

# **The Implications of Youth Restiveness on the Socio-Economic Development of Ikwerre Nation of Rivers State: the Case of Emohua Local Government Area**

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## **Abstract**

Emohua Local Government Area is one of the four local government areas that make up the ethnic nationality of Ikwerre in Rivers state, Nigeria. Others are Obio/Akpor, Port Harcourt and Ikwerre local governments. Ikwerre is within the wetland of Niger Delta sufficiently endowed with human resources, natural resources, such as forest resources, energy and water resources. Since after the Nigerian civil war, in 1970, the natural resources located in Ikwerre land have been of paramount importance to the socio-economic development of the Nigerian state to the detriment of the Ikwerre people. Unfortunately, Ikwerre people have been denied not only access to these resources by the federal government, but its benefits and enjoyment thereby keeping the place perpetually under developed and with extreme poverty and neglect. It is within this context that the issues relating to its youth restiveness and the attendant socio-economic deprivation need to be properly examined in this work.

**Keywords:** Resources, Exploration, Deprivation, Restiveness, Development.

## **Introduction**

Emohua Local Government is to Ikwerre what Ikwerre is to Rivers State and what Rivers State is to Nigeria in terms of strategic geographical location, population, overwhelming political votes in elections, massive endowment of natural resources etc.

Over the years, there have been persistent crises in Emohua local government area as a result of restive activities of the youths there. This is because the Nigerian state of today is not adequately equipped to effectively undertake the responsibility of ensuring the socio-economic well-being of high populated Ikwerre people of Rivers State; more so, it does not possess what it takes to have any national capitalist class (Lemuel Owugh 2008).

## **Favourable economic Activities and Youth restiveness**

Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (2007) defined restiveness as the lack of calmness and a situation of disaffection. In the same manner, Webster's New College Dictionary (2001) defined it as impatient or nervous, under restriction, delay or pressure, uneasy, difficult to control. Youth restiveness therefore can be said to be the unrest activities of the youth of any particular society which lead to a violent situation.

Ikunga S.A (2006), still explained further that the above factors of calmness indicated a favourable agricultural development which were responsible for the production of such edible foods as yam tubers (*Dioscorea Spp*), cassava (*manihot esculenta cranzt*), cocoyam (*colocasia esculenta* and *xanthosoma folium*), maize (*Zea-Mays L.*) etc. So agriculture was dominant but competing with hunting, fishing and petty trading. Local government then grew and expanded to the extent that other neighbouring communities were attracted to the areas which enhance long distance trading.

The viable economic activities of the area and her strategic central location discouraged migration of the people to other parts of Niger Delta region. Rather the favourable climatic and conducive environment attracted emigration of people of different ethnic groups into the area. The people became hospitable and with strong kinship ties, hostilities became an unknown phenomenon.

Again, social activities such as wrestling and dancing festivals were observed periodically. There was inter-communal dancing festival and wrestling. They represent a kind of social gathering which wielded communities together. They also became a means of uniting members of common group together in a manner that was devoid of discrimination under any ethnic divide. According to UNDP (2006:48) most families were held together by ancestral worship and by shrines dedicated to water deities and land deities on western delta and in human society values can be seen in terms of beliefs and assumptions relating to what are desirable to man.

Oil exploration desecrated the land and negatively withdrew the progression of attitudinal change when their staff began to wallow in affluence.

Then the emergence of oil destroyed all that and crumbled the occupation of the people. Local government was in disarray and long distance trading too gave way to the ensuing under-development of the area through neglect and blatant deprivation from the benefits of crude oil exploration and exploitation.

Ikwerre is one of the oil producing areas in Rivers State Among the Ikwerre communities that produce oil and gas are: Rumuekpe, Alimini Obelle, Omudioga, Elele, Egbeda, Rukpokwu, Aluu,Igwuruta, Eneka, Rumuola, etc. shell facilities are located in Rumuobiakani, rumuokorushe among others. It may also interest readers to know that gas pipeline crises cross several Ikwerre communities. Yet Ikwerre people get no reward for all that, not even employment in any of the oil company. Yet Ikwerre get no reward for all that, not even employment in any oil company.

It is for this reason that Okowa (1997) lamented that until the oil boom period of the '70s, fiscal federalism was based on the derivation principle when the Nigerian economy depended on cocoa, groundnut etc.

Indeed, today, Ikwerre communities are among the Niger Delta areas that bear the monumental brunt of ecological damages that are being inflicted on the fragile environment by the activities of the multinational companies.

Okowa (1997) still maintains that development, if any, must represent the entire social system, tuned to the diverse needs and desires of individual and social group within the system. It is a system that moves away from a condition of life widely perceived unsatisfactory, towards a situation of life regarded as materially and spiritually better.

The destruction of the Socio-economic activities of the people ushered in a period of idleness, poverty and lack. The anger on the faces of the youths can now be understandable more so when the oil company workers who make of the same market for their daily needs parade with thousands of naira causing inflation in such manner that see the communities unable to purchase what they need from the same market.

### **Socio-Economic Implications**

Youth restiveness and its attended evils together contributed to uncertainties and insecurities which scared away government and other development agencies from organizing socio-economic development programmes that would have transformed the area.

