

## Peasants and Development in Society: The Case of Bayelsa State

Fidelis A.E. PAKI

Department of Political Science, Niger Delta University, P.M.B. 071, Wilberforce Island 560001

Amassoma, Nigeria

Email: [paki\\_fae@yahoo.com](mailto:paki_fae@yahoo.com)

Kimiebi Imomotimi EBIENFA

Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

[Kemofas0958@yahoo.com](mailto:Kemofas0958@yahoo.com)

### Abstract

This paper examines peasants and development in society, with particular reference to Bayelsa state in Nigeria. The findings indicate that peasants contribute to development in the areas of economic exchanges and peasant production, especially in the supply of cheap labor or the process of food production. However, the findings also show that peasants are exploited in the process of development by government and multinational companies in Bayelsa state. The paper therefore suggests that, to give the peasants a sense of belonging, government and the multinational companies operating in Bayelsa state should evolve modalities to promote the living condition of peasants with a view to providing basic social amenities and infrastructure, agricultural equipments, grants and soft loans, payment of compensations for the destruction of their farmlands, technical measures to provide higher yielding seeds, extension services, cooperatives, crop purchases and sometimes insecticides and herbicides, and fertilizers and reduce pollution of the land, rivers and lakes.

**Keywords:** Peasants; Development; Bayelsa State

### Introduction

Human beings in society are divided into three basic categories. These categories are the rich, the middle class and the poor or peasants. Whereas the rich enjoys all the good things of life due to the resources they have at their disposal and the middle class relatively, the peasants who happens to occupy the lowest level of the ladder live under conditions of chronic need and emptiness. However, despite their disadvantaged position, peasants play a vital role in the development of every society, especially in backward nonindustrial societies.

From a more than casual perusal of the literature, a peasant in simple parlance refers to a member of a traditional class of farmers, either laborers or owners of small farms, especially in the Middle Ages under feudalism, or more generally, in any pre-industrial society. In Europe, peasants were divided into three classes according to their personal status: slave, serf, and freeman. Peasants either hold title to land in fee, or simply hold land by any of several forms of land tenure, among them socage, quit-rent, leasehold, and copyhold.

According to Markson (2010), a peasant is a small holding farmer, producing crops for family consumption and for market exchange, using family labor throughout the farming cycle. Peasants live in villages and small towns. They engage in face-to-face relations with neighboring farmers; they possess a diverse range of cultural and religious beliefs and practices; they fall within a diverse range of social networks and local organizations (kinship organizations, temples, labor-sharing networks) etc. This conceptualization of the peasants focuses on the occupational or material situations of the individual. It is thus not surprising that, materialist social theory has given particular emphasis to the category of "peasant society" as a potentially explanatory social category.

The peasantry, like any general category, is not a homogeneous group. It contains within it diverse populations that live in widely varied conditions. Always linked to agriculture, the term peasant is used differently according to the historical epoch that is being described. The definition of peasant can encompass anyone from those involved in basic subsistence agriculture to members of a modern family farm, depending on the literature being reviewed. It is most useful to define peasants according to their form of production. At a basic level, peasants are traditionally defined as people involved in agriculture that have direct access to the production of their means of subsistence (Araghi, 1995). This may or may not involve direct ownership, although for Marx it was ownership that fundamentally separated peasants from the proletariat (Archetti & Aass, 1978). What is definitive about the peasant form of production is that, regardless of ownership, the logic of production is subsistence. Building upon Alexander Chayanov's theory of a peasant mode of production, (Bernstein, 1979) argues that peasant production is distinguished from capitalism because there is no appropriation and realization of surplus value or accumulation of capital. The object is the satisfaction of family needs, not profit (Araghi, 1995). Beyond this, he argues that it is not a form of proletariat production because the individual retains some control. There are therefore two central components of peasant production: the driving logic of subsistence and the maintenance of some control over the means of production. Within peasant studies there is a major cleavage between those that advocate what (Araghi, 1995) designates the 'disappearance thesis'

and those that support the ‘permanence thesis’. Both attempt to situate the historical course of the peasantry within the development of society, although the disappearance thesis is far more teleological than that of permanence. The disappearance thesis is premised on the idea that capitalism will lead to the dissolution of the peasantry as individuals become wage workers in urban areas and capitalist farmers in the countryside. The permanence thesis, by contrast, argues that peasant societies do not abide by the ‘laws’ of individualistic capital and have a developmental logic of their own that will result in the survival of both the peasantry and the conditions of its reproduction (Araghi, 1995).

