

## Research Article

# Deradicalisation of Niger Delta Youth through Agricultural Production

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**Abstract:** The problems associated with youth behaviours in the Niger Delta region led to the study. The specific objectives were to identify the socio-economic characteristics of youths involved in agriculture in the study area; assess the attitude of youths toward agricultural production in the study area; identify the constraints to youths involvement in agricultural Production activities in study area; determine the relationship between attitude and involvement in agricultural activities; and to determine the way the Niger Delta youth can be deradicalise through sustainable agricultural production in region. Questionnaires were used to derive information from respondents. Simple random sampling was used to select respondents. The sample was made up of 132 Niger Delta youths Data were analysed by the use of correlation analysis, likert type scale and descriptive statistics. It was found that the constraints face by youth that hinders their involvement in agriculture were environmental degradation, lack of basic infrastructure, lack of modern agricultural equipment, lack of land/land tenure system, lack of credit facilities and poor incentives/ incomes. To achieve the deradicalisation through sustainable agricultural production, continuous remediation of the degraded environment and also youths should be motivated to take up agriculture through provision of inputs, credits, training and land for large scale farming.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Agricultural production, Niger Delta Youths, Deradicalisation.

## Background of the Study

The Niger Delta is an area in south and south eastern part of Nigeria, comprising of wet and dry lands which covers about 70, 000sq kilometres. The region which consists of a number of distinct ecological zones, costal ridge barriers, mangrove swamps, fresh water swamps, forests, and low land rain forest is dominated by rural communities that depend solely on the natural environment for subsistence living.

According to UNDP Report (2006), more than 70% of the people depend on natural environment for their livelihood. The region is home to more than 10 million people (NPC, 2006). The Niger Delta includes the States of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. The Niger Delta region is richly endowed with natural resources with oil and gas and a fertile land (Dokubo, 2004).

Paradoxically, the region remains the poorest, due largely to the ecologically unfriendly exploitation of oil and State's policies that expropriate the indigenous peoples of Niger Delta of their rights to these natural resources. It is believed that since the advent of oil exploration some decades ago, the region has become the breadwinner of the nation, accounting for over 90% of the nation's export earnings since 1975 (Wariboko, 2009). The major food crops which farmers cultivate in the Niger Delta Region include: maize, yam, rice, cassava, sugar

cane, pineapples and plantain as major The presence of natural pool of water in some parts of the swamp all year round provides the basis for integrated fish farming and bee keeping (Imogie *et al.*, 2008).

ERA (2013), also found out that farmers in the oil rich region have lost their lands and are consequently forced to emigrate to other communities in search of better livelihood, exerting additional pressures on natural resources in such areas. The blame for the wanton and continuous destruction of the ecosystem by oil producing companies has been on the lack of political will by the Federal Government to enact and enforce stringent environmental laws to regulate the environmental consequences of crude oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta.

Nigeria, having identified wheat production as one of the veritable tool for massive job creation for the unemployed youths in advancing their efforts in the Nigeria wheat sector. Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture (YISA) through this partnership with Lake Chad Research Institute (LCRI) and the River Basin Development Authorities has engaged 120 Graduates of Agriculture on a pilot scheme in Bauchi, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi and Zamfara in the production of Foundation seed for the Research Institute. Ogirinye 2016.

The Federal Government of Nigeria has pledged to train non-militant Niger Delta youths in agricultural activities as a way of empowering them economically. The youths are encouraged to take advantage of the huge resources available in the region to empower themselves, especially in the area of agriculture. Youth empowerment was a cardinal objective of the post amnesty programme of the Federal Government, the skills acquired by the youths will be utilised for the benefit of the region and the country at large. The overseas training has been described as a waste of time and resources. "Nigeria is richly blessed; other nations should come and learn from us too. Daramola, 2016.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The youths in the Niger Delta region who were predominantly farmers and fishers have now diverted their source of income into vandalisation of pipelines, illegal bunkering and kidnapping.

The ecological devastation occasioned by oil exploration has rendered farming and fishing which are the main occupations of the rural people of this region, useless. Pollution and continuous flaring of gas from oil prospecting and production have created health hazards and rendered fishing and farming activities almost impossible. Also, occasional large oil spills kill fish; destroy agricultural crops; pollute the waters which seriously affect families and communities. Not only have farming and fishing the major occupation of these mostly Riverine minorities been decimated, their territories have continuously lacked basic infrastructure and amenities—electricity, road, schools, hospitals, portable water, etc. However, the youth appear to be more interested in occupations that yield quick returns, many people especially the youth preferred to be distributors of farm produce rather than producers because of the long investment period. He observed that with the discovery of crude oil, the attitude of government officials and people of Nigeria changed in favour of crude oil production (Olaitan, 1984).

### **Objectives of the Study**

- 1) Identify the socio-economic characteristics of youths involved in agriculture in the study area;

- 2) Assess the attitude of youths toward agricultural production in the study area;
- 3) Identify the constraints to youths involvement in agricultural Production activities in study area;
- 4) Determine the relationship between attitude and involvement in agricultural activities; and
- 5) Determine the way the Niger Delta youth can be deradicalise through sustainable agricultural production in region

## **Literature Review**

### **Sustainable Agricultural Production**

This is the process in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional changes are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potentials to meet human needs and aspiration". WCED (1987).

