

An Appraisal of NDDC Vocational Skills Acquisition Programme and Socioeconomic Wellbeing of the People in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study evaluated the connection between the socioeconomic well-being of residents in the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria, and the NDDC vocational skills acquisition program. For the study, a cross-sectional survey design was chosen. The study's target population consisted of 546,782 persons who were at least 18 years old. For the study, three sample techniques were used: simple random sampling, cluster sampling, and purposive sampling. 1,200 adults, both male and female, who lived in the study region made up the sample. Focus group discussions (FGDs), interviews, and questionnaires were the instruments used to gather data. Respondents were given a questionnaire with both closed- and open-ended questions. At the 0.05 level of significance, the study used Simple Linear Regression Analysis to test the hypothesis. The people's socioeconomic well-being and the acquisition of occupational skills were found to be positively correlated. The study's conclusions led to several recommendations, including that the government adopt a bottom-up approach to project selection and implementation, reevaluate the commission's needs assessment strategy to better reflect the needs of the populace, and strengthen and reorganize the vocational skill acquisition programs run by the NDDC in the study area to increase their efficacy.

Keywords: NDDC, Vocational Skills Acquisition Programme, Socioeconomic Wellbeing, People, Cross River State

Introduction

One of the key pillars that enables many young people to realize their aspirations and provide a means of subsistence for those unable to work in public or private enterprises with academic credentials is skill training. The acquisition of skills is as essential to the human body as water. The process of learning a skill by oneself or through a group of people can result in the acquisition of knowledge necessary for self-sustenance. It entails the instruction of individuals in various trades under the terms of a formal contract between the instructors and the students, lasting a specific amount of time. The process of exhibiting the habit of active thought or behavior in a particular task is known as skill acquisition. Acquiring skills is viewed as the capacity to carry out an action associated with a purposeful workout, task, or employment. In order to gain a skill, one must acquire the necessary knowledge, attitudes, cognitive patterns, and moral traits that will help them build moral, intellectual, and emotional character and position them for success in the future (Uche, Okoye, & Uche, 2014).

According to Okashwe (2012), skill acquisition is the expression of ideas and knowledge gained via instruction intended to instill in people the spirit of clothing manufacturing necessary for significant progress. The author emphasized that providing people with the chance to gain the necessary skills for economic self-sufficiency will enhance their attractiveness in any workplace. The goal of education is to equip persons with the necessary knowledge, abilities, and skills to

live fulfilling lives and make valuable contributions to society as a whole. Therefore, the goal of all levels of instruction should be to assist each student in acquiring the necessary emotional, mental, and physical skills to enable them to contribute more to society as citizens.

According to Jude (2014), acquiring skills is the expression of ideas and knowledge gained via training intended to inculcate in people the spirit of entrepreneurship necessary for significant personal growth and self-employment. The author emphasized that providing people with the chance to learn the necessary skills for economic self-sufficiency will boost their charisma in any workplace and make them more competitive. According to Ede (2011), if people acquire skills in a variety of fields and subsequently generate income for both themselves and their local community, it will aid in lowering the poverty rate.

Since not everyone can work for the government or in a white-collar industry, it is necessary to acquire skills that will help those who have given up on their dreams of becoming employed and improve their lives. According to Bangul (2019), acquiring skills is a means of broadening one's options for a long and healthy life as well as acquiring information for a respectable level of living. The author goes on to elaborate that it is independence from constraints related to the economy, society, education, and chances for creativity and productivity. It also involves enjoying one's inherent right to self-respect and established human rights.

Possessing skills improves job prospects and lowers crime rates in communities. Every year, thousands of students graduate from secondary schools and universities, and more than 80% of them leave to pursue better opportunities. Due to the experiences gained, persons with acquired skills are better able to plan strategically, manage their finances, and lessen social problems (Isaac, 2012). According to Okumaga (2012), Nigerian university graduates who have completed their studies are eligible to participate in the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) program and serve their country. Graduates who are too old to work menial occupations to make ends meet parade the streets. Nonetheless, the Federal Republic of Nigerian government offers opportunities for skill development through the NDDC in an effort to improve the lot of young people living in oil-producing towns.

