

**SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF
PEOPLES' PERCEPTION OF THEIR
INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS OF THE
DELTA STATE OIL PRODUCING
AREAS DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
(DESOPADEC)**

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Abstract

The aim of this paper was to explore and assess people's perceptions of their involvement in the process of community development projects of Delta State oil producing area development commission. The study was guided by three research questions as indicated on the frequency distribution tables. There was review of relevant literature and the Gestalts Perception Theory formed the theoretical framework. A sample size of six hundred and thirty (630) was targeted, but five hundred (500) questionnaires were duly filled and returned. These, together with data from thirty (30) interviewees who were purposively selected, were used for the analysis. The major finding was that DESOPADEC had not been able to achieve the felt-needs of the oil producing communities successfully; thus, sustainability of community development projects has not been fully realized. This is as a result of inadequate community participations in projects' selections and implementation process. It is therefore recommended, among other, that effective community development strategies that could ensure adequate community participation should be adopted.

INTRODUCTION

The need for sustainable social development has become critical resulting in different international declarations. Some of the declarations were the Earth Summit (2001), the Copenhagen (1995). On sustainable development and Cairo declaration on population and development (1994). Within the country, the obvious poverty level of people created and need for the first national development plan up to the fourth, and the recent vision 2020. Sustainable development remains a key issue in these development plans.

The development challenges of the Niger Delta were identified before Nigerian's political independence by the setting up of Wilkins' commission in 1958, purposely to recommend how the region could be developed. The commission's findings produced Niger Delta Development Board in 1961; it could not achieve much apparently because of the Western region political crisis of 1962. thereafter, the Niger Delta Basin and Rural Development Authority was established in 1976, and later on, the Presidential Task Force was set up due to youth

restiveness in the region. These achieved nothing meaningful. In 1992, further effort to develop the region was made leading to the emergence of the Oil and Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC). Unfortunately this commission could not make any laudable development before it was scrapped in 1998. Due to awareness, sensitization and life experience of years of neglect, poverty, oppression and underdevelopment in the midst of oil wealth, both restiveness. In 2000, the Federal Government set up another development commission known as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to address sustainable development of the Niger Delta Areas. Its operations in 2001, the commission was bedeviled with abuse of political patronage, massive project abandonment, delay in release of approved allocations and inadequate release of deviation funds (ANEEJ, 2004). Since all the out Federal Government concerns about Niger Delta Development have not yielded intended results, some of the Niger Delta states have taken positive steps to establish their own community development commissions. These commissions would have the people of the affected states as board chairmen, members and staff to lead Community development process in order to enhance rapid human and infrastructural development in the various states. In the light of this, the Delta State Government, in 2007 established the Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (DESOPADEC). It may have been perceived by the people that the community development projects of the commission have not met their community felt needs. However, the law establishing DESOPADEC stipulated that 50 percent of the 13 percent Deviation Fund accruing to Delta State be set aside for execution of community development projects in the oil producing communities.

In spite of the good objectives of the commission, sustainable development seems to be elusive still. The people may perceive many other shackling factors that constrain the success, including inexperienced employees, of the commission. They may have been employed formal training in the area of community development. They may have been employed through political influence. Consequently, the people may perceive these employees as those who assume that they know best how things should be done and as such neglecting the

suggestions coming from the communities. Omoruyi (2001) observes that such staff can ruin popular participation and when they work with people, they often transform themselves into authority. Also, Bah (1985) points out that the rural man could not be said to be part of the system because not much is thought of him when decision on development plans are being taken, most of them only follow vaguely the happening in the society due to the low intellectual development.