In Araghi’s analysis, the disappearance thesis is fundamentally linked with modernity. First articulated within Marxist thought, it is also reflected in the theories of Durkheim and Weber. It was further developed and refined by Russian thinkers such as Kautsky in *The Agrarian Question* (1899) and V.I. Lenin in his book, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899). The disappearance thesis characterizes traditional peasant society as simple, undifferentiated, and rural, while modern society is complex, differentiated, urban, and individualistic. Throughout history, it argues, there has been a clear move from the first to the second stage. A key component of the disappearance thesis, present in the work of Marx and Engels through to present day development theorists, is the sense that peasants are a class representative of ‘barbarism’ unable to shape history and blocking the development of civilization (Araghi, 1995).

For civilization to progress, therefore, the peasantry must dissolve as society moves from a traditional to a modern state. The debate between disappearance and permanence is not simply academic; it has concrete, real-world applications for development strategy and process. Within development, the disappearance thesis has traditionally carried the most weight as industrialization and modernization have become synonymous with development, and the persistence of traditional societies has been seen as peripheral and unimportant at best and obstructive at worst. Araghi (1995) identifies two phases in the depeasantization process resulting from development. The first, from 1945 to 1973, is representative of the development of a world market and the establishment of a new world economy and political order under the hegemony of the United States. The second extends from 1973 to the present and has seen a collapse of that world order and an ongoing reorganization of world political and economic institutions. The first period coincides in development with the emergence and implementation of modernization theories. The second period encompasses the period that has come to be identified with post-colonial globalization, and begins with dependency theory. We are not in doubt of the fact that in both phases the peasants contribute to development. As (William, 1976: 131) succinctly put it, “peasants are expected to contribute to development by providing the resources for others to develop the urban industrial economy, or alternatively are required to give way to capitalist producers or state farms”.

By conceptualization, development, like most concepts in the social sciences, is a victim of definitional pluralism. This means that development has many meanings and the meaning a particular person attaches to the term depends on his/her subjective view of the world. Indeed, the meaning of development is not only a product of the individual’s perspective, but also of the particular period in time when the word is being uttered. Although it is a difficult term to define, it has been conceptualized by erudite scholars.

Gboyega, (2003) captures development as an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies improvement in material well being of all citizens, not the most powerful and rich alone, in a sustainable way such that today’s consumption does not imperil the future. It also demands that poverty and inequality of access to the good things of life be removed or drastically reduced. It seeks to improve personal physical security and livelihoods and expansion of life chances.

Naomi, (1995) believes that development is usually taken to involve not only economic growth, but also some notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services, all with a view to improving the individual and collective quality of life. Put differently, (Chrisman, 1984) views development as a process of societal advancement, where improvement in the well being of people are generated through strong partnerships between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in the society. It is reasonable to know that development is not only an economic exercise, but also involves both social and political issues and pervades all aspects of societal life.

A mere increase in GNP or GDP without a critical consideration of the poverty and unemployment index, coupled with the degree of inequality cannot paint the real picture of development. Development is the process of self-reliant growth achieved through the participation of the people acting in their own interest as they see them and under their control. Its first objective must be to end poverty, provide productive employment and satisfy the basic need of all people fairly shared (South Commission Report, 1993:13). What is discernable from the above is that, development implies growing self reliance and the fundamental transformation of the society in its totality, economy, polity, culture etc. In addition, development presupposes a democratic structure of government, together with its supporting individual freedom of speech, organization and publication as well as a system of justice which protects all the people from actions inconsistent with just laws known and publicly accepted.

It is a widely participatory process of directed social change in society and material advancement

including greater freedom, equality and other valued qualities for the majority of the people through their gaining control over their environment (Arvind and Euerret, 1989:4). That is, it is the conscious attempt by man to emancipate himself from obstacles, both natural and man-made in order to achieve a more fulfilling life. More importantly, development as a phenomenon is not a project but a process. Specifically, development is only but a comparative term and ever changing and that there are generally accepted indices that are used to calibrate or ascertain the developmental nature of a place, region or country (Paki & Ebienu, 2011: 133). More so, if variables such as poverty, disease, unemployment, inequality, etc are not reduced and basic social amenities cum infrastructures, justice and good leadership are not improved, then, development cannot be said to have occurred.