In their 2009 study, Akinwale and Osabuohien focused on analyzing the NDDC Master Plan in light of the Commission's declared goals for the creation of jobs, health, education, and overall sustainable development of the area. According to the report, there is no significant difference between the current government development policies in the area and the NDDC Master Plan. The Plan's current execution, according to the authors, may make the social tensions that are a feature of daily life in the area worse. The study suggested that locals whose daily lives and means of subsistence are impacted by operations related to the production of crude oil should be actively included in the decision-making process and the implementation of projects meant to enhance their quality of life.

Using the human development paradigm, Akpomuvie (2011) evaluated the NDDC's contributions to the solution of the Niger Delta paradox, which asks why the region's abundant natural and human resources have had such little beneficial effect on the sustainable development of the area. According to the report, the Niger Delta region's situation is pitiful, particularly in light of other comparable oil-producing regions like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Indonesia, and others. The study's findings demonstrated the appalling living conditions and high rates of poverty in the oil-producing towns. The ecosystem is badly damaged, which leads to a number of problems, including contaminated surface and subsurface water sources, a decline in crop output due to decreased soil fertility, and contamination of other natural resources. Based on a proposed nine-point agenda for the region's development, the study offered a people-centered development paradigm.

Up until the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission by an act of the National Assembly in 2000, the previous governments had left the Niger Delta region in the dark. The first of these initiatives was the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB), which came up as a result of the 1958 Sir Henry Willink Commission's recommendation that the region merited

particular development focus. The Board was established in 1960 to oversee the region's growth requirements and obstacles. It was in existence for seven years following the founding, during which time it achieved very little (Olujimi, et al., 2007). With the goal of accelerating the Niger Delta's transformation into a region that is economically successful, socially stable, ecologically regenerative, and politically peaceful, the Niger Delta Development Commission was established. There are five different ecological zones in the Niger Delta Region, which includes the states of Bayelsa, Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Akwa Ibom, Abia, Rivers, Ondo, and Imo. There are numerous opportunities for the development of forestry, ecotourism, and agriculture within the zones. There is a great deal of diversity in the area's flora and wildlife, including uncommon monkey species, exotic birds, and medicinal plants. Given the area's rich ecological zones, it is inappropriate to discuss unemployment, hunger, or restlessness. With the commission in place, the area is anticipated to achieve a significant level of food security; however, aside from political marginalization, the main issues facing the Niger Delta's population can be linked to economic hardship, youth unrest, a lack of skills, unemployment, hunger, and ultimately, rage (Oviasuyi & Uwadias, 2010).

The Nigerian government, along with the NDDC, has been working to increase capacity through both domestic and foreign vocational and non-vocational training. Regretfully, due to unemployment, the majority of those who received training are still found resettling in the creeks. Because human development is achievable when it is all-encompassing, the failure of the training program suggests that the participants were not appropriately integrated into society and, hence, it is insufficient to build capability (Omajemite, 2008). According to Aghedo (2013), the post-amnesty program that the Nigerian government started was ineffective since its main goal was to disarm the disgruntled youths rather than to promote individual and community sustainability. According to Apkomuvie (2011), the government alone cannot provide people with the infrastructure they need; instead, people can reach their full potential, develop self-confidence, live with dignity, and achieve self-actualization when they are given the chance to participate in the decision-making process regarding matters that impact their lives.

Statement of the problem

According to Nigerian population figures, youth make up over 60% of the country's population of over 200 million, meaning that they represent a significant portion of the population and should not be disregarded in society. These young people, however, confront numerous obstacles, including a high unemployment and poverty rate, a lack of self-discipline, ignorance, and access to basic social services and information that have caused them to lose hope in themselves. Due to the high rates of crime, violence, and sexual activity that are observed in young people, many people attribute the problem to the youth rather than its potential. Up to 40% of Nigerians live in poverty, and a large portion of the population in the research region lacks access to basic amenities like power, clean drinking water, and better sanitation. Furthermore, because the majority of people work in small-scale household farms and other non-farm businesses, jobs are not readily accessible, enabling the majority of people to live in poverty. While the majority of Nigerian workers struggle to buy enough food, a small percentage hold wage occupations that are most suited to pull people out of poverty.

