills acquisition, attitudes and development opportunities. This connects with the problem of the Niger Delta areas as addressed in this paper where affected state governments look for ways to empower their citizens by bringing development to these long neglected areas and try to get them involved in skill acquisition programmes. Then, coping with the impact of these development strategies brings to the fore the relevance of the *workforce development theory*.

The *workforce development* theory addresses the rational choices made by families and individuals as they grapple with the changes brought by development. The emphasis of the theory here is on poverty which according to Lohrentz (2006) “is the result of making bad personal decisions compounded by a geographic concentration of people all seeming to make the same bad decisions, just as their previous generations did. The intergenerational cycle creates an underclass”. While the poverty of majority of the communities of the Niger Delta may be attributed to the ignorance displayed by the previous generation on the ills of reckless oil exploration, the poverty still persists today despite increased awareness because the youths of the area still make wrong choices such as resorting to receiving paltry monthly stipends from oil companies instead of pressing for demands directed towards community development, environmental protection, education and all other demands that would improve the quality of life communally and individually.

DEVELOPMENT FROM A SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Okereke (1999:1) defines *development* as “the qualitative improvement in the living standard of members of the society.” and *administration* as “the role relationship that defines the intentions and programmes of government, the means available internally and externally to accomplish them; where, when and how they are to be accomplished; and who is to benefit from them.” He summarizes therefore that “development administration refers to all the activities of government and its agencies aimed at the attainment of higher levels of development.” (ibid:2)

Ujo (in Okoli and Onah 2002:130) contends that development is “both a physical process and a state of mind. The transformation of institution is one aspect. The other aspect is that the thinking of the people must change.” Development, no matter the circumstance, refers to change, a change for the better. Ujo’s perception above implies that development can only be achieved when the mental accompanies the social, economic, environmental and infrastructural aspects of development. If a community experiences an economic and structural revolution, and the affected people are unable to adapt to the changes brought therein, then a *fit* occurs in the developmental process. In other words, these development gains would be lost if the peoples psyche are unable to adapt to these changes to ensure maximum utilization of these structures. This situation which is a recurrent trend in the Niger Delta justifies the application of the *human resource management theory* as the framework for this papaer. For every development stride made, there ought to be a commensurate appreciation and adaptation on the part of the benefiting peoples otherwise the benefits of such development is lost all together. Thus, to speak of development at all, we have to examine the physical as well as the mental aspects. A close examination of happenings and development in the Niger Delta indicates that majority of development programmes are focused on tangible or material aspects of development such as roads, bridges, schools (without reference to the quality of education), hospitals and so on. This lopsided arrangement in development planning leaves the area grossly underdeveloped. Taking a cue from the argument above, of what use is a hospital when inhabitants of the community would not patronize it? The under-utilized, yet modern hospital at Okolobiri in Bayelsa state is a clear case in point. The majority of women in the area still give birth at home despite services at the hospital being provided for free. The essence of the argument here is to buttress the claim that for development to be effectively administered in the Niger Delta, extra attention ought to be paid to raising awareness and increasing adaptability through quality education with the aim of helping the aborigines make maximal use of the structural changes in their environment. It is for

this reason Friedman (1967: 225) defines planning as “the guidance of change within a social system.” This is a most salient aspect of development in the Delta most especially when we consider the fact that the people in the region have been among the most educationally disadvantaged in Nigeria.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AMONG THE ABORIGINES OF THE NIGER DELTA

It is widely held that the Niger Delta is one of Nigeria’s most educationally disadvantaged regions of which the Ijaws (Nigeria’s fourth largest ethnic group) have arguably been the worst hit. This state of affairs coupled with their crude agricultural methods amid environmental degradation has definitely aided the underdevelopment of the region. Again, as opined by Worgu (2000),

Agriculture forms the most dominant economic activity in the Niger Delta. Federal Office of Statistics (F.O.S.) in 1985 stated that crop farming and fishing activities account for about 90% of all forms of activity in the area. They also estimated that about 50% - 68% of the active labour force are engaged in one form of agricultural activity or the other including fishing and farming. Agricultural technology has remained relatively unchanged over the years and over 90% of the farmers are subsistent farmers operating on traditional methods using basic tools.... The organic farming technique widely used in the Niger Delta is highly susceptible to environmental changes affecting the soil, water or deforestation because it is not technology inspired, but rather land and labour intensive. Oil extraction and production has led to adverse environmental impact on the soil, forest and water of the Niger Delta communities.