Thus “development” as currently projected by the development establishments and articulated in the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2000), has returned to “poverty reduction” as its core initiative. We may say that in the course of development, the world-historic fact of poverty appears, as Marx would say, “first time as tragedy, and second time as farce.” In the first instance, the mid-20th-century development project exploited the tragedy of colonialism, whereby impoverished Third World populations were cast as “the wretched of the earth,” legitimizing First World intervention in the context of the Cold War containment politics. The tragedy of the colonial legacy was compounded by imposing a singular mode of development on a diverse world, via an interstate system manipulated by power to ultimately deepen global inequality. The farce is that this global project continues, and poverty continues to be represented as an originating condition, rather than an outcome, of “development.” Conventional wisdom, on both left and right scholarships, views poverty as the target of development. That is, the very essence of development studies is “a normative preoccupation with the poor, marginalized and exploited people in the South” (Saul, 2004, 230). Not only did poverty constitute the birthright of development, legitimizing the definition of the non-European world as “undeveloped,” but also the reproduction of poverty has animated development’s re-packaging across the last half century. The World Bank’s latest version of (neo-liberal) development appropriates the normative preoccupation with the poor via the “civil society revolution,” basing development on “inclusion and participation, bringing together civil society, local competition, NGOs, the private sector and the poor themselves ... in order to foster trust and sustainability” (Wolfensohn, 2000).

This paper seeks to explore peasants and the role they play in the process of development. The fundamental objective is to unravel how peasants contribute to the process of development in society, especially in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, and secondly explain how peasants are exploited in the process of development in society. The paper is structured into four parts. The second part is the social setting, which offers a description of the study area. Peasants and development is the third part and ends with the conclusion.

### **The Social Setting**

Bayelsa state is one of the 36 states in the Nigerian federation and the state is located in the South-South geopolitical zone of the country. The name Bayelsa is an acronym derived from the first two letters of Brass Local Government Area (BALGA), the first three letters of Yenegoa Local Government Area (YELGA) and the first two letters of Sagbama Local Government Area (SALGA). These three local governments were combined for the purpose of elections into the Federal Senate during the 1979 general elections in Nigeria, which was a Senatorial District or Constituency when the area was under the old Rivers state.

Historically, Bayelsa state was among the earliest in Africa to have contact with European adventurers, explorers, slave drivers, merchants, traders, missionaries and colonial officials in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Notably, through the Trans Atlantic trade in slave and palm oil when the coast of West Africa became somewhat of a great economic interest to nationals of various European countries (Portugal, Britain, French, Dutch, Spain, Italy etc) (Ikimi, 2006: 210-212). It became part of British Colonial Nigeria that gain independence in 1960. Bayelsa state was among the six youngest states in Nigeria that were created by the military as a result of further restructuring of the federation, and the state is undeniably the product of long years of agitations by a cross-section of Niger Delta people which dates back to colonial times until it was created out of the old Rivers state. The state was created during the administration of late General Sani Abacha on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, 1996, with Yenagoa as the capital city. The state is made of up of eight local government areas, namely Brass, Ekeremor, Kolokuma/Opokuma, Nembe, Ogbia, Sagbama, Southern Ijaw and Yenagoa Local Government Areas. It is noteworthy that Nembe and Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Areas were created together with the state in 1996.

Geographically, the state is bordered by Delta state in the west, Rivers state in the north and east, and the Atlantic Ocean in the south. The River Niger forks into Nun and Forcados Rivers, which run through the state and empties into the Atlantic Ocean. The state sits at the centre of the fan-shaped Niger Delta, and is crisscrossed by a myriad of rivers, rivulets, creeks, streams and canals. Without mincing words, Bayelsa state has more rivers than Rivers state and it is even more deltaic than Delta state. Perhaps this is because part of the state was in the old western region that later became the Midwestern region and subsequently, Bendel and Delta states, especially Sagbama and Ekeremor Local Government Areas were part of the Delta province before they were

carved to join Rivers state in 1976, the part that was under the defunct Eastern region. Infact, Bayelsa state is the core of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

The state due to its low topography is characterized by abundant water that covers about 60% of the area. This occurs as a result of overflows from the Niger Rivers and its branches lasting between 5-7 months of flooding in the year that submerges farmlands and communities. Flooding and river erosion are regular features of the Niger Delta, especially areas around the lower Niger Delta. Thus, it has a difficult terrain to develop.