Poverty is a major economic and social issue that affects a sizable portion of the population in the Niger Delta region. It can take many different forms, including a deficiency in education and skills, homelessness, chronic hunger and malnutrition, a lack of durable goods, disease, and access to clean water. In the Niger Delta, more than half of the people live in multidimensional poverty and cook using wood, charcoal, or sawdust instead of cleaner energy sources, particularly in rural regions. High levels of deprivation are also evident in housing, food insecurity, healthcare access, and sanitation. Most people agree that over the years, efforts to eradicate poverty have not been able to adequately address the fundamental requirements of rural development, nor have they contributed to the improvement of the social and economic circumstances of most local residents. The poverty eradication programme has not been able to

satisfy developmental aims such as livelihood enhancement, local economic development and empowerment within the rural level. Unfortunately, in spite of all these continued efforts, the World Bank and the Federal Office of Statistics reported that the number of rural poor people is almost twice that of urban poor people, and that the severity of poverty in rural areas has increased by more than double.

Objective of the study

This study's goal is to investigate the connection between the socioeconomic well-being of residents in Cross River State, Nigeria's southern senatorial district and the NDDC vocational skills acquisition program.

Hypothesis

Ho: The development of vocational skills and people's socioeconomic well-being are not significantly correlated.

Hi: The development of vocational skills and people's socioeconomic well-being are significantly correlated.

Literature Review

According to Okolo (2014), the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) is the region's sixth intervention agency, carrying out a plan for long-term prosperity and peace. Despite all the criticism and doubts about NDDC's efficacy and accountability, she has nonetheless had a greater and more significant impact in line with the master plan. Okolo (2014) went on to say that young people. People have long done things that are thought to advance their status and quality of life. Governments all across the world have attempted to promote the development of rural areas by meeting people's infrastructure needs, particularly for rural roads, which are thought to be a means of raising the standard of living for rural residents, in response to the growing gap between rural and urban areas and environmental issues in the area lead to young people staging violent protests against ongoing oil spills, pollution, underdevelopment, marginalization, and more than 50 years of gas flaring, all of which have a detrimental effect on the local population and the environment's ecology. Using a political science methodology, the author proposed the creation of a conflict resolution body as a social remedy to keep an eye on and assess social issues that contribute to conflict so that they can be addressed before they blow out.

According to Agekameh (2010), socioeconomic inequities "walk on four legs" in the Niger Delta, which causes people to agitate violently. The NDDC project aims to end these injustices. Several works of literature have addressed the region's socioeconomic issues and the pressing need for government action. Additionally, they noted that one of the main socioeconomic effects of oil pollution was agriculture degradation. Udom (2016) agreed, claiming that oil exploration had a negative influence on the soils, forests, and water bodies of host communities in the Niger Delta. Due to the loss of their fields and fishing waters, subsistence farmers, fishermen, and women are compelled to emigrate to neighboring communities in search of work, placing more strain on the local natural resources.

Wilson (2012) used the growth of Rivers State as a case study to analyze the effects of the Niger Delta growth Commission's (NDDC) operations on the State's development. The study focused on the NDDC and the sustainable development of the Niger Delta region. According to the study's conclusions, the NDDC's initiatives are beneficial and beneficial for Rivers State's sustainable development, but they fall woefully short of what is needed to spark the state's rapid sustainable development. The report made recommendations on how the Commission should go about achieving its objectives.

Similar to this, Uche, Okoye, and Uche (2014) investigated the community development initiatives carried out by NDDC in Abia State as an essential part of the state's sustainable community development. The study's main objective was to evaluate the Commission's programs critically in light of how the public views them and how they support long-term, sustainable

community development. Six communities from six local government areas in the state made up the purposively selected sample for the study. Focused group discussions (FGD) and interviews were employed as participatory research appraisal approaches. According to the results, the NDDC has carried out community development initiatives in the six communities, some of which have been effectively finished. The study communities' quality of life has improved as a result of these initiatives' successful completion. It stated that there has been little community involvement in the projects' implementation and contended that this had major ramifications for the projects' sustainability.