The utter neglect of the rural communities in the Niger Delta has led to a massive rural-urban drift occasioned not only by lack of basic amenities (healthy drinking water, electricity and medicare) and unemployment, but also by the destruction of their environment and livelihood from oil exploitation as well as the frequent inter and intra communal clashes witnessed in the region (most of which are also oil related). The outcome of the prevalence of these problems is the population explosion of the regions few urban centres. As Worgu (ibid) notes once again,

“this has ultimately caused problems of environmental refugees. Some of the landless farmers migrate to other more fertile lands in other rural communities putting pressure on scarce fertile lands. While some of the displaced farmers out-migrate to the urban areas in search of other means of livelihood.”

This latter perception is buttressed by Okonta and Douglas (op.cit: 34) when they opine that, “The population of Port Harcourt and the other major towns is literally exploding. The ensuing scenario – urbanization without economic growth.” No doubt, the majority of these migrants are unschooled or uneducated, skilled in trade - such as boating, canoe making, thatch house building and fishing - that would not be beneficial to them in the city. Even when they possess more relevant skills, there is still some little difficulty in adapting to urban life. This problem is aptly conceived by Odediran (2004: 165) when he argues that

Rapid industrialization and urbanization and population growth have hastened the degradation of the environment and the depletion of natural resources. But it is the development that we have practiced so far that have polluted the earth. In providing the desired quality of life for the privileged few, the process of development has caused a marked decline in the quality of life for the bulk of humanity.

The inability of development administrators to address this problem has contributed largely to the problems of youth restiveness and insecurity in the Niger Delta as a result of the high level of frustration felt due to being displaced from their environment and livelihood without being retrained to fit into modern society. This is aptly explained by Orakwe (in Ofuebe 2001: 92) when he says; “Mans happiness within his social setting is largely determined by the extent and intimacy of relationships and socialization effects. Without these relationships and adequate socialization, mans self worth and perception of himself and others become both ugly and oblique.” This psycho analysis aptly explains the aggression and anger that is prevalent in the Delta. Changing situations have made it increasingly difficult for Niger Deltans to relate with their environment thus making them feel misplaced in today’s modern society. Even road construction in the Niger Delta have been known to obstruct flood time water ways which disrupts the economic and social life of the people and places them at the receiving end of

modernization. This paper thus posits that we can only meaningfully talk of development in the Delta when the people are provided with the wherewithal and opportunities to adapt to change.

OTHER FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST DEVELOPMENT IN THE DELTA

This paper has argued to present the lack of awareness on the need for retraining in relevant skills as a major problem of the Delta. Education, be it formal or informal (as in skills acquisition and adaptation), is a salient ingredient in helping the individual adapt to change. The lack of this constitutes a stumbling block to Niger Deltans, most especially the Ijaws. However, a recent phenomenon that has militated against human resource development in the Delta and made it more complex is the *quick and free money syndrome*.

There is no gainsaying that heinous crimes such as kidnapping and cultism have reached alarming proportions in the region. This is as a result of the *quick money* or *fast track to wealth* that is assured. As such, most youths are no longer disposed to making a living through hard work. Learning a skill or trade, becomes too tedious and education becomes too lengthy. Decent work does not pay well enough when *kidnapping* is likely to net a cash haul equivalent to a government employee's entire career earnings. Cultural values no longer hold and morals have been thrown overboard. This aptly explains why in budding Niger Delta towns like Yenagoa where there is surplus need for artisans of sorts, you seldom find male Ijaw youths learning new skills/trade. In Yenagoa for example, you rarely find native youths among drivers (automobile and motorcycles), automobile mechanics, vulcanizers, masons, carpenters, electricians, tailors, cobblers, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, plumbers etc, despite the increasing need for the services these craftsmen render. These services and the opportunities they provide get eventually occupied by non-natives who end up training more non-natives to fill these needs. This trend did not begin overnight. It is the result of a decade of transformation that has its origins in politics and oil exploration.

