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Interrogating Empowerment as a Tool for Good Governance in the Niger Delta

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Abstract

Governance aims to provide basic amenities, opportunities and the enabling socio-economic environment for citizens to meet their aspirations within the prescribed social order. In Nigeria and the Niger delta, the ubiquitousness of corruption is the major challenge to governance. Approaches employed to tackle or bypass the corruption challenge include the use of empowerment programmes. Empowerment is conceived as a vehicle through which national governments tackle underdevelopment, unemployment and sustainable livelihoods. This research investigates what empowerment means to Niger Deltans, comparing provider-recipient perspectives. It also examines the impact of empowerment programmes and practices as employed across the Niger Delta, and the role empowerment plays in producing good governance outcomes. The research shows that; conflicting empowerment expectations exists between end-user benefactors and programme designers/providers which hampers development efforts. These conflicting expected outcomes stem from an entitlement to empowerment. Empowerment also serves the role of conduit for corruption which is a bane of good governance in the Niger delta and Nigeria. Finally, further room for research exists in questioning our dependence on empowerment programmes as facilitators of rural development as against direct infrastructural and institutional development.

Keywords: Empowerment, Governance, Good Governance, Governmentality, Development

Introduction

At the intersection of development in all of its facets, whether, economic, social, youth, women or the disabled is the idea of empowerment. Its usage in the general development literature is increasingly popular, more so in low income contexts such as those of developing countries like Nigeria and regions like the Niger delta.

The present state of development and underdevelopment in the Niger delta is well documented. The need for more community, youth, social and infrastructural development is also apparent across the region in light of the various economic and environmental challenges. In spite of all these, the Niger delta has in the last 20 years benefitted from efforts by a number of state and International Oil Companies (IOCs) aimed at driving sustainable social and economic development. A few of these include the 13% derivation policy, the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), a ministry of Niger Delta Affairs; these steps seek to

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stimulate development, build peace and capacity as well as provide more opportunities to indigenes of the region.

However, the development statistics over the same period have show little, no significant at best intermittent improvement in the region (UNDP) which is further incongruent with the amount of resources inputted from various state and non-state actors. This perpetual state of infrastructural decay, economic lag and administrative neglect has fuelled and still fuels restiveness in the region. Furthermore over the same period the region has received far more than others in revenue allocation in addition to non-state social investment. These are yet to yield measurable development impact.

What theses suggest include; a lack of responsive down-up community-based development approach at the state level, a one-size fits all approach to infrastructure and social development from the federal level and a lack of adequate recipient understanding, perception and response from beneficiaries and prospective beneficiaries of development or empowerment efforts. The latter is the focus of this paper.

In light of the above, the research examines nuanced understandings of empowerment in the Niger delta context. It further seeks to ascertain if a difference exists between the meaning of empowerment as envisaged by empowerment / development program designers and the expectation as seen by intended recipients. Given the above we try to find out if this accounts in part among other factors for the seeming ineffectiveness of development / empowerment programs in the Niger delta.

Problem Formulation:

Is the understanding of the concept “empowerment” related to the inability for empowerment programmes to impact positively on the socio-economic dynamics of the Niger delta?

Objectives

General Objective: To analyse the relationship between meanings of empowerment of designers and recipient and the effectiveness of development programme meeting target outcomes.

Specifics:

1. To ascertain different meaning of empowerment from design and recipient perspectives.
2. To analyse the association between interpretation of meaning and purpose of empowerment and empowerment programmes.





Good Governance

Governance according to (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and The Pacific, 2007) is “the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)”. For (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 1999) governance is “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development”. UNDP (1997: 2-3) in (Gisselquist, 2012, p. 6) defines governance as ‘the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels’, which ‘comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences’.

Governance as a decision making process functions at different levels, corporate governance as it applies to business organizations, international, national and local governance as it applies to different level of inter and intra state decision making. Decision making at the level of the state involves both state and non-state actors. The major state actor is the government with other non-state actors including NGOs, the media, civil society groups, interest groups, unions, multinational companies etc. all these parties influence decision making in different ways from protests to lobbying.