Specifically, the NDDC was established to guarantee the Niger Delta's comprehensive growth. This is predicated on the worldview that highlighted the importance of people as the center of social development. Numerous indices, including longevity, education, and a reasonable level of living, are used to gauge human progress (UNDP, 2002). It is important to recognize that the Niger Delta's overall level of human development is appalling. The Niger Delta region's infrastructure does not correspond with the well-being or social and economic advancement of its residents. It is nearly impossible to support economic and human development without the fundamental infrastructure. This is related to how the government implements policies and plans strategic courses of action for development initiatives (Oviasuyi & Uwadais, 2010). According to Nkpoyen and Bassey (2013), a country's wealth is not solely based on its income but also on how well-off its citizens are in terms of their ability to meet their basic needs and aspirations. Thus, the capacity of individuals to realize their full potential through the exercise of their freedom of choice in order to achieve self-actualization in life is known as human development. According to Akpabio (2011), the level of development in the Niger Delta region is not commensurate with the living conditions of the population, even though the region generates significant cash from oil. Beyond financial prosperity, human development is the capacity to recognize the wants and interests of the populace and empower them through improved decision-making and freedom on issues that impact their daily lives. Therefore, a country's true wealth is determined by how well its citizens are able to maximize their potential by having access to the necessities of life.

According to Ayuba (2012), human development is the capacity of individuals to exercise their free will and select a way of living that will allow them to achieve their desired goals in life. A thorough evaluation of the Niger Delta's human development must take into account significant problems like educational access. According to UNDP research from 2006, there is a gap in the Niger Delta between the availability and application of educational skills and knowledge in the field of expertise. The analysis also shows that a lack of adequate coordination of investment has a negative impact on the educational needs and interests of the people living in the Niger Delta Region, severely impairing the educational system in the majority of oil-producing villages. In addition to education, everyone in a community or area must be involved in decision-making processes that have an impact on them. This is to guarantee that programs for people's growth are geared toward their needs and desires rather than anything else. As a result, individuals will be able to frame their issues in light of their beliefs and areas of interest (Ali, 2013). The poor foundations upon which the NDDC and other intervention organizations were founded have been identified as one of the main contributing factors to their inefficiency (UNDP, 2018). Furthermore, one of these underlying causes is the lack of autonomy exhibited by regional authorities when it comes to allocating funds and implementing projects, given that their primary responsibility is the oversight of initiatives about the origins of which they are ignorant. Corrupt practices, a lack of political will, inadequate money, and subpar project monitoring were also noted (Ali, 2013).

The start of 2047 infrastructure development projects in the Niger Delta, encompassing roads and bridges, electrification, water supply, canalization, and school construction, is one of the major accomplishments highlighted in the NDDC Annual Report 2015. A variety of initiatives for human development were launched, such as those for skill development and youth empowerment (Niger Delta Development Commission, 2015). However, evaluation of Niger

Delta development since the NDDC was formed reveals that poverty reduction progress has been sluggish, especially considering the region's abundant natural resource endowments and additional Federal Government funding.

Okolo (2014) bemoaned that the primary issues affecting the people in the Niger-Delta region are those pertaining to the nature and applicability of skills as well as the empowerment of individuals to use their skills in the workforce. This observation suggests that the people's old economy has been replaced by an industrial economy, meaning that their conventional knowledge and abilities are no longer applicable to the new economic framework. This is further underscored by the fact that, in many cases, targeted skills may not be applicable to people's social and economic environments, especially those of women and young people (Okolo, 2014). In this context, it was suggested that each new skill should prepare students for work, especially self-employment, for reducing poverty, and for the development of a skilled labor pool that businesses might utilize. The Niger-Delta International Conference on Sustainable Development (2003) suggested skill development and retraining programs that consider the trainees' community's unique economic activities, social groups (youth and women, for example), customs, and way of life. It was also mentioned that the two main industries from which training programs should take their material are industrialization and agriculture, which is the traditional vocation of the region. This would help the recipients of the training become valuable contributors to the local economy.

