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The Advancement Of Rural Communities In The Niger Delta Region: The Case Of Niger Delta Development Commission

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ABSTRACT
The development of Niger Delta communities remains a significant concern for both the citizens and the Nigerian government. This concern has led to the establishment of various intervention agencies over time. However, despite these efforts, persistent poverty and underdevelopment in rural communities indicate the failure of these agencies. As a result, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was created to foster community development through its programs and projects. This study examines the impact of NDDC's initiatives on the development of rural communities in the region. Two hypotheses were formulated to guide the research. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire, and the Pearson Correlation method was employed for data analysis. Findings reveal that NDDC programs and projects significantly contribute to poverty alleviation, rural development, and economic empowerment of the populace. Additionally, a strong relationship was found between NDDC's performance and the socio-economic development of communities in the region. However, while the commission's programs and projects support rural development, they are insufficient to fully address the region's challenges. Therefore, the study recommends strategies that NDDC should implement to enhance the effectiveness of its initiatives and achieve sustainable rural community development in the Niger Delta.
Keywords: Niger Delta, rural development, communities

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian government has long been concerned with the socio-economic development of communities in the Niger Delta region. During the colonial era, the Ijaw Rivers People's League led efforts to advocate for rural development in the region, signing multiple treaties with the British government to secure protection for the people and address poverty and underdevelopment (Adeyemi, 2022). Consequently, the 1958 Constitutional Conference in London, which set the stage for Nigeria's independence, recognized the region's developmental challenges and established the Henry Willink Minorities Commission. The Commission was tasked with investigating these issues and recommending measures to ensure adequate developmental attention for the communities (Okonkwo, 2023).

Following the Commission's recommendations, the Nigerian government established the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) in 1961 to drive socio-economic development in the region (Ekpo & John, 2021). Subsequent interventionist agencies included the Niger Delta Basin and Rural Development Authority (NDBRDA) in 1976, the Presidential Task Force in 1980, and the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992, all aimed at addressing the development deficiencies of the Niger Delta communities (African Development Review, 2023). Despite these numerous

interventions, research suggests that these agencies failed to achieve their objectives, leaving the region's communities underdeveloped (Idumange & Peters, 2024).

The inability of past government intervention agencies to drive meaningful development in the Niger Delta has led to inadequate social amenities such as potable water, electricity, healthcare facilities, transportation networks, and employment opportunities. Additionally, socio-economic inequalities and environmental degradation remain prevalent in many rural communities (Wilson & Emmanuel, 2023). These conditions have fueled frustration and persistent demands for resource control as a means to achieve sustainable community development. Over time, these agitations evolved into ethnic-based movements and later escalated into militancy, creating severe security challenges for individuals, organizations, multinational oil corporations, and the Nigerian state. These developments eventually drew the attention of both national and international stakeholders (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

To address the militancy and insecurity caused by the region's resource control agitations, the Federal Government, under former President Olusegun Obasanjo, established the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in December 2000. This was achieved through the NDDC (Establishment Act) 2000, No. 6 Law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, positioning the agency as a strategic interventionist body for the socio-economic development of the region (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2023). As outlined by the NDDC (2023), the Commission was mandated to design, plan, and implement projects and programs aimed at transforming the Niger Delta into a socially and economically viable, as well as ecologically and politically stable, region (ANEEJ, 2024).

The NDDC has since implemented various programs and projects to enhance rural community development in the region (NDDC, 2024). Rural community development entails the socio-economic transformation of rural areas into modern communities equipped with essential infrastructure. Some of the Commission's initiatives include rural electrification, road and bridge construction, establishment of community schools, markets, hospitals, and skill acquisition programs for youths. However, these interventions appear insufficient, as they have not achieved the desired level of transformation in rural communities. Indicators of poverty and developmental challenges remain widespread, prompting this study to critically examine the impact of NDDC's programs and projects on the development of rural communities in the Niger Delta region.