Good governance seeks to implement decisions which lead to the provision of basic amenities, opportunities and the enabling socioeconomic environment for citizens including minorities and the vulnerable to meet their aspirations within the ambits of normative social behaviours. Good governance as sociopolitical concept can be measured given the knowledge of its major attributes. (Bang & Esmark, 2013, pp. 1-2) note that good governance is an “empirically observable politico-administrative way of public policy-making, reforming and organizing”.

Good governance is characterized by principles of fairness, equity, legitimacy hinged on inclusive participation, transparency and accountability. (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and The Pacific, 2007), (Lachapelle, 2015)

In Nigeria and the Niger Delta one of the challenges of governance is the ubiquitousness of corruption in various forms.

Empowerment

One of the approaches through which both intra and international organizations mitigate the developmental challenge of corruption is through the use of empowerment programmes. Empowerment programmes also help to bypass institutionalized corruption.





It is common practice for state government to design and startup programmes aimed at alleviating poverty, improving skills acquisition or job creation, empowering minorities and the vulnerable. These take the form of extra-budgetary activities.

In order to justify the need for empowerment programme as designed and implemented by state actors, the obvious neglect in public discourse of the role of government in strengthening its own institution to carry out their constitutional responsibilities is apparent. The rationale behind state sponsored developmental processes and programmes both at the federal, state and local government levels must first be presented as being inadequate.

In order to gain a richer understanding of empowerment and in assessing the challenge of the understandings of empowerment and its application of the word an x-ray of various definitions of empowerment is necessary. The origin of artefacts, process and words among other historical items are mostly fixed in history, their uses, meanings and interpretations however, remain subject to present social, cultural, economic and political circumstances. One of such words is empowerment thereby making this research one characteristic of etymology.

Among the applications of the concept empowerment are with respect to powerlessness of the citizens (Rappaport, 1981), social change (Payne, 1991), mental health (Lord & Hutchison, 1993), psychological empowerment (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998), social work (Fook & Morley, 2006). Other more recent applications however have shown its definitions as lacking clarity (Hennink et al, 2012) and its evolution (Institute of Development studies, 2016) when applied to new contexts. This research on the Niger delta application buttresses this view.

For the Institute of development studies (2016) empowerment implies an expansion of opportunities and the power to make choices. Empowerment here addresses both structural inequality and inequitable power relations. This view was shared by Fook & Morley (2006) as they saw the empowerment process as dialogical (p. 69) “as those being empowered engage in a staged process of changing consciousness in relations to their social world and their ability to act within it.” They further posit that empowerment involves promoting values such as social justice as one person’s struggle for personal improvement does not interfere with the ability and capacity of others to achieve theirs. Empowerment is also the process of gaining or increasing access to opportunities and control of resources in one’s sphere of socioeconomic and political influence in order to improve one’s quality of life (Rappaport, 1981; Jennings et al, 2006, Raj, 2009; Mutuku, 2011).

For Keiffer (1984 in Lord & Hutchison, 1993) empowerment is best understood from the premise of the pervasiveness of a feeling of powerlessness which he further describes as the expectation of a person that his/her own actions will be ineffective in influencing the outcome of life’s events. Furthermore, even much deeper is the inability to identify an opportunity for





empowerment thereby undermining this requisite effort for short, medium and long term socio-economic and political freedom and personal development.

Empowerment is also an interactive process through which people experience personal and social change, enabling them take action to achieve influence over the organizations and institutions which affect their lives and the communities in which they live (Whitmore, 1988;3). For Keifer (1984) empowerment is a 4-stage developmental process; entry – advancement – incorporation – commitment.

In terms of international development, Hennink et al (2012) identifies six mechanism which facilitate empowerment; knowledge, agency, opportunity, capacity building, resources and sustainability. They further identified five domains in which empowerment ought to be applied (health, economy, polity, resource and spiritual) as well as a three-step hierarchy; individual, community and organization. Similarly, IDS bulletin (2016) advocate for three components of empowerment namely economic, social and political. In essence there is an agreement that empowerment in which ever form of application except its clinical application is ideally a multifaceted process and approach.

Empowerment and Development

Closely linked to empowerment is development; the latter being the predecessor and increasingly seems out of use as (Sachs, 2010, p. xv) notes the last forty years can be called the age of development. This epoch is coming to an end. The time is ripe to write its obituary.