### **Effects of oil production on agricultural production**

Ekpebu and Ukpong (2013) noted the following among the numerous hazards traceable to oil production; which post great challenges to agriculture and rural development in the state;

- a) Oil spillage pollutes both land, air and water resources; causing tremendous havoc on crops, humans and aquatic lives. It contaminates drinking water and loss of aquatic lives and also causes health hazards on the people when consumed.
- b) Gas flaring poses great threat to productive vegetation, soils and forest resources. It also pollutes and heats-up the environment resulting to unfavourable temperature condition for surrounding plants and animals.
- c) Gas leakage is also hazardous to aquatic lives and farmers' health within the region. It is also risky to the environment as exposure to fire source can cause heavy explosion and fire; which can destroy farmlands and human settlements.
- d) Reduction in agricultural lands, forest and water resources; the region faces continuous reduction in agricultural lands as more oil wells are discovered.

### **Method of Data Collection**

Data was collected using a well-structured questionnaire using a two stage sampling technique of first purposive selection of four villages from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and randomly select fifty youths from each villages which makes it 200 but had a return of 132 valid for the analysis of the study.

### **Analytical Technique**

Descriptive Statistics  
Likert type Scale and  
Correlation analysis

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Socioeconomic characteristics of the youths involve in agriculture in the study area**

Majority of the respondents (60.4%) were male with a high percentage of the youths between the ages of 21 and 25 years (71, 8%). More than half (50%) of the respondents were unmarried and were mainly farmers (50%). These goes with the findings of Matthews– Njoku and Ajaero (2006), where 56% and 44% of the respondents in their study were single and married, respectively. Also, 45% of the youths had secondary school education suggesting that the youths had a moderate level of awareness about agricultural activities as a result of

their level of education. Higher percentages of the respondents were rural dwellers (67%). These placed them in higher position in the practice of agriculture and provide adequate food for the present and future generation.

### **Youths Involvement in Agricultural production Activities**

The study reveals that youths were highly involved in arable crop production (71%), farm labour (69%) and crop (palm oil) processing (51%). Youths were moderately engaged in agric business (41%) and poultry production (55%); lowly engaged in horticulture (35%) and cash crop (28%) production and highly involved in fish production (75%).

The finding implied that youths were more involved in crop production and fish farming than cash crop production which is the list production.

### **Ways in which the Niger Delta youth can be deradicalise through agricultural production**

**Special agricultural intervention by the Government** through the use of Agricultural Development Programmes, Properly organized agricultural development programmes can help improve the income of youths. The analysis of the study reveals that a lot of programmes have been implemented in the study area but have faded out due to lack of commitment on the part of the donors and interest by the beneficiaries.

It is important to continually evaluate projects in order to ensure successful outcomes although there are some ADP programmes going on presently in the region which include: Shell Micro Credit Scheme, Women-in-Agriculture (WIA) programme, Agricultural Development Project, and Agricultural Cooperative Societies.

**Continuous remediation of the degraded environment** just like the cleanup of Ogoni land: Although the oil companies have been carrying out remediation activities on the degraded lands, they are yet to do enough. According to the UNEP report (2011), it will still take about take about 25-30 years before the Ogoni land can be properly remediated.

The Federal Government's regulatory agencies need to ensure that remediating companies comply to international best practices.

**Access to Credit:** Youths: should be encourage on the benefit of agricultural production by given them access to credit, although the youths are not so interested in agriculture there is need to keep encouraging the youths who are vibrant and educated to go into agriculture.

**Subsidized inputs for farmers:** There is need for subsidy to be given to the youths who have showed up interest in farming for example the improved seed can be given to them freely, subsidized the fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides and other inputs to increase their yield.

### **Constraints to youth's involvement in agricultural activities**

As indicated in the study the youths identify some constraints which have discouraged them from engaging in agricultural production activities which justifies the study of (Onuekwusi and Ottah, 2006) that says lack of infrastructure and essential inputs hinders youth's participation in agricultural and rural development activities.

The constraints are as shown in table 1 below:

Constraints	Frequency	Percentage
Environmental degradation, Oil spillage and pollution	122	92.42
Lack of infrastructure and modern agricultural equipment	89	67.42
Lack of credit facilities and Poor incentives from the Government	86	65.15
Inadequate training and extension services.	75	56.81
Insufficient land	72	54.54
Lack of commitments from the Government	54	40.91
Social and psychological effects of being called a farmer	19	14.39

### **Relationship between the constraints of agricultural production and youth's radical attitude in the Niger Delta region**

The study shows that the constraints of involvement in agriculture correlated positively and significantly with the radical attitude of the youth in the Niger Delta ( $r = 0.5$ ). The significant relationship could be attributed to a number of factors and this reveals why there is low turn out in agricultural production activities in the area. Environmental degradation, Oil spillage and pollution are highly significant to the reason why some youths of the Niger delta tends to be involved in unlawful act.

### **Conclusion**

The study revealed that though youths are involved in some agricultural activities in the area, majority of them still have negative attitude towards agricultural production. Environmental degradation, Oil spillage and pollution, Lack of basic infrastructure, lack of modern agricultural equipment, lack of land, lack of credit facilities and Inadequate training and extension services were the major constraints of involving in agricultural production activities in the Niger. The implication is that the government has not taken agriculture seriously probably due to the availability of oil in the area.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- i) Government should clean up the area to prevent the negative effect of environmental degradation, Oil spillage and pollution on agricultural production activities
- ii) Government should focus more on agricultural production in the study area and not only oil exploitation
- iii) Government should stimulate agricultural production by providing extension services directed at rural youths to improve participation in agricultural activities.
- iv) Government should provide adequate infrastructures in the environment
- v) Community leaders should encourage the youth on the benefits of farming rather than other criminal act.

**Conflicts of interest:** There is no conflict of interest of any kind.

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