For time and the objective of this paper, much would not be said about the former (politics). But suffice to say, Nigeria's politics of godfatherism (client-patron politics) where contestants are not shy of the use of guns and thugs, has contributed its fair share to the problem being discussed. Since most Politicians in Nigeria measure their strength not by popular votes, but by the number of thugs or miscreants each has in his camp, a scenario that *thuggery pays* is

created since these miscreants can eke a living from the remuneration they get from their political patrons. This accounts for the violent nature of Nigeria's political landscape. Relating to political violence, Alanamu (2001: 79) observes, "the frequency and ferocity with which these violent clashes have occurred since the inception of the present democratic rule have made them one of the challenging monsters that need to be addressed."

Agreed that this trend pervades the whole country, the educationally disadvantaged nature of the riverine areas of the Niger Delta, makes the situation worse and human resource wastage grave.

The worse culprit of the *quick money syndrome* however, are the oil MNCs in the Niger Delta. Prior to recent agitation by communities in the region to benefit from oil exploration within their borders, oil companies, where and when they are called to account for their actions, avoid corporate responsibility by bribing influential community members (youths and community heads). The reason is to get the communities to turn a blind eye to their unethical operations which allow for irresponsible profit maximization. From the perspective of these companies, it is much cheaper to settle individuals and communities than to clean up their mess and act responsibly. In consonance with this argument, Odogbor (in Orobator 2005: 112-113) stated thus:

Most of the companies responsible for these acts of degradation are not always willing to attend to the plight of the communities. Because they think that the demands of the communities are outrageous, they are more amenable to assuaging a powerful and influential individual or group in the community (usually the youth) whose demands most often in monetary terms – they find bearable. This attitude promotes further agitations by other factions, and rivalry resulting in clashes of diverse magnitude.

Communities among numerous others that have suffered this fate include Okurekpo in Ethiope East Local Government Area, Ewureni in Ughelli South Local Government Area, both in Delta state and Nembe in Bayelsa State. Worse still is the fact that between 1996 till date, intra and inter communal clashes have arisen or been fuelled due to this practice. Notable among these conflicts are those of Igbogene community in Yenagoa LGA in 1996, Bassambari and Ogbolomabiri in Nembe LGA also in 1996 and Odioma community in Nembe LGA in 2005.

(cf. Etekpe 2007:7-10). Okonta and Douglas (op.cit: 225) put it succinctly; “The real story: This is how a senior European Shell executive described SPDC’s development projects in the Niger Delta; I would go so far as to say we spent more money on bribes and corruption than on community development projects.”

With so much money been given by the oil companies to individuals and youth groups, it becomes understandable why opting for modern/relevant skills acquisition becomes a problem for the average Niger Deltan. Youths in many oil producing communities do nothing while they wait for the end of the month when they each collect what they term *royalty* usually between N20,000 - N40,000 (approximately \$160 - \$320) from the oil companies operating in their communities. And now that oil companies are being compelled to live up to their corporate responsibilities and seem no longer willing to support this easy and unproductive lifestyle, the culture of *quick and easy money* which they encouraged and which has been so inculcated in the Niger Delta youth now serves as the biggest obstacle to their development programmes as the youths have opted to force money from the oil companies by abducting their staff, and when these oil workers cannot be gotten, they opt for other well to do members of society who can afford paying huge ransoms. In all these, human resource development suffers as it remains relegated and stagnated, the damaging effects of oil exploration remain unattended to thus leaving most of these Niger Delta communities poor, primitive and further underdeveloped. The description above thus becomes an apt exemplification of the *workforce development theory* (also adopted as framework for this paper) which posits that collective poverty is the result of people within a geographic area all seeming to make the same bad decisions just as their previous generations did.