During the Ogbakiri, rumuekpe, and Obelle, houses were destroyed, school and markets were closed. There was a stand still in the activities of other business endeavors. It was a bleak situation for the area. Soldiers and other security agencies posted there to maintain peace became hostile to the people, intimidated, harassed, and even killed innocent citizens. There was total depletion of human resources needed for the development of the already shattered and battered communities of Ikwerre ethnic nationally.

As the crises lasted, angry youths transferred their aggression to the scanty government and oil company infrastructures in the area. For example, there was pipeline vandalization and looting if several installations. There was then fuel scarcity and black market operators emerged raising petroleum prices so high that the products became unaffordable.

Oil companies at Rumuekpe, Elele-Alimini, Omudioga and Obelle closed their businesses resulting in the loss of job. Poverty then ensued and unemployment became the order of the day.

Meanwhile, Ibaba (2005) has described the attitude of government and multinational oil company workers in enhancing untold hardship in the Niger Delta in their attitude in not allowing host communities access to the oil wealth in their domain thereby contributing to the hostile environment witnessed in the area in the past few years.

Apart from suffering from health hazards as a result of pipeline vandalization and environmental pollution, economic activities were also affected. Fishing activities were halted as many fishes died from water pollution. Farmers were also dislodged from their farming activities as the soil was turned infertile.

According to Naanem. (1995) as quoted by Okafor C. (2008) in describing the situation in the Niger Delta he identified some factors as responsible for the under-development in the area as acute scarcity of resources, land degradation, water pollution and environmental hazard. In fact incessant oil spillage and gas flaring such as the one at Rumuola and Rumuekpe have disrupted and destroyed natural central to local livelihoods. Okafor C. (2008) reiterated the obvious succinctly when he explained that the degradation of the natural environment, the socio-economic paralytic condition of the people due to environmental problems has also caused such complicated situation.

He went on to assert that economy diversification of natural resources has proofed difficult. Agriculture that employ majority of the local people suffered many set backs due to degradation of the environment. All these indeed have resulted in unemployment, poverty and other social vices.

## Way forward

From Ogbakiri to Emohua, Odegu to Apagu and from Ibaa to Obelle, Youth restiveness has degenerated to a level where everybody is now affected and there is concern on all corners for its resolution which now look like a difficult task. However, something can be done to mitigate the situation.

First and foremost, there should be an institutional framework for an alternative development strategy for the area. In this case, extensive grassroots participation should be encouraged for everybody to be involved in order to remove suspicion and assume neglect.

Ikwerre should be divided into development zones and proper management of each zone should be drawn from youth organizations, community based organization, traditional rulers, Religious groups, village Association such as CDC etc. managers of these management teams of the various zones should be credible and tested individuals appointed by the various communities so that they can be accountable to the people at all times.

To fund these development areas, federal Government should take responsibility through direct budgetary fiscal allocation domiciled in the various community accounts. There should be properly defined and effective mandate from the federal and state governments to the management development zones to ensure urgent infrastructure and socio-economic development of the areas. In executing the various projects, the local communities should be considered and made part of the decision making process.

Indeed, there should be mandatory budgetary contributions from the various oil companies in the area to the development funds. And through legislation, oil companies should be made to first consider host communities in their employment policy which should be enforced through state supervision, set up development programmes to be supervised jointly by the host communities, pay periodic compensation for lands acquired and for the resources that are exploited in the area to the community funds.

There should also be man power development through scholarship awards, skill training and acquisition both at home and abroad in order to empower the youths for technical jobs.

Gas flaring should end and environmental degradation should be properly managed in a manner to preserve aquatic life and soil fertility so that the people can still engage in their traditional occupation.

Regular meetings should be arranged between the youths from the various zones, the three tier governments and the oil companies to review development programmes to ensure optimal performance and sustainability.

## Conclusion

Youth restiveness in Ikwerre land can endanger national economy because when oil production is disrupted the country's crude sales would be affected. In the same manner, violence and insecurity in the area can be very destructive to the potentials of sustainable development of the region.

Nigeria has the third largest concentration of poor people in the world after India and China. Unfortunately while the economy of India and China are growing and advancing rapidly, Nigeria looks somewhat slow and weak on a per capital basis. Out of ten Nigerians live on less than \$1 per day. Ikwerre is one among the very poor areas of Nigeria. Emohua Local Government area shares in the burdens of poverty and under-development.

The situation is real and remains so because in areas like Diobu, Ewekwu, Rumuodogo II and Apabu-Itu housing situation has worsened. A lot of homeless people now have increased. There is an increasing urban slum in parts of Ikwerre lands of Port Harcourt and Obio-Akpor Zones. It is an open secret that physical infrastructures have degenerated due to inadequate maintenance on the part of government with an ever increasing population.

The socio-economic development of the area has been abysmal due mainly to corruption, neglect, and deprivation, abuse of human rights, environmental pollution and degradation, poor micro-economic management and lack of accountability and transparency.

All these together have driven the youth into violence making the area insecure which also grew into community conflicts with each youth group forming cult groups which carry arms against one another. The situation is pitiable and needs urgent action plans on the part of the stakeholders to transform the area.

Moreover, it is pertinent to adjust that government should employ strategies to bring about stability and sustainability development in the area. And to do this, it should take into consideration the empowerment of the youths in order to address the root causes of the social instability and poverty. In this way the anti-social behavior and value decadence among youths would either be reduced or totally erased.

It is wrong and out of place to wait for youths to become restive and throw insecurity into the area before development plans is put in place to transform the society.

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