Statement of the problem

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) has implemented several rural community development programs and projects in the Niger Delta region over the years. According to Okonkwo and James (2023), these initiatives include skill acquisition programs for manpower development, the construction of community roads, rural electrification, waterfront jetties, water supply schemes, health centers with free medical services, and classroom buildings. However, despite the implementation of these projects, they appear to be insufficient in meeting the growing development needs of rural communities in the region. To further enhance development, NDDC introduced the Niger Delta Regional Master Plan, which aims to improve the living standards of rural dwellers, strengthen security, and promote sustainable technological and industrial growth in the region. Nevertheless, these efforts still seem inadequate, as rural communities continue to face widespread poverty, youth unemployment, rising insecurity, criminal activities, and deteriorating social infrastructure (Adeyemi, 2024). In light of these challenges, this empirical study seeks to explore critical questions regarding the role of NDDC in rural community development within the Niger Delta region.

i. What measures and strategies has the Niger Delta Development Commission implemented to achieve rural poverty alleviation, community development, and economic empowerment in the Niger Delta region?

ii. How effective has the Niger Delta Development Commission been in promoting rural community development in the Niger Delta region?

Hypotheses

i. The programs and projects of the Niger Delta Development Commission have not made a significant impact on rural poverty alleviation, community development, and economic empowerment in the Niger Delta region.

ii. The performance of the Niger Delta Development Commission has no significant correlation with rural community development in the Niger Delta region.

Conceptual Review: Rural Community Development

Rural community development involves the ability of rural dwellers to creatively harness and transform their natural resources into goods and services through the application of their skills and productive capacity. According to Adams, as cited in Okafor (2022), development signifies progress and improvement, marking the transition of a rural community from a crude to a more refined state. It is a continuous and gradual process that encompasses the transformation of individuals and their communities. Rural community development is a multidimensional process that spans various sectors, including agriculture, healthcare, education, infrastructure development, social life, political and economic affairs, as well as commerce and industry, all of which are integrated into the national economy. Aziz (2015), as referenced in Uche (2023), describes rural community development as a holistic approach that considers the interplay of economic, social, political, cultural, and technological factors affecting the quality of life in rural areas. This underscores its complexity and the necessity of a coordinated effort across different sectors to achieve meaningful progress.

In the perspective of Abugu (2019), rural community development entails educating and mobilizing members of rural communities to collectively identify and address their challenges. It is a self-discovery process that fosters unity, collaboration, and shared aspirations, enabling communities to shape their future. Bartle (2017) further explains that rural community development is a structured intervention that empowers local populations to take control of their socio-economic conditions. While it does not solve all challenges, it builds confidence and equips communities with the skills to tackle their problems effectively. Participation is a crucial element of rural development. According to Okonkwo (2021), any development initiative that excludes active participation from the community members cannot be regarded as true rural development. He further emphasizes that rural development efforts must aim to eradicate poverty, illiteracy, disease, and social vices such as corruption, violence, and drug abuse, which hinder progress in rural areas. Similarly, Alozie (2020) asserts that community participation is an essential ingredient for sustainable development.

Ekong (1985), as cited in Anikeze (2023), describes community development as a movement designed to enhance the quality of life for the entire community, with active engagement from local residents in development initiatives. This aligns with the view that successful rural development requires a collaborative approach involving government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities. Furthermore, Rubin and Rubin (2018) define rural community development as an ongoing process aimed at improving the overall quality of life in rural areas. It is driven by local leadership and structures that focus on maximizing resources for social and economic benefits. According to Larry and Sunday (2023), achieving sustainable rural development depends on effective program management and the dedication of community leaders.

For this study, rural community development is understood as the transformation of rural economies, social structures, and cultural life to a more modern and sustainable standard. This involves the reorganization of economic, political, and social structures to improve the well-being of rural populations. The above perspectives align with the objectives of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), which, as an interventionist agency, serves as a platform for collaborative efforts to implement development programs and projects aimed at transforming rural communities in the Niger Delta region.

METHODOLOGY

The study encompasses all nine states of the Niger Delta region, with the sample population drawn from both indigenes and residents of the area. To ensure comprehensive coverage, four rural communities were selected from three states within the region. These include Rundele, Ibaa, Opobo, and Onyeada communities in Rivers State; Torufani, Nembe, Odi, and Igbogini communities in Bayelsa State; and Koko, Obulu-Uku, Abo, and Uzere communities in Delta State. The findings from these selected communities were generalized to represent the broader rural communities across the Niger Delta region.

Both primary and secondary data were utilized to achieve the study's objectives. The primary data were obtained through a structured questionnaire designed to address the subject of NDDC and rural community development in the Niger Delta. A total of 552 questionnaires were distributed across the 12 selected communities, with each community receiving 46 copies. However, 460 completed questionnaires were successfully retrieved and deemed valid for analysis, while 92 copies were either missing or contained errors and were thus excluded. The questionnaire consisted of 12 items designed to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Pearson Correlation analysis was employed as the statistical tool to test the hypotheses.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The questionnaire response were presented in a tabula frequency, and used in answering the research questions. The data was analysed using percentage frequency, and Pearson Correlation methods to validate or reject each of the hypothesis of the study.