ADAPTING TO MODERNIZATION AND THE NECESSITY OF EDUCATION

As opined by Gant (1979: 75-76)

The quality of the human resources applied to economic development has a direct relationship to the pace and level of that development. The quality of human resources is dependent upon education as well as upon health and upon the supporting environment. Physical capital would be wasted to the degree that productive skills are not applied to it The production of this skilled manpower is a function of education – education in formal schools, on the job, and in non-formal but systemic programmes of information

dissemination and skill improvement Other benefits to economic growth which can be attributed to significant proportions of literacy and schooling are the acquisition of attitudes which encourage and support the changes which precede and accompany development.

In line with this assertion, it is logical to affirm that the increasing gap between the development strategies of the Niger Delta (no matter how meagre) and the level of awareness and relevant skills acquisition to enable the people adapt to the changes therein, has further underdeveloped the inhabitants of the region. The increasing social fit has left the aborigines of the Niger Delta grappling for relevance and inclusion in a system most are not suited for. I find this scenario aptly depicted in the political satire/comic movie, *The Gods Must be Crazy*. In this movie, a bottle (science and technology) finds its way into a primitive yet peaceful society of San Bushmen. The presence of the bottle (which signifies development) makes living easy as it becomes a handy tool for grinding and crushing. But just as it is useful, it becomes the centre of squabbles for the primitive and once peaceful community as every one wants use of it at the same time. A community that had grown so used to doing things together could not adapt to the pattern of taking things in turn. In the end, they had to get rid of the bottle to let peace return.

The traditional inhabitants of the Niger Delta fall into the occupations of fishing, subsistence farming and canoe building. The viability and sustainability of these occupations amid the slowly increasing road network and extensive environmental pollution gets increasingly questionable with each passing decade. With the pollution of rivers and lands, surviving on fishing and farming is almost impossible. This is understood in view of the terrain which a World Bank Report in 1995 described as “vast interface between land and water.” (cf Ighodalo 2005: 321). Hence Briggs et al (cf Obi, 1997: 14) state; “we have widespread water pollution and soil pollution, contamination with oil spills become dangerous for farming, even where they continue to produce any significant yields.” So, in a changing Delta, what becomes the lot of the fishermen who have no fish to catch, farmers who have no land to farm on, or canoe carvers or boat men whose services are required less as time passes? These people along with those seeking ‘the better life’ head for the urban centres and eventually find themselves ill equipped and consequently misplaced in today’s modern society. (Agreed that many more communities still commute by water, but when we consider that just about a decade ago, communities such as Abonema, Buguma, Degema, Amassoma, Ogoibiri, Agudama-Ekpetiama, Trofani, Ihibiri,

Bomadi and most Isoko areas which could only be reached by water can now be reached by land, it would not take a seer to project into the future on the relevance of professions such as canoe building and boating)

MAKING DEVELOPMENT MEANINGFUL

For development to be meaningful, it ought to be appreciated and utilized by the people for whom it is meant. Thus, for the fisherman whose rivers have been polluted, schooling him in the provision, maintenance and increased productivity of fish ponds, (whether natural or artificial) would definitely give him relevance in society. Even without formal education, retraining him in modern methods of production coupled with his basic traditional fishing knowledge and skills, would improve his haul of fish and make him a better fisherman. The same applies to land farmers where lands yet unpolluted could be put to maximal use through the use of fertilizers and modern methods of farming. Providing these facilities and teaching these skills creates for the beneficiaries not only the economic wherewithal to cope with today's demands, but also provides a psychological cushion which arises from being a functional part of society. In doing this, development is brought to farmers and fishermen as they are kept abreast and involved in changing trends of productivity.