Bayelsa state is occupied predominantly by the Ijaw ethnic group in Nigeria. Its ethnographic constituents include different dialects of the Ijaw ethnic nationality such as Kolokumaa, Nembe, Bulutoru, Beseni, Ogbia, Epie, Atissa Okordia and others mingled with other ethnic groups such as Isoko, Urhobo, etc. The territory occupied by ethnic groups cannot have precisely defined boundaries in the sense that most ethnic groups are mingled and found beyond the state. For instance, the Ijaws in addition to constituting majority in Bayelsa state can also be found in Akwa Ibom, Delta, Ondo and Rivers states in Nigeria and are the fourth largest ethnic group in the country. Bayelsa state by the 2006 census is made up of a population of 1,703,358 people. The state is relatively peaceful with a rich culture and tradition, which is demonstrated with the celebration of annual festivals and masquerade displays. River transportation is the predominant means of transport because about 70% of the state is not accessible by road. For instance, Brass, Nembe, Ekeremor and large parts of Sagbama and Southern Ijaw local government areas cannot be accessed by road.

### **Peasants and Development**

As stated earlier, the imperative of a discussion on “peasants and development” in Bayelsa state can be viewed from two broad perspectives. The first prism is the role played by peasants in the process of development, and second, is to x-ray how peasants are exploited in the process of development. Until recently when Bayelsa state was created and Yenagoa became the state capital and the 8 local government headquarters and city like Amassoma which hosts the state owned Niger Delta University that urbanization began, all the area constituting Bayelsa state was a rural area. Even at that, about 80% of the people in Bayelsa state still dwell in rural towns and villages and 90% of the rural population is constituted by peasants. This has enabled us to aptly describe Bayelsa state as a peasant state. The major occupation of the people as mentioned earlier is farming, fishing, and trading. Bayelsa state is rich in aquatic and agricultural resources like palm fruits, cassava, yam, timber, plantain, cocoyam, sweet potatoes, okra, vegetables etc.

Peasant Exchange: Exchange, especially in traditional societies like the Ijaws since the Portuguese and other Europeans penetration in West Africa in the 15<sup>th</sup> century that led to the trans Atlantic slave trade and the subsequent legitimate trade, and “the development of cash crops, the peasant, while continuing to live within his customary framework has had, in order to survive, to participate in trade economy that has encourage him to sell his harvest to buy not only foreign consumer goods, but also basic foodstuffs that he gradually ceases to grow when it became increasingly unprofitable for him to do so” (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1976: 94). Though exchange in itself may not be adequate in the analysis of peasants and development, but it is the most obvious manifestation of the network of relationships, reflects the internal organization of society, which is the result of production. For the most part, the peasant mass live in rural subsistence communities, obedient but not very involved, activated only by the rare local markets that traded exclusively in foodstuffs for cash. The prevailing prices of commodities, more than any other thing, were determined by the economic law of demand and supply.

In a typical market the merchandise of peasant trade includes foodstuffs such as garri (cassava flour), palm oil, yam, plantain, fish and shrimps, which are sold and the peasant is able to obtain manufactured articles such as cloth, jewelry, medicines and other household utensils. Traditionally, the market was centers of activities. Everything was for sale in the market-place, which was an occasion to bring together on a fixed day all locally produced products. Traditionally, the market was dominated by women, and they set the rules for transactions on the local food markets. Women usually ferry canoe loaded with their wares to neighboring and distant markets and after sales obtains their family needs in return. A typical market day is called “foubai” or “akenbai”, but the day before the market day which is known as “fouyoubai,” market bound canoes sale towards the distant market communities in the Niger Delta. Until now when the use of plywood engine boats have made things quiet easy for the market women, it was tedious to paddle canoe, which is the dominant means of transportation in the creeks and rivers of the Niger Delta, to long distant markets. Interestingly, it was mostly women with family or friendly ties that normally join the same canoe to the market. Such trips offer opportunity for interaction, storytelling and gossips. Meanwhile the men wait patiently for the return of their wives and children ever ready to carry the goods from the market women on their return.

In any case, the market provides not only opportunity for economic exchange, but also provides multi-functional institution - social, religious and political exchanges (Bohannan & Dalton, 1965; Piault, 1971). It was the center of communication, as well as occasion for exchange of goods and news and even the meeting of sexes. In the area of information dissemination, the town crier with the aid of the talking drums spread the decisions of the community’s leadership in the market. The traditional head of most Ijaw communities is the “Amanaowei” or

“Amadaowei” or “Amayanabo” and the traditional chief-in-council that is the highest authority in the community. Thus, have the political advantages as a means of control by the chiefs over the people who frequented it and goods that were offered for sale. The political authority in return guaranteed peace in the market-place by exercising the function of both police and justice, and even a religious role whose ceremony guaranteed the maintenance of peace (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1976: 104).

