ASSESSMENT OF RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN OIL PRODUCING COMMUNITIES OF RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract. The study assessed rural livelihoods in oil producing communities of Rivers state. A structured interview schedule was utilized in obtaining information from two hundred respondents. Multi- stage sampling procedure was employed in the study. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study established that 64.5% of the respondents in the upland oil producing communities had farming as their economic livelihood while 74.2% of the respondents in the coastal oil producing communities had fishing as their main occupation in the 80s. At present (2010), the percentage of those involved in farming in the upland oil producing communities have reduced from 64.5% in the 80s to 21.6% in 2010 while a higher percentage (61.3%) are now civil/public servants. Also, the percentage of those fishing in the coastal oil producing communities has reduced from 74.2% in the 80s to 18.4% in 2010 while a great percentage (55.6%) of the respondents is now civil/public servants. The causes for these changes were land degradation, low agricultural produce, socio economic effects of oil prospect and land displacement. It is therefore recommended that the oil producing communities should use fertilizer to improve the nutritional content of the soil.

Keywords: traditional, economic, livelihoods, alternative, causes

INTRODUCTION

Economic activities evolved from the need to provide for the daily needs of man. Human economic life or economic development dates back to the evolution of human society. The quest of men in society or community to provide for their daily needs culminates in livelihood. Livelihood is any work done by an individual that provides income, means of support and maintenance for the individual to survive. According to Barrett &Reardon (2001) the livelihoods of most people are directly dependent on their involvement in a range of trades/markets as private agents or as employees and indirectly dependent on the wider economy for the demand of goods and services. The most important is the development of livelihoods which depends critically upon, among other things demand for the outputs (goods and services) supplied by these livelihoods.

The oil producing communities are predominantly rural areas in Rivers state. Rural living conditions are considerably influenced by the environment and types of settlements are to a large extent motivated by socio-cultural and traditional modes (Olayide, 1995). Before petroleum exploitation began, the traditional economic base of the people of Rivers state was agriculture (Orubo, 2005). Besides agriculture, processing, manufacturing and mining thrive in some rural communities. There is some form of creativity; art work, designing, weaving, carving and even fabrication including pottery works in some rural communities. Majority of rural poor people engage primarily in agriculture to survive (Ekong, 2000 & Arowolo, 2008). But there has been a trend for people to move from rural

to urban areas and, within rural areas to move out of agriculturally-based occupations, often due to growing pressure on natural resources, oil spillage resulting from oil prospecting, declining terms of agricultural trade and other broad ranging trends in society (Aluyor, 1998).

Oil spillage which is also associated with oil exploitation has caused untold hardship to some of these communities. This phenomenon results from oil blow out, rupture of high pressure pipeline or wear and tear resulting from ageing or poor maintenance of the pipeline. Oil spillage has caused several damages to strip of mangrove vegetation, loss of fish and other aquatic animals, loss of drinking water and other forms of ecological damages (UNDP, 1992). For instance, Rivers State with its very delicate environment, swampy aquatic and mangrove ecology suitable habitat for species of periwinkle (*Tympanotonue fuscatus*), oysters (*Crassostrea gasar*), swimming crab (*Ikoli)(Callinectes spp*), cockles (*Anadara, senilie*), whelk (*Thais coronata)* and clams *(Tagelus adansornia*) and various fish species had colossal record of oil spills and pollution problems. This has distorted the livelihoods of communities, whose primary occupations include fishing, crop farming, forest and marine product exploitation,

In some communities a network of pipelines criss-cross a great part of arable land, resulting in loss of land. Another problem is gas flaring in the communities which destroy their farm land and pollute the environment (Ekpo, 2005). This was buttress by Obulor (1998) who reported that gas flaring do not only destroy the land but also destroys the economy of the affected communities. Gas flaring causes air pollution, evaporation, production of heat, loss of vegetation, suppresses the growth and flowering of some plants, reduces agricultural production, aesthetic devaluation, produce acid rain and also dislodge the ecosystem. It was on this premise that the research was founded to unravel traditional economic livelihoods of the rural oil producing communities, characterize alternative livelihoods of the people and causes for the change in rural livelihood.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Rivers state. The state is made up of twenty-three local government areas. It is divided into two geographical settings namely upland and coastal. Sixteen of the local government areas are predominantly upland areas while seven are predominantly coastal areas (Orubo, 2005). Multi-stage sampling procedure was employed in the study. The first stage involved the purposive sampling of all the oil fields/wells in the state and the communities that constituted each oil field. The second stage involved the random sampling of upland communities and the purposive sampling of the coastal communities because the coastal communities are few. The last stage involved the random sampling of ten (10) households from fifteen upland communities (150 households) and five coastal communities (50 households) from an average of 25 households. A total of 200 respondents were surveyed for the study. Data collected were analyzed using percentage and a three point Likert- type scale with options ranging from “a great cause”, “a cause” and “not a cause” to ascertain the causes of change in livelihood. They were scaled 3 to 1, respectively. The values were added to give 6 and divided by 3 to get a mean score of 2.0 which serves as the decision rule. In terms of reliability, mean scores of 2.0 and above were classified as causes while those with mean scores below 2.0 were regarded as not a cause.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Traditional economic livelihoods of oil producing communities. Results in Table 1 showed that majority (65.0%) of the respondents in the upland oil producing communities had farming including palm oil processing, hunting, and palm wine processing as their main occupation while 21.0% were fishing.