The development reality in the Niger delta has been alluded to by scholars of Niger delta development with various focuses ranging from underdevelopment in terms of infrastructural development, educational, widespread poverty, exploitation of resources, environmental and climate challenges as a product of oil exploration activities (Inokoba & Imbua, 2010)(Ibaba, 2005, p. 10)(Nyananyo, 2007, p. 2); (Ukiwo, 2009)(Worgu, 2000); (Ikelegbe, 2005).

Urgent and continuous interventions are fuelled by renewed violent agitations within the region which threaten to or indeed disrupt the free and uninterrupted flow of oil revenue. Development interventions or empowerment programmes from state and non-state empowerment providers take two predominant forms; educational and business/skill development. In order to address the development challenges and mitigate against further deterioration both developmentally and efforts aimed at hampering oil production of the Niger delta.

State-based development interventions specifically targeted at the Niger delta include the establishment of a ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the federal government Amnesty programme,





Non-state actors in the empowerment provision effort include Multinational Oil companies operating in the region such as SPDC, AGIP/NAOC, Chevron, international bodies such as agencies of the United Nation.

The following tables show empowerment programs embarked on by selected state and non-state actors, objectives, targeted recipients and total reached so far. This list is inexhaustive.





S/No	Organization	Classification / Brief	Empowerment Program	Objectives	States Targeted	Total Empowered
1	Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC)	State + Non-State Actor. Operator of NNPC/Shell/Total/Agip Joint Venture	Shell Livewire (2003)		9 Niger Delta States – Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, Rivers States	Trained – 6687 Start-ups - 3000
			Academic Scholarships: University Scholarship Scheme			
			Secondary School Scholarship		Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Imo, Rivers	2600 annually
			Cradle to Career Scholarship (2010)		Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta	350
2	Chevron	Non-State / MNOOC	Agbami Scholarship (2009)	Academic Scholarship for Engineering and Medical students in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions		15800
			RiverBoat Clinic – Medical (2001)	Health Services	Escravos and Benin Rivers	
			Prevention of Mother To Child Transmission (PMTCT)	Health Services	Bayelsa, Rivers, Nassarawa	Equip 670 health facilities Testing & Counselling – 53,000 pregnant women
3	Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC)	Non-State	Green River Project (1987)	Increase agro-productivity and quality of life	Rivers, Bayelsa, Imo, Delta	
			Skill Acquisition	Increase Technical & Vocational skill		3750 youths & women
4.	Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)	State Actor	Foreign Academic Scholarship (2010)		9 Niger Delta States	1411 students: MSc - 1066, PhD – 345
			Retail Empowerment App Program (REAP) + Empowerment Support Initiative (ESI)			3350
5.	Ministry of Niger Delta	State Actor	Amnesty Programme (2009)		9 Niger Delta States	30,000 ex-militants

Source: (Chevron), (Shell) www.shell.com.ng/sustainability/communities/education, (Shell) www.shell-livewire.com/home/newsevents/news/1447774694.947, (PMNewsnigeria, 2017), businessdayonline.com, africanleadership.co.uk, www.nddc.gov.ng

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Theoretical Framework

Empowerment is globally recognised especially as applied to developing countries context though in relation to governance, the goal of empowerment is called to question as it fails in part to stimulate social and community development. Michel Foucault's theory of governmentality offers useful insights in understanding this challenge. For (Foucault, 1991) and (Marshall, 2005, pp. 255-256) government refers to a complex set of processes through which human behaviour is systematically controlled in ever wider areas of social and personal life. In this regard, the primary goal of government is social control and not necessarily in the interests of the citizenry or principality. Furthermore, governmentality is exercised through what he describes as dispersed mechanisms of power. In the Niger delta and indeed Nigeria one of these mechanisms of power is empowerment – the idea of which connotes opportunities, means, end as well as financial gains.