Peasant Production: Notwithstanding the institutionalized exchange, peasant production is another area that will enable us to appreciate the Ijaws of Bayelsa state that is defined by a largely agricultural production that at best is subsistence, characterized by technological backwardness and a weak degree of specialization and exchange. Peasant production in Bayelsa state contributes maximally to the process of development in diverse ways. First and foremost is the issue of technological backwardness, which many authors have reacted. The low level of technology of the African peasant, up to twenty first century, used a very limited number of machines that are elementary. The basic instruments used for farming in the Niger Delta are hoes and cutlasses. The land is marshy with a topography that is below sea level, it cannot allow for the use of plow, the wheel or animal for farming. As (Goody, 1971) observed that technological backwardness is the reason for the stagnation of Africa. Coquery-Vidrovitch, (1976) argued aptly that:

Without the wheel or the plow, the area cultivated by each man never increases; therefore, there is no demand for productivity, no possibility of accumulation of surplus to support an increase number of artisans or to bring about differentiation in income or style of life apart from the constraints of agriculture which would be manifested in urban and political development.

The implication of the low level of technology is the low level of production as Africa was precisely the place where agriculture was least able to produce meaningful surplus.

Despite the low level of technology and its attendant low level of production, the peasants contribute to the process of food production. Peasant production is different from capitalist production in the sense that in capitalist enterprises, the producer does not own the means of production, but is employed as a wage labor. The worker is free from servile obligation. The workman has no land or tool in order to meet his basic needs, but is forced to seek employment as a laborer (Marx, 1961: 174; Chayanov, 1966). On the contrary, peasant production is conducted by the family labor unit, which ideally works on its own family land with its own equipments. The farm is rather his livelihood (Williams, 1976:143). As stated earlier, majority of the peasants in Bayelsa state are farmers and fishermen, and as subsistent farmers, they cultivate yams, cassava, rice, cocoyam, plantain, sweet potatoes, corn, sugar cane, okra, and other vegetables among others in the flood plains along the rivers, and in semi-high lands, to feed their families and sometimes, sell some of their farm produces in the local market to raise money to buy household items. The predominant means of farming among the peasants is mixed cropping. Thus, the peasant farmer usually plant groundnut, sweet potato, corn, cassava and yam etc in the same piece of land.

In terms of fishing, the peasants in Bayelsa state do fish in the rivers, streams, lakes and ponds, and equally explore different methods or techniques of fishing with the use of traps, fish lines and nets. Some of such nets, traps and fish lines includes: Ingo, Atalei, Figi dei, Zuye, Igogo, Itien, Ikimi, Ingoo, Pegae dei, Birinkasa, Sara dei, Bomuu to mention but few.

One unique characteristic of peasant production activities is the issue of communal labor. This refers to the practice of jointly rendering their labor services to help each other in times of need. That is, the peasants jointly work on each other’s farms during the early planting season and even during harvest periods where much labor is needed. Area in which joint labor is required are in the process of palm oil production, fishing in ponds, harvesting and processing of cassava to garri to mention but few. However, there are times when the peasant farmer hires labor for a fee in order to clear, or till the land, or sow seeds, or harvest crops. Such daily labor which is referred to as “eren si” is paid for between N1, 500.00 and N2, 000.00 for men and women and men that are not too strong receive payment of N1,000.00 daily, depending on the task negotiated for.

Secondly, the peasants in the rural areas contribute in a very high degree to sustain the educated peasants and the urban poor, by providing the food needs of the city population. To be candid, the educated peasants and the urban poor are not mutually exclusive groups, and they depend to a large extent on the rural peasant population to survive. Therefore, there are instances whereby, these groups of peasants travel regularly to their towns and villages periodically to get food stuffs from the rural dwellers. The urban population also depends on the peasants for their food supplies.

Again, peasants also supply the pool of labor in the execution of developmental projects. For instance, the peasant is seen as a source for cheap labor simply because the amount that is paid to him for his labor is relatively very low. There is therefore the laborers category of peasants which depends on working for others to make a living, because the wages paid to such category of people barely exceeds what they use for food. This category of persons in most cases has no land on their own to cultivate, hence they depends on others to survive by working for them.

