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# Sustainable development of Ewu-Urhobo rural region of Delta State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

In realizing accelerated development in the rural areas, settlement planning and institutions such as Cooperative, Thrift and Credit societies must act as catalysts. In addition, a bottom-up approach of planning with the people is necessary to make developmental activities relevant to dwellers of these areas. This paper appraises rural development efforts in Nigeria in relation to its impact on Ewu-Urhobo region of Delta State. Ewu-Urhobo region has four localities with one paramount ruler. Two hundred and ninety seven (267) respondents were randomly selected for the study. Analysis of data was done using simple percentile. The research discovered that most of the people in the region earn low annual income because development efforts have not trickled down to the rural areas. Policy measures were suggested based on research findings.

**Keywords:** Ewu-Urhobo; Infrastructure; Region; Rural development; Sustainable development

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## 1. Introduction

The term 'rural area' has spatial, occupational and structural dimensions and its perception varies from country to country. Generally, it is a landscape devoid of rudimentary forms of secondary and tertiary activities; but consisting predominantly agrarian system of human settlement with rudimentary forms and facilities, such as unpaved roads and pathways and reasonably vegetated (Akinbamiyo, 2000). In Nigeria, most of the rural areas are yet to have a fair share of previous efforts of government poverty alleviation and rural development programmes. Development, from economic, social and political dimensions is the structural transformation of the economy, society, poverty and culture of the people (Ibitoye, 2002). Rural development, therefore, entails concerted efforts made in order to facilitate significant increase in the rural resources and productivity with the overall objective of enhancing rural income, increasing employment opportunities and upgrading rural commodities (Ajala, O.A., Sanni, I. and Adeyinka, A. 2002).

Rural development of Ewu-Urhobo region is the focus of this paper. This regional planning approach connotes the step by step method and process of defining, developing and outlining various possible courses of actions to meet existing or future needs, goals and objectives for a designated area or an administrative division of a city, country or larger geographical area (Ajala *et al.*, 2002). The purpose and relevance of regional planning is in its attempts to guide the development of a region. The rural regions in Nigeria are in disadvantaged position. About seventy percent live in these areas, which remain centres of poverty and insecurity (Abdulrahman, 2002).

Structural inequalities between the rural and urban areas resulted from some basic factors. First, there was the general lack of enthusiasm for the development of the rural areas before the World War II. Secondly, when attention was focused on the development of these areas after the war, it was narrowly defined to cover expansion of agricultural and mineral exports. Thirdly, there was the principle of financial parsimony, which required each area to receive only those services its inhabitants could pay for. The consequences of these three factors are the wide regional imbalance between the urban and rural areas on the one hand, and between different rural areas on the other (Abdulrahman, 2002). The objectives of this study, therefore, are to: (i) identify the socio-economic characteristics of the people in Ewu-Urhobo rural region; (ii) assess the existing level of infrastructural development based on government development programmes and policies; and (iii) examine the concept of sustainability for adoption in the growth and development of the environment.

## 2. Literature review

The concern of rural development is the improvement of the standard of living of the low-income population living in rural areas on a self-sustaining basis through transformation of the socio-economic and spatial structures of their productive activities (Mabogunje, 1980; Bankole and Owolabi, 2002). The main pivot of development of any nation in the context of rural development is set to achieve the following: (i) Adoption of rural development programme that will raise the income of the rural people who are predominantly agrarian

and are into non-farm activities including agro-based industries; (ii) equitable distribution of wealth and personal income between the centres and rural segment of the society; (iii) reduction in the level of rural poverty and rural unemployment among the youth; and (iv) good health for the people in the rural areas and the reduction of ignorance through mass literacy and education (Idachaba, 1983).

Rural development programmes adopted by Nigerian Government need to make the grassroots aware politically, and be conscious of their rights and entitlements like their urban counterparts (Bankole and Owolabi, 2002). Rural areas in Nigeria are central and pivotal to meeting the goal of sustainable development. Sustainable development targets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. A more prosperous or growing rural environment becomes sustainable when it centres on increasing importance and priority actions that can reduce excessive consumption of natural resources and the burden of waste.