It follows therefore that though strict efforts are needed to expose and address the major problems negatively affecting the execution of DESOPADEC's efforts in the state, it is still very imperative to find out what the people see as the constraints and the commission's efforts to achieve effective execution to her community development projects. Community participation in decision making and implementation of projects remains a critical issue in any development efforts. Without community participation, sustainable community development is elusive. Sequel to that, some sustainability strategies such as regular multi-development stakeholder fora a means of negotiation at the community level, involvement of community members in planning and implementing relevant choices, and plot activities to generate learning and ownership of such projects by beneficiary communities are imperative for the success and sustainability of the projects. The commission may have however, adopted some sustainable development strategies in the execution of its projects in the study area. Yet, the effectiveness of these strategies cannot be taken for granted, but rather calls for scrutiny. To do this warrants reflections on the mandate of the commission. The Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (DESOPADEC) was set up by the Delta State Government in 2007 with the specific mandate to rehabilitate, rejuvenate and revive the physical, economic and social well being of the people may perceive of the oil and gas host communities (DESOPADEC, 2009). However, the people may perceive that the commission has not achieved its mandate in the state due to inadequate community participation in project selection and implementation process. It is through the assessment of the people's perceptions that the achievement of the commission's mandate, as well as strategies adopted could be determined. There is need, therefore, to

explore and assess people's perceptions of their involvement in these projects, hence, the need for the current study.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Popular participations is shown to be relevant to sustainable development. It is the active process whereby beneficiaries influence direction and execution of development projects rather than merely receiving a share of the project benefits (Paul, 1987). Supporting this view, UNDP (2006) views sustainable development strategies as interactive process of planning, setting priorities, implementing choices relevant to a country's sustainable development needs, and learning from experience to continually improve people's lives; this requires strong commitment, leadership and improved coherence of existing processes.

However, there are constraints to sustainable development as Muoghalu (1992) noted that the major problems of DFFRI are shortage of knowledge and skilled caliber of staff that can translate its objectives into action; and that poor mobilization of people, insincerity of public officers have hampered sustainable development in the country (Nigeria). As Ayichi (1995) asserts that one common shortcoming of sustainable development is the limited or absence of local community participation in problem identification, project prioritization, design, preparation and implementation. Also, Ominde (1997) observes that the constraints of sustainable development include colonial legacy, political instability, corruption and deficiencies in governance, deficiencies in planning, inappropriate policies, and strategies, deficiencies in legal and legislative support of development programme, and lack of effective regional integration and collaboration in development.

Generally, sustainable development has to do with participatory development, human development and environmental protection. An approximation measure that tends to capture these ingredients was formulated by UNDP in 1990: the Human Development Index (HEI), its aim is to capture the broader picture of human welfare by considering these indicators: life expectancy, literacy and living standard (Eboh, 1995).

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Gestalt Perception Theory

This perception theory came to limelight in the 19th century in Germany. It was propounded by Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffa and Kohler (Davidoff, 1987). The theory focuses on the extent to which configurational aspects are representatives of the total phenomenon of human behaviour. Thus, it states that the primary target in perception is determined against the background which represents that issue as a whole. The information is articulated in the order of similarity. Impliedly, people's perception of the community development projects of the Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission, which is derived from their past experience and image from their sensory systems, are expected to a sound background for assessing their effectiveness on the lives of the beneficiaries.

However, the theory has some limitations. It is seen to have a systematic orientation with a strong philosophical note rather than a basic explanation established by references to rigorously tested and proven model (Allport, 2005).

In spite of this short coming peoples gestalt theory of perception is outdated for this study. This is because it can examine perception of community development projects of the commission under study. Its basic assumption is from the concept with x-rays the way things appear to the perceiver by the use of the sensory system and experience; the way the situation appears was integrated and organized to provide balance assessment. Thus, this theory can x-ray the way the community development projects of the commission appear to the people and could suggest ways that can successfully attain the commission's aims and objectives in Delta State.

METHODS

The sample size was made up of 630 respondents. This sample size was considered appropriate, due to time limit and financial implications that were involved in this type of academic research. Also, it was considered to be enough to enable valid generalization of the research findings.

Multistage sampling procedure comprising cluster, simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques adopted. These gave equal opportunity to every element to be included in the study. Delta State was clustered into three in line with the three geopolitical senatorial zones in the state: Delta Central (Urhobo), Delta North (Ibo) and Delta South (Ijaw, Isoko and Itsekiri). Thus each of the senatorial zones formed a cluster. Again, using the sample random sampling techniques (by balloting), two (2) oil producing communities were selected from each of the three geo-political senatorial zones, resulting in a total of six (6) oil producing communities. This was to ensure adequate representation of the zones in the state.