The above applies also to handicraft. Canoe carvers, boat men and others whose profession, infrastructural development may eventually make redundant, and who should be encouraged to unlearn old skills to acquire new ones which would make them fit into society. When for example a road hits a riverine community, a sizeable percentage of its boatmen and boat technicians could be encouraged into being automobile drivers and mechanics. The logic here is simple: with the coming of the road, fewer communities would to be reached by water, thereby leading to a decline in water transportation. Thus, the informal or technical education provided here would allow for job fluidity which is essential for survival in today's modern world.

But unfortunately, the majority of original inhabitants of the riverine communities of the Niger Delta have stuck to their traditional skills and methods of production. This explains why in a budding Niger Delta town like Yenagoa, it is difficult to find Ijaw youths being craftsmen, builders, drivers or artisans of sorts. These lines of trade have been taken over by non indigenes

since the indigenes would rather stay idle than retrain into any of these relevant skills, no matter how high the demand for their services. Worse still, is the fact that there has been no serious effort on the part of the government, be it Federal, State or Local to embark on human development projects to address this trend. The Niger Delta Development Commission whose sole responsibility is the development of the Niger Delta has fared no better. A visit to its website (www.nddc.ng.org) reveals that the only human resource development programmes it undertakes are annual scholarships given to a few indigenes of oil producing communities to study in tertiary institutions. Rural youth empowerment programmes are conspicuously missing. The programme implementation of the Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF) unfortunately has followed this trend. This is evident from its mission statement and listed programmes which states thus; “In line with Mr. Presidents vision of Poverty Eradication, empowering the youth in the Niger Delta and the need to re-inject the resources derived from the oil producing communities with a view to addressing the problems existent in the area, the PTDF has been mandated to undertake some strategic projects/programmes in the oil producing states.” (cf, PTDF:2007). The so called strategic projects are; “Completion of the Federal Technical Institute, Bonny, Rivers State designed to train students in obtaining professional certificates in Gas, Petroleum and Environmental studies. Establishment of the Federal Polytechnics, Ekowe, Bayelsa State with specialization in Gas and Environmental studies; and Establishment of primary and secondary schools at Oporaza and Okeronkoko communities in Delta State.” (ibid) The claim of the PTDF goes further: “The PTDF in pursuance of its mandate to train Nigerians ... has introduced local scholarship scheme. Under the pilot scheme, qualified Nigerians will be trained locally ... at both undergraduate and master’s levels, effective from 2007/2008.” As argued in this paper, where do the vast unschooled riverine rural inhabitants of the Niger Delta, who are most affected by oil exploitation and displaced by skewed development programmes, fit in? Ironically too, the PTDF has come under heavy criticism for the manner in which its scholarships were awarded. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) described as unfair the *fourteen* (14) slots allotted to the Niger Delta out of the PTDF’s long list of *one thousand and two* (1002) beneficiaries for its doctoral scholarship programme. As Onoyume notes, “MOSOP has expressed grave shock at the deliberate and insensitive exclusion of the Niger Delta from benefits accruable from the Petroleum Development Trust Fund (PTDF) as reflected in its short-listed candidates for overseas scholarship interview for Doctoral studies

published in *Thisday* of June 13, 2008.” (Onoyume, 2008). The Shell Petroleum Development Company on the other hand has been a little more attentive to human development in the region. The SPDC, as part of its 2009 community development programmes in Bayelsa State, floated a vocational training scheme in which N53 million (approximately \$300,000) was earmarked with 78 persons as beneficiaries. This it said, was its way of promoting self development and empowerment for indigenes of the delta. Vocations to be learnt include baking, computer and secretarial studies. The scheme also promises a further N34 million (\$200,000) in starter packs and cash incentives which would be shared to the beneficiaries at the end of the training to enable them start off. (Radio Bayelsa News Report: 2009).