In the art of governing as alluded to by Foucault - quoting La Pierre - developing on Machiavelli's the prince, government is the right disposition of things arranged so as to lead to a convenient end (Foucault, 1991, p. 94). In the Nigerian case the question must be asked, what convenient end, whose convenient end and further appraising the disposition of things as being more of a complex of citizens, their state of being whether in poverty as recent data from Brooking Institute shows Nigeria as the poverty capital of the world and the relationship between the Prince or princes and the mechanisms of power by which the populace remain under the disciplinary control of the political class. It is common practice that during election cycles the incumbent government and contending candidates give out empowerment aids of various forms to their constituencies. Empowerment serves this latent role as politicians and government official use empowerment programmes to win the votes of an already deprived and hungry electorate. (Foucault, 1991, p. 90) also notes that this link between those in government and their principality lie in the ability to manipulate relations of force, and production, to coerce compliance.

Findings and Discussions

Previous sections have shown the role of empowerment in aiding social development. It also highlighted understandings of governance as well as an approach of governmentality in understanding empowerment in governance in the Nigerian context. This section therefore further highlights significant findings from semi-structured interviews and quasi-auto ethnography on the question of empowerment, its perceptions and implications for development as the research presents a nuanced understanding of empowerment in governance.

Empowerment as noted in previous sections refers to the processes and efforts through which individuals are provided with knowledge, skills and or opportunities which help in their drive for





self-sustenance. Empowerment efforts and programmes include but are not exclusive to loans and grants for businesses, provision of equipments for small and medium scale businesses.

Empowerment as an end in itself

Popular notions as the research showed relate and equate empowerment to receiving of money or receiving materials with a goal of exchanging it for money rather than a tool for medium or long term sustenance. In local everyday usage, empowerment and empower are also synonymous with help. Its application exceeds development and capacity building context. Empowerment is widely used to show political loyalty with the aim of immediate financial benefits.

Though most respondents especially those with a university degree understood the purpose of empowerment programmes which are aimed at providing aids to self-sustenance. It is widely agreed that due to the poor economic situation of the country and poor implementation of programmes, diverting empowerment aids for immediate monetary gains and seeking monetary empowerment suffices.

Empowerment as an entitlement

In addition to a misunderstanding of empowerment goals and conflicting targets, further evident from the interviews is an entitlement to empowerment. This is closely linked to a feeling of ownership of and deprivation from benefits of indigenous oil resources. What this portends is an equation of a dependence on empowerment and diversion of empowerment aids to a nuanced fight for resource control. By implication a continuous trend of non-performance of development programmes is bound to continue with resource control as justification.

Empowerment as leisure

Another reason why empowerment fails to meet its goals is due in part to participation in empowerment programmes done for leisure. As referred to by a respondent who facilitates for Niger Delta Development commission and the National directorate of Employment in fashion design, participants often include young secondary school leavers preparing for the university and unemployed graduates. Interactions with participants showed that some attended because they were asked to and not by any deliberate choice of theirs. Others attended to pass time as they wait for their desired opportunities. Hence only very few go on to utilize these skills while majority wait to receive the stipulated stipend at the end of the training period.

Conclusion

Governance is the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. Good governance characterized by principles of fairness, equity, legitimacy hinged on inclusive participation, transparency and accountability seeks to implement decisions which lead to the provision of basic amenities, opportunities and the enabling





socioeconomic environment for citizens including minorities and the vulnerable to meet their aspirations within the ambits of normative social behaviours. One of the basic challenges of good governance and governance in Nigeria is corruption. Empowerment serves as a tool by which various international and intra national organization bypass this challenge.

Though empowerment seeks to provide tools for self-sustenance, a disconnect between the understandings and expectations of empowerment from designers and beneficiaries perspectives present a development challenge. One of these is a popular perception of empowerment as an end or a means to immediate financial gains. Here empowerment is synonymous with sharing government money. Another point of disconnect lies in the entitlement to empowerment - both in terms of financial benefits and other material or skill-based capacity building efforts. Some beneficiaries hold the view that the money and materials given as part of empowerment programmes are funded by the natural resources of the Niger delta therefore diverting these funds or materials serve as a quasi-agitation for resource control. These challenges of empowerment lead to a consistent inability for development programmes to meet their anticipated socioeconomic good governance goals. Finally, empowerment is also applied as a mechanism of power as programmes usually serve to gain political capital from an already deprived electorate. The use of empowerment programmes as tools to control the electorate is made apparent by the application of Michel Foucault's theory of governmentality.

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