Determining the role of the Capitalist Economy: It is clear that “capitalism could revolutionize agriculture in

Europe, but it could not do the same in Africa” (Rodney, 1972: 239) and “capitalism first makes the production of commodities general, and then, by degrees, transforms all commodity production into capitalist production” (Marx, 1961: 34). There is no denying the fact that capitalism came in to Africa through colonialism. Until recently, the Nigerian economy was propelled by agriculture before it was surpassed by oil in the 1970s and beyond, “accounting for about 80% of total government revenue, 95% of foreign exchange and over 80% of national wealth” (Tell, February 18, 2008:33). The oil industry is a modern development that is dominated not by peasants, but by multinational corporations such as Chevron, Texaco, Exxon-Mobil, Total, Agip, SPDC, ELF and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Interestingly, there are over 600 Oil fields, 5,284 onshore and offshore Oil Wells, 10 Export Terminals, 275 Flow Stations, 4 Refineries and a Liquefied National Gas Project (Lubeck, Watts and Lipschits, 2007) cutting across the states in the Niger Delta. Statistics shows that about 23,183.9 billion barrels of Crude Oil were said to have been produced in the Niger Delta, which amounts to a staggering National revenue of 29.8 trillion naira (TELL, February 18, 2008:28).

Curiously, oil was first discovered in commercial quantity in Nigeria in Otabagi Community (under the then Oloibiri District) in 1956 in present day Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa state. The state currently accounts for about 30% of Nigeria’s oil and gas production index. The existence of the capitalist oil economy side by side the peasant economy has many implications. First, the oil industry is a product of advanced capitalist development, while the peasant economy is backward and underdeveloped.

Be that as it may, peasants in Bayelsa state are seriously being exploited in the development process. Experience has shown and there is no denying the fact that, the discovery of oil and gas in commercial quantity, and subsequent oil and gas exploration cum production activities have impacted negatively on the subsistent economy of the peasant population. Fishing and farming have become frustrating activities due to the frequent cases of oil spillage and gas flaring which causes environmental degradation and destruction of the eco system. Most species of fish has gone into extinction, aquatic resources have been destroyed due to pollution and the land is no longer fertile for farming. The undeniable reality is that, whereas the multinational oil companies operating in the area reap multi-billion dollars as profits each year, the living condition of the peasants have been put in reverse and as such turn for the worst due dominantly to its co-existence with the capitalist system.

Determining the role of the Government: Over the years peasants have always been affected by good, or bad government policies. In Nigeria reaction of peasants to government policies has sometimes led to rebellion, schism and detention as evidence in the peasant revolts to agricultural policies of the western region in 1968 – 1970 (Beer, 1976). In most cases, government initiates policies without inputs from the peasants, but directly or indirectly compels them to implement such alien policies that do not promote their interest. Government policy measures are mostly in areas such as the provision of technical measures to provide higher yielding seeds, extension services, cooperatives, crop purchases and sometimes insecticides and herbicides, and fertilizers. These inputs are sometimes not available to the peasant (Feldman and Lawrence, 1975). Again, there has been a deliberate restructuring of production relation by government, especially at the federal level through the land use decree, which expropriates peasant lands. According to (Nigeria: 1973: 14),

It will be the policy of the Federal Government to acquire large areas of suitable land to be leased out on uniform terms to farmers as in the case of industrial estates. It will be much easier to provide extension services, agricultural inputs, etc, on such agricultural estates.

This has led to the ownership of large farms by government such as the Peremabiri rice farm which is situated in Southern Ijaw local government area of Bayelsa state and is claimed to be the largest rice farm in West Africa, yet cannot produce significant rice to the market and the Bayelsa Palm, which the state inherited from the old Rivers state. Unfortunately, these state owned farms have been unable to transform the “pigmy property of the many” into “the huge property of the few” (Marx, 1961: 762). This is what (Mafeje, 1972: 19) refers to as “in the absence of a virile national bourgeoisie the government was proposing state capitalism as an alternative.” The promotion of capitalist agriculture will not entirely displace peasant farming, especially in rural communities, but is capable of depriving the peasants of the much needed inputs for the transformation of peasant occupation.