The post World War II era till 1975 marked the end of the second National Development plan during which rural development efforts concentrated on increasing agricultural output through constitutional change in land tenure, land distribution, rural education and other institutional aspects within the rural context. In a collaborative effort, the Third Development Plan (1975-80), emerged with a national concern for integrated rural development. The rural development policy targeted high productivity in agriculture and provision of basic social amenities such as water, medical services, schools, electricity etc (Ajala *et al.*, 2002). The basic intention of this development plan was to boost income diversity of the rural economy and generally improve the quality of life in the rural areas; the basis for which the Federal Government initiated Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs).

Rural development policy in the Fourth national Development Plan (1981-85), still focused on 'man' with its emphasis on realizing new income opportunities, and rescuing rural inhabitants from the ravages of diseases, malnutrition and ignorance (Ajala *et al.*, 2002). A plethora of rural development programmes were witnessed during this period. These ranged from the Directorate for Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), which carried out construction of 60,000 kilometres of roads in the rural areas in 1986; Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW); to National Directorate of Employment (NDE); Graduate Employment Scheme; Peoples Bank, etc. The achievement of these programmes as summarized by the Nigerian president (Late Gen. Saani Abacha) on 1<sup>st</sup> of October (Independence Day), 1995 was that all we did to mobilize our population in the rural areas towards meaningful development has not been effectively achieved.

Niger-Delta region is the oil producing area that contains nine states (Delta state inclusive), out of the thirty-six states in Nigeria. Recently, the Ministry of Niger-Delta Affairs (MNDA) was established for the region following the amnesty granted the Niger-Delta militants by the federal government. Previously, the Oil Producing Area Development Commission (OPADEC) was in charge of infrastructure development of this region, before it later transformed to Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). Although, substantial federal allocation was released to the nine states in the region, yet, the economy has failed to support the growing demand for infrastructure development projects. On this note, the new Ministry (MNDA) coexists with NDDC to rescue the situation.

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) recently prepared the Niger Delta plan for the Niger Delta region to address the imbalance in the development of the coastal areas (Olujimi, 2009). In spite of this effort, pollution from oil spillages, soil erosion, poor infrastructure, lack of physical planning, unemployment coupled with youth restiveness, are major problems confronting the region. Sustainable development of Ewu-Urhobo rural region of Delta state is adopted as strategy for rural development of the entire Niger Delta, which is the heart of oil-producing region of the country.

### 3. Study area

Ewu-Urhobo region locates in Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. The region has four communities namely; Ewu, Ogoda, Orere and Assan. The predominant language is Urhobo, with a distinct culture and religion. The region constitutes one of the five major clans in Ughelli Local Government. Others are; Arhavwarien, Okparabe, Ujevwe and Olomu clans within the tropical rain forest vegetation zone, rich in oil and mineral deposits. Natural features prevalent in the area include rivers and floodplains. Major occupations of the people are fishing, farming, and trading of major food items like maize and cassava flour. Common cash crops in the area are palm trees and rubber.

### 4. Methodology

As earlier noted, Ewu-Urhobo region comprises of four communities namely Orere, Ewu, Ogoda and Assan. Samples used for this study were derived from the projected population for the communities from the 1991 census of Nigeria, put at 1705 for Ewu; Ogoda – 705; Orere – 796; and Assan – 910 (FGN, 1997). Using 2.5% population growth rate prevalent in developing countries, the population of Ewu-Urhobo region is estimated to be 4,116. The sample size for the study was determined taking into consideration: (1) the level of confidence desired in estimating the sample size,  $Z= 1.96$  at significant level of 0.05; (2) the sampling error that could be permitted,  $e = 0.06$ ; (3) the estimated true proportion of success,  $p = (0.5)$  (Berenson & Levine, 1986; Olotuah & Fasakin, 2003). Thus, sample size ( $n$ ) was calculated as;

$$n = \frac{z^2 p(1-p)}{e^2} \quad (1)$$

Since sampling in the exercise was done without replacement from the population, the finite population correction factor was applied, thus;

$$n = \frac{nN}{n + (N - 1)} \quad (2)$$

where  $n_1$  = sample size with correction factor,  $n$  = sample size without correction factor, and  $N$  = Population size.