Thereafter, the six hundred (600) respondents on whom the questionnaires were administered were chosen on the distribution of the hundred (100) from each of the selected communities. Only adult members of the population, who were ordinary people, between the age of 20 years and above were included. This was to ensure that the selected respondents were knowledgeable enough to give reliable information which was useful for this investigation.

Furthermore, for the purpose of quality of results and reliability of data collected, there was need, also, to adopt the purposive sampling method. This enabled the researcher to reach respondents who possessed certain characteristics. Thus, the remaining thirty (30) respondents, five from each of the selected communities, made up of chairmen, secretary, heads of departments and principal officers of DESOPADEC, who could provide some qualitative information, were purposively chosen. On the whole, six hundred and thirty (630) respondents were used for this exercise.

However, out of the 600 questionnaires distributed, 500 were fully completed and returned, on these, together with the quantitative data obtained from the in-depth interview sessions, the analysis was based.

FINDINGS

TABLE 1: Respondents' Views on The Selection of Project (S) Executed in Their Communities by DESOPADEC.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
DESOPADEC officials	175	35.6
Community members	110	22
Powerful elites	105	21
External agency	12	2.4
Government	75	15
Politicians	20	4
Others, specified	-	-
Total	500	100.0

The close look at the above tables indicates that majority of the respondents (35.6) said that DESOPADEC Officials selected the projects executed in their communities, 22 percent said community members, 21 percent said powerful elites. Another group 2.4 percent indicated external agency, government scored 15 percent, while politicians scored 4 percent. During the interview, the above result was supported. The researcher was made to understand that in some cases, DESOPADEC officials came into the communities with planned projects. Two women leaders said that the officials came into their communities to renovate schools buildings without holding meetings with their community members. This in line with the literature: the rural man could not be said to be part of the system because not much is thought of him when decision and development plans are being taken, most of them only follow the vaguely the happening in the society due to their low intellectual development (Bah, 1985).

TABLE 2: Respondents' Views on Whether They Were Involved in the Planning and Execution of Project (s) by DESOPADEC

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	357	71.4
No	143	28.6
Total	500	100.0

The above table shows that the majority of the respondents (71.4%) said yes to the question, while a few (28.6%) said No. these views were confirmed to be true during the interview. However, the researcher was made to understand that the involvement was not in all projects' planning and execution.

TABLE 3: Respondents' Views On Reasons For Their Non-Involvement In The Planning/Execution Of DESOPADEC's Projects

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Politicians selected the project	150	30
Powerful elites selected the projects	100	20
DESOPADEC's officials imposed them	200	40
Government selected them	20	4
Community leaders selected them	30	6
Total	500	100

The above table shows that 150 (30%) of the respondents said that they were not involved in the planning/execution of DESOPADEC's projects because they were selected by politicians, 100 (20%) said powerful elites selected the projects. Another group of 200 (40%) said DESOPADEC's officials imposed the projects, 20 (4%) said it was government that selected the project, while 30 (6%) said community leaders did the selected of the projects. This was supported during the interviews. Some of the participants regarded DESOPADEC's project planning/execution as community leaders' and **DESOPADEC** official's affairs.

TABLE 4: Sex Of Respondents and Their Perception of their Involvement in The Planning and Execution of DESOPADEC'S Project (S) (N=500)

Sex of Respondents	Perception of participation		Total
	Yes	No	
Male	234 (65.6%)	86 (60.1%)	320 (64%)
Female	123 (34.5%)	57 (39.9%)	180 (36%)
Total	357	143	500 (100%)

In the above table, the investigator tried to find out the relationship between the sex of respondents and their perception of participation in DESOPADEC's projects planning and execution. The finding shows that 234 (65.6%) males agreed that they participated, while 86 (60.1%) males agreed with the question. 123 (34.5%) females respondents agreed that they participated, while 57 (39.9%) females disagreed with the view.