Every organized program's effectiveness, including the skills acquisition program, is mostly determined by how the program's intended audience views it. When the target group has a favorable opinion of the program, members of the target community may participate in both solicited and unsolicited ways in any skills acquisition initiative (Skogan, 2015). The main goal of skill development programs is to lower the youth unemployment rate. This is obviously relevant in the Niger Delta, where the ongoing high rate of youth unemployment has led to a wide range of negative outcomes, from youth restlessness to Niger Delta militancy. The introduction of skill acquisition programs in the Niger Delta region was prompted by the revelation that the primary factor contributing to youth unemployment was a deficiency in learned skills (Nwachukwu and Ekanem, 2016). According to Nwachukwu and Ekanem (2016), the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is arguably the most affected by unemployment issues of any region in the country. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) launched its Skills Acquisition Program in Rivers State in 2006, while the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) created its in Old Rivers State in 2002.

According to Akerele (2016), the Skills Acquisition Training Program is an adult education program that aims to address participants' urgent needs—such as employment, independence, and reducing youth restlessness—by teaching them a variety of skills. It is essentially a training program that enables participants to gain knowledge and abilities in a variety of fields, including electronics, carpentry, masonry, electrical wiring and installation, hair styling, barbering, driving, vehicle maintenance and repair, plumbing, fixtures, mobile phone repair, and computer appreciation. It is primarily a hands-on program designed to equip young people with the necessary skills and abilities to fully adapt to Nigeria's current economic climate, particularly in the Niger Delta region's states of Rivers State and Bayelsa, where population is growing steadily without the states' economies expanding at the same rate.

Aside from the aforementioned, research conducted in Nigeria has increasingly recognized the importance of low skill development for both economic growth and poverty alleviation. Menendez and Maria (2013), for example, contended that the social and economic issues Nigeria is currently facing may be significantly lessened by providing appropriate vocational training in skills, raw materials, machinery, and equipment. According to Akpama (2015), developing entrepreneurial and vocational skills opens doors for wealth generation and the alleviation of poverty.

In a different study, Udom (2016) looked into how 118 Indian rural women's livelihoods were improved by their access to skill development. The study concentrated on how training in

clothing manufacturing and embroidery could improve employment prospects. The results showed that because the trainees had practical experience, their knowledge had increased by 151.6%. Some of the trainees went on to launch their own enterprises, while others were hired by clothing companies. The results so imply that mml women's ability to obtain training in garment manufacturing and needlework has contributed to their diversification of income, particularly that of housewives. They now have additional revenue, which has improved their ability to adjust to changes in their farm-based livelihood activities. An intriguing study was conducted by Audu et al. (2013) on the relationship between acquiring vocational skills and people's socioeconomic well-being. The study's findings demonstrated that the area's youth still have extremely high rates of poverty despite the fact that many of them have received training in other fields. The researchers also discovered that, despite having these abilities, they are no longer needed because of the weak economic situation, which has left them without jobs. The data indicate that because of the poor purchasing power of the populace, these trained adolescents are rarely patronized.

Research Methodology

For the study, a cross-sectional survey design was chosen. Because this strategy can employ data from a large number of respondents or subjects and is directed by purposive selection, it is deemed acceptable. The Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State served as the study area. 11189,801 people who live in Cross River State's Southern Senatorial District make up the study's population. However, people 18 years of age and older were the study's target group. There are 546,782 adults in the population. For the study, three sample techniques were used: simple random sampling, cluster sampling, and purposive sampling. 1,200 adults, both male and female, who lived in the study region made up the sample. Focus group discussions (FGDs), interviews, and questionnaires were the instruments used to gather data. Respondents were given a questionnaire with both closed- and open-ended questions. At the 0.05 level of significance, the study used Simple Linear Regression Analysis to test the hypothesis.

Results

The study's premise was supported by the results that were presented. Both the null hypothesis and the proper statistical method used for data analysis were restated. The development of vocational skills and people's socioeconomic well-being are not significantly correlated. This hypothesis was investigated using basic linear regression analysis at the.05 level of significance.