Table 1: NDDC programmes and projects adopted as steps and strategies to achieve rural community development in Niger Delta region.

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	Total agreed	Total disagreed
7	NDDC has performed well in provision of health facility in our Community	88	76	156	140	164	296
8	NDDC has performed well in provision of good roods in our Community	142	120	102	96	262	198
9	NDDC has performed well in poverty alleviation of youths in our community	95	114	130	121	209	251
10	NDDC has performed well in employment creation for our community youths	92	116	133	119	208	252
11	NDDC has performed better than other government intervention agencies in our community	132	137	91	100	269	191
12	NDDC has performed well in socio-economic development in our community	96	85	131	148	189	279

Source: Field work (2025)

Based on the data presented in Table 1, the NDDC has implemented various strategies and initiatives to promote rural community development in the Niger Delta region. While there remains a shortfall in the provision of functional healthcare centers in these communities, respondents acknowledged the Commission's efforts in executing the following programs and projects:

i. Implementation of functional water supply schemes
ii. Development of a reliable road network
iii. Expansion of rural electrification projects
iv. Introduction of skill development programs
v. Support initiatives for farmers

Given these efforts, it can be concluded that while the NDDC's strategies for rural community development in the Niger Delta region are commendable, they remain insufficient.

Table 2: Respondents opinion on NDDC performance on socio- economic development

Table 3: Respondents' opinion or rating of NDDC performance expressed in percentage. Respondents' rating

S/N	ACTIVITY	Performance (Yes)	%	Performance (No)	%
1	Provision of health facility	164	35.65	296	64.35
2	Provision of good roads	262	56.96	198	43.04
3	Poverty alleviation of youths	209	45.43	251	54.57
4	Employment creation for youths	208	45.22	252	54.78
5	Performance in relation to other agencies	269	58.48	191	41.52
6	Performance in socio - economic development	181	39.35	279	60.65

Source: Field work (2025)

The responses presented in Table 2 indicate that the performance of the NDDC, as assessed by the respondents, has not been sufficient or satisfactory. This becomes even more evident when analyzed in percentage terms, as illustrated in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Respondents' opinion or rating of NDDC performance expressed in percentage. Respondents' rating

S/N	ACTIVITY	Performance (Yes)	%	Performance (No)	%
1	Provision of health facility	164	35.65	296	64.35
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6	Performance in socio - economic development	181	39.35	279	60.65

Source: Field work (2025)

As shown in Table 3, the percentage of respondents rating the NDDC's performance in the provision of health facilities, good roads, poverty alleviation for youth, and employment creation stands at 35.65%, 56.96%, 45.43%, and 45.22%, respectively. Additionally, the Commission's performance compared to other intervention agencies in the study area is 58.48%, while its overall contribution to socio-economic development is 39.35%. Based on these figures, it can be concluded that the NDDC has fallen short of expectations in key areas such as healthcare provision, poverty alleviation, and youth employment, as well as in overall community development in the region. On average, the data suggests that the NDDC has not performed satisfactorily, highlighting the urgent need for increased efforts to enhance rural community development in the region.

Testing of hypotheses and interpretation of findings

Hypothesis One- The first hypothesis of this study states that "Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) programmes and projects have no significant impact on rural poverty alleviation, rural development, and economic empowerment in the Niger Delta region." The independent variable in this

hypothesis refers to the various programmes and projects undertaken by the NDDC, while the dependent variable represents the extent of rural poverty alleviation, rural development, and economic empowerment resulting from these initiatives in the rural communities of the Niger Delta region. In this study, the NDDC's efforts in poverty alleviation, rural development, and economic empowerment were collectively regarded as socio-economic development initiatives. These efforts were continuously measured, as reflected in Table 1 above. Similarly, the independent variable—NDDC's projects and programmes—was also assessed on a continuous scale. Given that the objective of the analysis is to examine the impact and relationship between these projects and socio-economic development, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was employed for statistical analysis. A summary of the results is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Result of Pearson's correlation of the relationship between NDDC projects and programmes and rural community development in Niger Delta region.

Table 4: Result of Pearson's correlation of the relationship between NDDC projects and programmes and rural community development in Niger Delta region.