Peasants also create a peaceful atmosphere for development to thrive by their peaceful disposition. That is, by being law abiding, they help to create, promote and sustain the right environment for development to occur. However, there are also scenarios where by peasants are swindled and exploited by government officials or their representatives under the pretext of including them in government programs that will better their living conditions, such as employment, payment of compensation for the destruction of their farm lands and provision of soft loans, among others. For instance, the Bayelsa state government gave loans to traders, farmers and cooperative societies and in a public hearing by the state house of assembly, it was discovered that the commissioner of trade and commerce gave loans amounting to millions of naira to his close relations such as his parents, sibling and other family members. Yet the commissioner served until the end of the tenure of the government in 2007 - 2012. This justifies the contention that in Africa the minority ruling class dominated and exploited peasants “without interfering directly in the conditions of production” (Godelier, 1963).

Specifically, peasants help to implement government policies and programs in the rural areas. This is

because, programs such as Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, Fadama, etc, witnessed peasants playing unique roles in the implementation process in Nigeria. However, inadequate or lack of farm credits, infrastructure and lack of market information with regards to current prices are impediments to peasant farming in Bayelsa state. Again, due to the unavailability or lack of storage facilities during harvest seasons, peasants are subjected to sell their farm products in very cheap (give away) prices, thus making them not to benefit maximally from what they produce. For instance, most peasants lost over 80 percent of their farm produce in 2012 due to the devastating flood that submerged almost all their communities and to make matters worse, they equally lost majority of the seedling needed for planting in the new farming season. There is still no discernable government policy to forestall the devastating calamity that befell the peasant farmer as the next raining season approaches.

The role of peasants in the socio-economic development of Bayelsa state cannot be over emphasized. Though Bayelsa state is rich in the production of oil and gas, the inhabitants of the state are relatively poor, and paradoxically remains a civil servants state even in the capital city Yenagoa and its metropolis, due to the absent of industries, hence there is an alarming rate of unemployment in the land. For instance, due to the pitiable rate of unemployment in the state, graduates under the auspices of the Unemployed Graduates Forum, staged a peaceful demonstration in the state capital, Yenagoa recently, to press home their demands, but were unfortunately arrested by security operatives and are presently facing prosecution in a magistrate court. The above category of unemployed youths belongs to a group that I called "educated peasants". Our argument is that, whereas, members of the aforementioned category of peasants, though mostly children of peasant, have acquired western education (secondary, university or polytechnic education), hopeful to escape from peasant hood, paradoxically, sits uneasily in the trench hood of the peasantry, due primarily to either no or low level of income and therefore live in a highly dependent mode of existence.

### Conclusion

The paper has shown that peasants play a vital role in the development of all societies, with special reference to Bayelsa state, either through the exchanges, or peasant production, especially in the supply of cheap labor or the production of food. However, while they contribute positively to the development of society, they are equally exploited in the process of development, and the peasants in Bayelsa state is not an exception. Peasants exploit themselves, or are exploited by government and multinational companies in Nigeria.

The paper therefore suggests that, to give the peasants a sense of belonging, government and the multinational companies operating in Bayelsa state need to evolve modalities to promote the living condition of the peasant with the provision of basic social amenities and infrastructure, agricultural equipments, grants and soft loans, payment of compensations for the destruction of their farmlands, technical measures to provide higher yielding seeds, extension services, cooperatives, crop purchases and sometimes insecticides and herbicides, and fertilizers. and reduce pollution of the land, rivers and lakes. In this way peasant development will transform to modern development in the near future.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Kimiebi Imomotimi Ebienfa** was born on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, 1981 in Sabagreia, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science (2005) from Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State and Master of Science degree in Political Science (2010) from the University of Ibadan, Ibadan where he specialized in Comparative Politics. He is presently a Doctorate Candidate in the Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan, and has published widely in reputable international and local journals. He is a member of Nigeria Institute of Management and the International Political Science Association, among others. His research interests include Oil and Environmental Politics, Public Policy, International Security and Terrorism.

**Mr. Fidelis A.E. Paki** was born on 20<sup>th</sup> October, 1966 at Ayamasa Town in Ekeremor Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. He holds a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree in Political Science (1998) from the University of Jos and a Master of Science (M.Sc.) degree in Political Science (2001) from the University of Ibadan where he specialized in International Relations. He is presently an M. Phil/Ph. D. student in the Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan. Also, from 2002 to date, the author has been employed as a lecturer in the Political Science Department, Niger Delta University, and has risen to the rank of lecturer 1. His current research interest is in the areas of Niger Delta Studies, African Politics and International Peace and Security.