Furthermore, the result shows that the percentage of male respondents (65.6%) who participated was higher than their female counterparts (34.5%). The X^2 value (1.295, $P \leq 3.841$) shows that there was no statistical significant relationship between sex of respondents and their perception on their participation in DESOPADEC's projects planning and execution at .05 level of significance.

Discussion of Findings

The major aim of this study was to explore and asses people's perception of their involvement in DESOPADEC's community development projects as they affect the lives of the beneficiaries. It was discovered that the people were aware of the existence of the commission under study. The people had benefited from one or more projects of DESOPADEC; though the projects were not equitably distributed among the oil producing communities. Also one of these projects were imposed on the communities by DESOPADEC's officials at the expense of the communities' felt-needs. Such projects were mainly problems of DFFI are shortage of knowledge and skilled calibre of staff that can translate its objectives into action; and that poor

mobilization of people, insincerity of public officers have hampered sustainable development in the country (Nigeria).

Nevertheless, it was revealed that few of the projects were involved actually addressed their felt-needs. Such projects were applauded and were said to have enjoyed sustainability by most of the interviewees. UNDP (2006) views sustainable development strategies as interaction process of planning, setting priorities, implementing choices relevant to a country's sustainable development needs, and learning from experience of continually improve people's lives; this requires strong commitment, leadership and improved coherence of existing processes. It was also revealed from the test of hypotheses that there was a significant relationship between respondents' level of education and their perception of participation in DESOPADEC projects' planning and execution processes.

Furthermore, the gestalt perception theory which focuses on form concept says that people's perception is important in assessing any social situation. That is, the way people perceived their involvement in the community development projects of the commission depends on who selected the projects, reasons for their non-involvement and their sex. These will provide useful insight into the strategies adopted in planning and execution of community felt-needs, nature of DESOPADEC's community development projects and the way forward.

Conclusion

The study had tried to provide useful insight into the operations of the Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission as well as other development commissions in the Niger Delta region in the country (Nigeria). The commission's developmental efforts were perceived by the people as not very successful. This was as a result of inadequate community participation due to inexperienced officials of the commission.

Conclusively, going by the people's perception, DESOPADEC has not been able to achieve its specific services in Delta State. In other words, rehabilitation, rejuvenation and revival of the physical economic and social well-being of the oil and gas host communities are yet to be very successfully attained. Therefore, sustainable community

development projects in the oil bearing areas of Delta State are still almost a mirage.

Problems Encountered in the Course

Some of the respondents and interviewees, who mistook the researcher for a government agent, initially demanded for gratifications before accepting the questionnaires or getting interview. This was surmounted by passing through the community leaders. There were two cases of disappointment on interview contact. These were rescheduled and held.

Implication of the Study to Social Work

The findings of this study revealed that the Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission has not met the expectations of the people. It is mainly as a result of inadequate community participation. As Ayichi (1995) asserts that one common shortcoming of sustainable development in the limited or absence of local community participation in problem identification, project prioritization, design, preparation and implementation. Also, Omide (1997) observes that the constraints of sustainable development include colonial legacy, political instability, corruption and deficiencies in governance, deficiencies in planning; inappropriate policies, and strategies, deficiencies in legal and legislative support of development programme, and lack of effective regional integration and collaboration in development. All of these cumulated into poor intervention strategies to underdevelopment ravaging in the Niger Delta region and Nigeria as a whole. Therefore, social workers should rise up to the challenge and take their positions in our social institutions to formulate appropriate social policies. This will enhance rapid sustainable community transformation and attainment of the objectives of community development commission in the country.

Recommendation

- (i) Recruitment of employees to serve in community development commission and other human agencies should be based on professionalism. The employees should be those trained in the discipline of social work. This will yield the

much needed positive community transformation in the country.

- (ii) Effective community development strategies that ensure adequate community participation should be adopted. This will strengthen interactive process of planning, setting priorities, implementation of relevant choices and sustainability of development projects in the beneficiary communities.
- (iii) Community leaders should be given necessary local political education, initiatives and understanding. When this is done, it will enable easier sensitization and mobilization of the rural populace towards achieving sustainable development.
- (iv) Community members, as many as are willing should be allow to participate actively in community development process.

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