A total sample size of 267 was derived for the entire region. This was distributed proportionately to the constituent four communities {Ewu=110, Ogoda=46, Orere=52 and Assan=59}.

## 5. Research findings

Research findings reveal that 63.2% of the respondents in the region were males, with a predominant household size of 8-10 (42.1%) followed by 5-9 household size (31.6%). Occupationally, 47.4% of the respondents were farmers; 21.1% were into fishing; 15.8% into trading; 10.5% were Artisans; while, 5.3% were civil servants. Quite often, the operations of oil and gas companies both onshore and offshore have caused degradation and devastation to the area (especially to fishing and farming activities) without any benefit till date (Aiyedatiwa, 2014). Majority were of age 19-34 years (42.1%), followed by age 35-64 (36.8%); an indication of the dominance of active working age that can support the regional growth. Generally, low annual income is prevalent in the region as 94.7% earn less than ₦50000 (\$335) which is about one half of the wage of the least paid civil servant in Nigeria. To curtail this high incidence of poverty, government should implement policies aimed at accelerating economic growth, improving the distribution of income, wealth and accelerating social development (Gwilliam, 2002).

Aggregate crop production in the region reveals that 89.47% produce food crops, while 10.2% produce cash crops. The four villages have crude oil reserves, in addition to other minerals. Building types in the area are bungalows (89.0%); storey buildings and other types of building (11.0%) constructed with different types of materials, and used for various purposes. It was discovered that 57.9% of buildings do not maintain adequate set backs to the roads because virtually all the buildings (93.7%) lack development permit or approval by the Local Planning Authority. As observed by Sanusi (2006), Nigerians generally, do not believe there is the need to get permit nor to conform to the conditions for the granting of development approval.

The only infrastructure revealing the presence of the government rural development programme in the region was a community 'borehole' cited at Ewu village. Major source of water for household purposes is stream (79.0%), supported by wells (21.0%). Other infrastructure present in the villages includes electricity under the control of Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN). However, about 10.53% of the regional population has stand-by generating set to complement PHCN.

The condition of most of the roads (89.5%) is bad. As one of the low-lying coastal region with very high propensity for flooding, this situation resulted from inadequate drainage, the topographic state of the environment (Okereke, 2007), and dumping of refuse on traffic ways, thus, hindering surface water runoff. Only one secondary school was sighted at Ewu, with a few Nursery and primary school; 60.0% of which suffer basic facilities (classrooms, toilets, football pitch, library etc). Primary health care providers in the areas are Maternity centres (57.9%), private clinics (35.7%) and traditional health care services (6.4%).

## 6. The concept of sustainability

The basic concepts of sustainability are sustainable growth and sustainable development. The concept of growth refers to annual increase in a country's output of goods and services (Akainiyere and Jacobs, 2002). In community development, output growth implies growth in physical infrastructure, environmental quality and other social factors such as the spatial distribution of human and material resources, with the rising

aggregate consumption. Sustainable growth, however, refers to growth that can be supported by physical and social environments in the foreseeable future.

Development from a general perspective is multidimensional involving economics, social, physical, cultural, political, technological, administrative and other processes of change over space and time (Akaininyere and Jacobs, 2002). It can be defined qualitatively as a process of improvement in the general welfare of the entire society, as manifested in changes in the various aspects of the society (Akpakpan, 1987). Such changes could be increase or reductions in personal and regional services. It could also represent improvements in techniques of production, improvement in the level of socio-environmental and political consciousness of the people and the greater ability to draw on local resources to become self-reliant. In any case, one of the concerns of the country at the moment is to move itself to higher levels of social and economic development, such that all its citizens in all locations have equal access to the benefits of economic growth and development (Bashir, 2002).