Variable	$\bar{x}$	SD	E_x E_y	E_x2 E_y2	E_{xy}	rxy
Measure of dev.	19.33	3.56	710	5370		
Projects (x)					4930	0.986*
Measure of socio economic dev. (y)	17.68	4.03	670	4630		

*P<0.05, df = 458, critical r = 0.088

In Table 4 above, the observed impact or relationship between the Niger Delta Development Commission's (NDDC) projects and rural community development-assessed through poverty alleviation efforts, rural development initiatives, and economic empowerment-is reflected in the calculated r-value of 0.986. This value exceeds the critical r-value of 0.088 at a 0.05 level of significance with 458 degrees of freedom. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was rejected in favor of the alternate hypothesis. This indicates that the NDDC's programmes and projects have a significant impact on the socio-economic development of Rivers State, particularly in the areas of poverty alleviation, rural development, and economic empowerment.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation analysis of the relationship between NDDC performance and rural community development in Niger Delta region.

Variable	E_x $\bar{x}$	E_x2 SD	E_y	E_y2	E_{xy}	rxy
NDDC performance (x)	16.49	3.52	602	4051		
					4160	0.885*
Rural community dev. (y)	17.68	4.03	670	4630		

*P<0.05, df = 458, critical r = 0.08

As shown in Table 5, the calculated r-value is 0.885*, representing the observed relationship between two variables: the perceived performance of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) as rated by respondents and its perceived contribution to rural community development in the Niger Delta region.
From Table 5, it is evident that the calculated r-value of 0.885* exceeds the critical r-value of 0.088 at a 0.05 level of significance with 458 degrees of freedom. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was rejected in favor of the alternate hypothesis. This finding indicates that a significant positive relationship exists between the performance of the NDDC, as perceived by the public, and its corresponding contribution to rural community development in Niger Delta communities.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Hypothesis One stated that Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) programmes and projects have no significant impact on poverty alleviation, rural development, and economic empowerment in the Niger Delta region. However, this hypothesis was invalidated. To test this hypothesis, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between NDDC's projects and programmes (independent variable) and poverty alleviation, rural development, and economic empowerment (dependent variables) in the region. The results presented in Table 4 indicate that the socio-economic development efforts of the NDDC—particularly in poverty alleviation, economic empowerment, and rural development—are represented by a calculated r-value of 0.986*, which is greater than the critical r-value of 0.088 at a 0.05 level of significance with 458 degrees of freedom. Based on this result, Hypothesis One was rejected, confirming that the NDDC's programmes and projects significantly impact socio-economic development in the Niger Delta, particularly in areas such as poverty alleviation, rural infrastructure, and economic empowerment initiatives.
Hypothesis Two proposed that NDDC's performance has no significant relationship with rural community development in the Niger Delta region. However, this hypothesis was also not supported. The two variables in this hypothesis—the measure of NDDC's performance (independent variable) and the measure of NDDC's impact on rural development (dependent variable)—were continuously measured. The main objective in testing this hypothesis was to explore the relationship between these two variables. To achieve this, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation statistical tool was applied. The results in Table 5 indicate that the calculated r-value is 0.885*, representing the observed relationship between the two variables, which is greater than the critical r-value of 0.088 at a 0.05 level of significance with 458 degrees of freedom. Based on this result, Hypothesis Two was rejected. This confirms that a significant positive relationship exists between NDDC's performance, as perceived by the public, and its contribution to rural community development in the Niger Delta. This conclusion is further supported by the data presented in Table 3, which summarizes respondents' opinions (from questionnaire items 7–12) on the relationship between these variables. In practical terms, the performance of NDDC in strategic areas such as poverty alleviation, rural infrastructure, healthcare services, and job creation is a key determinant of its rural community development efforts in the region.

Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence that the NDDC has established various programmes and projects aimed at fostering rural community development in the Niger Delta region. While these initiatives contribute significantly to the socio-economic development of the region, they remain insufficient to fully meet the rural community development needs. However, the available programmes and projects have had a measurable impact, particularly in areas of poverty alleviation, rural infrastructure, and economic empowerment. Based on these findings, the study recommends that the NDDC should enhance its performance by increasing the number of its programmes and projects to accelerate rural community development in the region. Additionally, the scope of these initiatives should be expanded to cover a broader range of rural development sectors. Achieving these improvements will ensure that NDDC's programmes and projects more effectively contribute to the socio-economic development of rural communities in the Niger Delta region.

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