4. DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION CHALLENGES IN THE NIGER DELTA IN NIGERIA

INTRODUCTION

Despite increased political voice and influence, the peoples of the Niger Delta have made little progress in livelihood functions in the last decade, as they continue to suffer from higher poverty, lower capabilities, and greater incidence of human rights violations than other regions (UNDP 2006a). Although they have gained political power and representation in government, so far they have not been able to accomplish poverty reduction and social inclusion – that we had hoped to find when we embarked on this research. These are mostly complex problems of social injustices and conditions of development that compromise economic, social and political factors, all of which interact to maintain long-term low entitlements and opportunities, and depressed living standards. These outcomes make it obvious that the region is not on track to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The most pressing dilemma in national political debates, and a key concern of this chapter, is how to properly ensure entitlements, capabilities, and other social rights that are enshrined in the constitution. The UNDP (2006a) claimed that failure in the region is of enormous consequence, contributing to ongoing deprivation of human development. However, interventions and methods of poverty reduction have mainly benefited the leadership, rather than ensuring choice and opportunities or self-determination, as they serve as serious obstacles to confronting poverty and vulnerability in the region. Article 26 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and others makes it mandatory for its signatories to promote economic, social and cultural claims as *sine qua non* to “positive rights”. Nigeria acceded to these Covenants, but has failed to take action towards achieving the promises made in them and its constitution.

In this chapter we argue that decades of multi-layered government development initiatives have resulted in structural disparities and failure to redirect sovereignty over resources to locally-based socio-economic and political realities (UNDP 2006a). This implies serious neglect of the claim for entitlements and understanding of the Human Poverty Index (HPI) that are significant for measuring human poverty; it is critical for understanding past failures in achieving basic capabilities and reveals that providing equal educational opportunities to all has not been a priority (UNDP 1998; UNDP 2000; UNESCO 2000; Alston and Robinson 2005). For instance, the poor have not been empowered; rather they...
have continued to experience socio-economic factor deprivations, as the State has continued to shed its responsibilities of providing equitable and quality economic growth to all regions through effective policies and programs. It is all the more dangerous as State’s effort has only adopted a rhetoric which soundspolitically progressive, but has often been imposed from the center, using external models to determine what the region should be. In taking a cursory look at poverty and education policies imposed top down, it is very evident that levels of education and employment are extremely low; household income levels are low; and people are poorly housed, often living in extremely over-crowded conditions.

This chapter reviews the multiplicity of poverty and provides insight into the applicability of rights in development approaches. The chapter further explores the socio-economic drivers and maintainers of poverty, and chronicles the struggles of human capabilities in the region. It is suggested that low capabilities, few opportunities, and inadequate human development infrastructure are core contributing factors to these social ills. It is important for the reader to keep in mind that the people’s exposure to risks or trends of instability with negative impacts on social rights makes it difficult to create institutions that will enhance well-being in this complex and diverse region. In this vein, we stress the lack of effort in developing fully human capacity and strengthening respect for human rights in the Niger Delta, as policies and approaches are mismatched with poverty measurement in the region. We conclude that endorsing a multi-pronged approach for development does not necessarily mean full development, as growth might not reflect a life of dignity or that of empowerment.

CONCEPTS AND DEFINITION OF POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT

Development Defined

The purpose of development is to make available a political space for the voiceless and relatively powerless to empower themselves in their sustainable communities. It can also facilitate resourcefulness or introduce mechanisms that distribute/ redistribute the fruits of economic progress to the broadest segment of society. In short, development is conceived as involving major changes in social structures and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of sustainable economic growth, the reduction of poverty and enlarging choices and opportunities. Amartya Sen set the discourse in terms of development as ‘expansion of opportunities’, or in terms of freedom enjoyed by individuals (see Sen 1999). Consequently, States must coordinate targeted interventions that must enlarge people’s choices, so as to move people away from life conditions widely considered as unsatisfactory towards that which is regarded as economically and spiritually superior (see Sen 1999). These are goals, which neoliberal orthodox’s automatic macroeconomic stabilizers are in many cases incapable of effectively addressing in developing countries, let alone in the unique Niger Delta environment.