Despite efforts by various government organs and private organizations such as multinational companies, it has been noted that most Youth Development Schemes have not achieved their objectives of employment generation and poverty reduction. Ibaba (2005:139) opines that “A performance review of the scheme blames this on a number of reasons, which include: faults in implementation strategy; ... inadequate training; sharp practices by the operators of the scheme” among others. In view of these avoidable hitches which mar such schemes, Ake’s (2001:1) claim strikes home when he says, “the problem is not so much that development has failed as that it was never really on the agenda in the first place.” Even when development is celebrated, it never goes beyond the provision of roads, schools, hospitals, electricity and water. Human resource development has seldom been on the agenda of the various tiers of government. This trend has underdeveloped the aborigines of the Delta much more than the lack of infrastructure. As such, the little institutions and infrastructures provided are either abused or misused, and underemployment and restiveness remain rife. It would therefore make more sense to have oil companies and government agencies to be sincerely involved in skills acquisition and human resource development programmes just as they are in the programmes relating to infrastructure.

While this paper calls for the organizing of human development programmes for human development, it also recognizes the *Nigerian factor* (wanton corruption) and thus advocates that such programmes be undertaken with sincerity of purpose. The indigenes of Yenagoa would not forget in a hurry, the government’s hoax in the procurement of 96 brand new mini-van taxis in 2006 which it claimed was to empower youths of the area. No sooner had these taxis been distributed than only a handful could be found on the streets as government officials had hijacked the process and given the majority of these cars to their wards/kin who had not the

intention of using these cars for the purposes they were meant. In the end, the exercise was a dismal failure and human resource development thus remained stagnant.

CONCLUSION

There has been so much emphasis on curbing the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta. Much of this emphasis borders on the provision of roads, hospitals, educational institutions, potable water, electricity, theatres and so forth. But little attention has been paid to underdevelopment from a socio-psychological perspective. This paper argues that for infrastructural development to be meaningful, emphasis ought to be paid to education, both formal and informal to help the aborigines of the Niger Delta adapt positively to the changes that ensue from physical development. While it would not be easy to alter the *quick money* culture which has been encouraged by politicians and oil companies, it is the position of this paper that relevant skills acquisition and adaptation ought to be earnestly implemented both in rural and urban areas so that the youths find relevance in society.

The government both at federal and local levels has shown itself to be overtly unwilling to effectively address issues pertaining to the Niger Delta region. However, while not excusing or encouraging government irresponsibility, it is my contention that since these oil companies work in the remotest of communities, they stand a better chance of providing fastest the basic amenities to make life for these distant rural dwellers a little more comfortable and thereby reduce the allure of migrating to the townships where the meager facilities have already been over stretched and where these migrants end up being disillusioned and, more often than not, become threats to society.

After the provision of basic facilities, next comes the effort at helping them make optimal use of their habitat, be relevant to society and keep abreast with the times through the acquisition of relevant skills and crafts. This becomes a vital step in human resource development in the Delta. It is a step which both the government and MNC's in the Delta have the capital and wherewithal to achieve. The only problem here is the *will*. But the earlier they settle to achieve this, the better, lest communities and youth groups that are still accommodating of government

policies and MNC's operations become hostile and aggressive like their already restive brothers. If the MNC's can begin this process of human resource development, it is only hoped that somewhere along the line, the various arms of government would genuinely follow.

While the implementation of these conditions may not completely address the complex issues of human development and restiveness in Nigeria's Niger Delta, the intention of this research is to point stake holders in the right direction in the search for a solution to the stagnating of human resource development in the Niger Delta region. One of such stakeholders is the novel Ministry of the Niger Delta whose responsibility is the development of the Niger Delta, but whose creation met with so much skepticism since the Niger Delta Development Commission which is already saddled with the same responsibility, has arguably not succeeded despite being in existence for about a decade. The Niger Delta Ministry, in view of arguments presented here would go a long way in effectively tackling issues of restiveness and development in the region if only they would divert adequate attention and resources to human resource development programmes which would make the Niger Delta aborigines more self sufficient and deft to change.

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