Table 1: Simple linear regression results summary of the relationship between vocational skills acquisition and socio-economic wellbeing of the people.

R	.752				
R Square	.565				
Adjusted R Square	.564				
Std. Error	3.633				
Model	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	6828.914	1	6828.914	517.512	.000
Residual	5251.876	1198	13.196		
Total	12080.790	1199			
B = .746	t = 22.749	p< .05			

Source: Field Work, 2023.

The analysis's findings, which are shown in Table 1, showed a significant positive correlation between people's socioeconomic wellbeing and their ability to acquire occupational skills. Additionally, it was demonstrated that the acquisition of occupational skills accounts for 56.4% of the variance in the socioeconomic wellbeing of the population, with an adjusted R square value of.564. It follows that other independent variables not included in the model may be able to predict the remaining 43.6% of the variance. An F-ratio of 517.512 was found by the analysis of

variance, and for 1 and 1198 degrees of freedom, the p-value of 0.000 was less than the alpha threshold of 0.05. This outcome led to the rejection of the null hypothesis and the retention of the alternative hypothesis. In conclusion, there is a strong correlation between acquiring vocational skills and an individual's socioeconomic well-being. Additionally, it was demonstrated by the unstandardized regression coefficient of $B = 0.746$ that individuals' socioeconomic welfare will rise by 0.746 for every unit increase in occupational skill development.

Discussion

The results showed a strong correlation between people's socioeconomic wellbeing and their ability to acquire occupational skills. This conclusion is explained by the fact that acquiring vocational skills enhances young people's and interested adults' prospects for employment by giving them the chance to advance their careers, make a living, alter their way of life, and ultimately hire others while also boosting the local economy. Gaining vocational skills also makes it possible for recipients to launch small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), which increase economic productivity—particularly when the businesses are focused on production. These allow for the improvement of internal production, which may further open up a surplus for export to other regions of the state, nation, or world. Engaging in such activities suggests that the area's excessive reliance on the government will be significantly reduced, as well as social issues like cultism, kidnapping, theft, and general social unrest. This is because many young people who would have participated in such threats out of poverty or unemployment will now be supporting themselves.

The results of this study are consistent with those of Audu et al. (2013), who offered insightful research evidence showing that participants in programs designed to help people out of poverty gained valuable skills that helped them make better use of money, land, water, and crops. Gainfully, they felt less susceptible to financial transaction fraud because they could now maintain their records. This research confirms Wilson's (2012) findings, which showed that funding lifetime education for individuals living in poverty is worthwhile and that the skills taught in these programs actually assist the impoverished in increasing their income and escaping it. Wilson (2012)'s findings, which are based on an experiment conducted abroad, imply that the development of vocational skills and their potential to enhance people's well-being are global trends that do not only affect Nigerians or those who live in Cross River State's Southern Senatorial District.

Menendez and Maria's (2013) analysis also shown how some indigenous people live in impoverished environments. It's interesting to note that at project's conclusion, the identified negative indicators of poverty were said to have been satisfied, with sustainable indications starting to emerge.

Conclusion

The general conclusion drawn from the study's findings was that Niger Delta intervention initiatives can play a significant role in advancing the socioeconomic well-being of residents in Nigeria's Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State. This can be accomplished by empowering rural areas, which can support the current projects offered. Specifically, efforts aimed at acquiring vocational skills are beneficial initiatives that have the ability to greatly improve people's socio-economic wellbeing. In light of the aforementioned, it was suggested that:

- I. The government ought to choose a bottom-up strategy for selecting and carrying out projects.
- II. A re-evaluation of the commission's needs assessment plan to take into account the perceived requirements of the populace.
- III. To increase their effectiveness, NDDC's vocational skill acquisition programs in the study area should be reinforced and restructured.

- IV. Citizens should have access to more vocational training programs and sufficient funds to launch their own businesses. All beneficiaries will have a source of income from this, enabling them to live better standards of living.
- V. NDDC projects that have been abandoned must to be finished so that the recipients can utilize them.

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