For the coastal oil producing communities, majority (75.0%) of the respondents had fishing (fish catch, sea food farming) as their main occupation while 21.0% were farmers. The remaining 4% were civil/public servants, periwinkle/other sea food farmers and fish sellers. Also, 27.7% of the respondents had farming as their secondary occupation in the upland oil producing communities while 7.1% of the respondents had fishing as their secondary occupation in the coastal areas. From the study, it could be established that the rural people gained livelihood from traditional inheritance and practices.

Traditional livelihood was gained from agriculture which include crop farming, fishing and sale of marine products and forest product processing. However artisan work and small scale manufacturing as in wood carving, boat building, pottery were also prominent businesses.

Commerce also thrived among communities. Only a few percentages were engaged in public service (wage earning service in government institutions or corporate organizations) before oil exploitation. This confirms Ugorji's (2000) finding that before crude oil exploration era, the traditional economy of the people of Rivers state was predominately agriculture.

Table 1

Percentage Distribution of Traditional Economic Livelihoods of Oil Producing Communities in 80s

Primary Occupation (80s)	Upland	Coastal	Secondary Occupation	
	%		Upland	Coastal %
Farming				
Crop farming				
Palm Kernel/Oil Processing	65.6	21.0	22.7	2.2
Hunting				
Palm Wine Processing				
Fishing				
Fish Catch				
Seafood Farming	20.7	65.0	7.7	7.1
Trading				
Mangrove trading				
Seafood trading				
Snail/fish trading	7.8	8.3	1 5.4	25.8
General goods				
Food Vendors				
Artisans				
Tailoring				
Carpentry				
Brick laying/mason	3..2	2.9	1.8	1.4
Weaving				
Lumbering				
Civil/Public servant				
Contracting	3.7	3.0	4.2	7.1
Politics				

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Characterized present livelihoods in oil producing communities. Entries in Table 2 showed that a 51.3% of the respondents in the upland oil producing communities were now civil/public servants (Politicians, contractors and operators of businesses) while farming have reduced to 22.0%.

For the coastal communities, 55.4% of the respondents are civil/public servants while fishing has reduced to 18.4%. This implies that rural livelihoods have changed from farming and off-farming activities to civil/public work, politics and business because of poor yield of farm produce due to decay of the soil resulting from oil activities. Also, 40 years after oil production that is at present day situation, farming and fishing account for less than 40%.

Table 2

Percentage Distribution of Alternative Livelihoods in Oil Producing Communities

Traditional Occupation (2010)	**Upland**	**Coastal**
	%	
Farming		
Crop farming		
Palm Kernel/Oil Processing	22.0	11.0
Palm Wine Processing		
Fishing		
Fish Catch		
Seafood Farming	10.2	18.4
Trading		
Mangrove trading		
Seafood trading		
Snail/fish trading	8.3	10.2
General goods		
Food Vendors		
Artisans		
Tailoring		
Carpentry		
Brick laying/mason	8.2	5.1
Weaving		
Lumbering		
Civil/Public servant		
Contracting	51.3	55.4
Politics		

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Causes of alternative livelihood in oil producing communities. Table 3 identified the causes of alternative livelihood in the oil producing communities to include: land displacement (M=2.10), land and water pollution (M=2.20), land degradation (M=2.25), low agricultural produce (M=2.05) including preferred white collar jobs to agriculture (M=2.15), lack of interest on agriculture (M=2.05), low income from agriculture (M-2.10) and desire for higher income (M-2.05). The acquisition of massive arable farmlands by oil companies for lying of pipelines and building of oil fields and wells reduced the number of farmlands owned by the rural people.

They have to content with the remaining one for farming and building of houses due to population growth. This has increased the pressure on the available land including the effect of oil spillage from rusted and vandalized pipelines which have led to land degradation and low agricultural produce. Also, the socio economic effect of oil activities

have resulted to lack of interest on agriculture by the oncoming youths who preferred white collar jobs to farming. This is in line with Obulor (1998) reported that gas flaring does not only destroy the land but also destroys the economy of the affected communities**.**

Table 3

Mean Distribution of causes of alternative livelihood

Causes	Mean Score (M)	Remarks
- Land Displacement	2.10	AC
- Land and water pollution	2.20	AC
- Migration	1.80	NAC
- Land Degradation	2.25	AC
- Lack of interest on agric.	2.05	AC
- Preferred white collar jobs to agric.	2.15	AC
- Low income from agric.	2.10	AC
- Low agricultural produce	2.05	AC
- Diversification from agric. to oil	1.90	NAC
- Stakeholders not encouraging agric.	1.85	NAC
- Desire for higher income	2.05	AC

AC = A Cause
NAC= Not A Cause
Source: Field Survey, 2012

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rural livelihoods of oil producing communities have changed from fishing, farming and off-farming activities to civil/public work, politics, contracting and business activities because of poor yield of farm produce due to decay of the soil resulting from oil activities. Hunting which was a major occupation no longer exist as a major occupation and not even as minor or secondary occupation in present day situation as the wildlife have become endangered or even wiped away by oil exploitation activities. Furthermore, the quest for high income have made the present generation to prefer white collar jobs to farming as the former is more lucrative. Based on the findings above, the following recommendations were made:

Given the fact that oil has polluted the rivers of some communities, which have affected their fishing occupation, oil companies should encourage aqua culture/fish farming by constructing fish ponds for farmers in their host communities for a sustainable livelihood. Also, upland communities should be encouraged to use fertilizer to improve the nutritional value of their soil in other to increase agricultural produce.

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