For any development to be sustainable, it must meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987). That is, a development becomes sustainable if present growth in production of goods and services as well as methods of production are such that seek to preserve the natural resource base on which future production depends. Arguably, growth and development are not static but dynamic. They vary from place to place and from time to time. Sustainable development of Ewu-Urhobo rural region, therefore, is premised on the recognition of broader public interest and the practice of discretionary regional review with primary focus on potentials or resource endowments of the area. This will allow for regulatory practice and emergence of substantive principles with which to enhance the viability of the regional communities for projects to produce functional growth.

## **7. Policy implications and recommendations**

Urban areas in Nigeria have received much of government attention to the neglect of the rural areas. The implication of this is a high trend in rural-urban migration. The study revealed that infrastructural facilities in Ewu-Urhobo region such as roads, schools and health facilities are in deplorable state. If the situation remains unchecked, the health and productivity of inhabitants might be in jeopardy. Major sources of water available to dwellers in this region are unimproved, thus, making them susceptible to water-borne diseases such as cholera, diarrhoea, typhoid etc. In summary, most of the settlements are unplanned hence, the need for rehabilitation and renewal. As an oil-producing region, the impact of government programmes at alleviating poverty and improving development in the area is negligible. Delta State Oil Producing Area Development Commission (DESOPADEC) is also yet to make its presence felt in the area, through provision of basic amenities.

There is now a critical challenge of reversing the endangered physical environment through settlement planning and replanning with specific focus on Ewu-Urhobo region. The federal and state governments or their agencies (NDDC and DESOPADEC) should initiate 'sustainable neighbourhood plans' for Ewu (a growth

centre) to accommodate more people and create opportunities to citizens to live in better environment. The plan will aggregate and prescribe orderly physical development by providing access to houses, industries and commerce, increasing standard land allocation to industrial enterprises to raise employment opportunities and adequate space for community facilities.

In view of the institutional deficiencies, there is urgent need for a formidable institutional arrangement equipped with capacity for action in the region. "Farmers Co-operative Societies" should be encouraged by Ugheli South Local Government in the area; this will foster and promote access to more fund and cooperation among the farmers for better output in cash crop production. In addition, dwellers in this region should initiate 'Credit, Thrift Co-operative Society' that can provide the platform for pooling resources together, and access loan-able funds from government and financial institutions. DESOPADEC can assist these communities by establishing a 'Regional Trust Fund' (RTF). The purpose is to provide capital for funding progressive projects that can impact positively on the people.

The federal government should enact laws mandating Oil producing companies to be proactive in the development of the area. Non-governmental organizations and international organizations should assist in the establishment of institutions (schools, health care and vocational centres) that will enhance the social life of the people. The people in these communities should be encouraged to be involved in semi processing of farm products, by establishing agro-allied and agro-based industries. It will be helpful if the Local Government can embark on Family Support Programmes that will directly assist the household heads for higher productivity. In order to stem the tide of rural-urban migration and rural poverty levels, cottage and medium scale industries should be located in these communities by Delta state government. Granting industrial tax relief for about three years to recoup capital invested is a way to attract more investors to the region.

## **8. Conclusion**

This paper examines rural development concept and relates it to Ewu-Urhobo region of Delta State, Nigeria. It noticed the absence of rural infrastructure, as well as continuous migration of able-bodied men from this area. The local government, which is the third tier, is not doing much as expected because they concentrate on duties delegated from the federal and state governments to the detriment of its statutory responsibilities. Ministries and Parastatals that have no direct contact with rural dwellers handle most of state government responsibilities by attending to most pressing issues at the villages and hamlets. It was also observed that the oil producing agency of the state government is lacking in its responsibilities. In order to encourage development of these communities, replanning of the settlements and establishment of institution such as 'thrift and credit societies' that can facilitate adequate public participation are necessary, through a bottom-up approach to planning in the region.

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