Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency and Social Development in Rivers State

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A B S T R A C T

This paper assessed the performance of the Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency (RSSDA) in social development in the state in 2007-2010. The period marked the first phase of the work of the agency within a stipulated 15-year review cycle. The initiative of the Rivers State Government in launching RSSDA in replacement of the Federal Government – sponsored Rivers State Sustainable Development Programme (RSSDP) came at a time of little meaningful interest in sustainable development issues in the country, despite much global concern regarding these and the emerging environmental challenges in the Niger Delta, including Rivers State. The study focused on social development which attracted the bulk of the interventions under the programme. It used the basic needs approach to development, reflective of the priority of RSSDA, as its theoretical framework. The methodology was content analytic and descriptive. Among others, it was found that RSSDA's budgets in the period under review progressively declined and that actual receipts of allocations for social development equally suffered continuous shortfalls. It was recommended that funding should be beefed up and sustained, and that the state should clearly set out its social policy, spelling out the role of the social development arm of the sustainable development programme in it.

Keywords: *Development, Sustainable Development, Social Development, Sustainability.*

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Background to the Study

This study examined the performance of Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency in social development in Rivers State as part of its overall sustainable development programme. Sustainable development deals with issues of environmental sustainability and the social problems of human survival. It was to address such problems that the Rivers State Government (RSG) established RSSDA under the Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency Act of 2007 as amended in 2008. RSSDA replaced the Rivers State Sustainable Development Programme (RSSDP) which was set up to develop quick gestation projects and to fill gaps in infrastructure. RSSDA was established to serve as a focal point of sustainable development in the state. It is designed to combat poverty and to transform the state's rural and urban economies in such a way that they would become self-sufficient (RSG, 2010:152-152). Its specific mandate is to:

1. Evaluate and assess existing and future intervention programmes in the sustainable development sector through the acquisition, warehousing and analysis of development and socioeconomic data.
2. Formulate and implement plans, initiatives, strategies, intervention modes and specific measures to achieve sustainable development, capacity-building, skill acquisition, alternative sources of livelihood in an environmentally sustainable manner.
3. Collaborate with the government, including local government councils, communities, international development agencies and the private sector with the aim at entrenching a sustainable development agenda for the state.

Objectives of the Study

i. Design, plan and execute sustainable projects and programmes in community health, water and sanitation.
ii. Design, plan and execute sustainable programmes and projects in agriculture/agro-allied services, agua-culture and other small-and medium-scale enterprises.
iii. Promote human capital development.
iv. Advise the government on harmonizing the sustainable development strategy (Kpakol, 2008).

The agency is headed by an Executive Director who oversees nine zonal offices manned by resident zonal co-ordinators. Under each resident zonal coordinator is a local government area community interface officer in charge of monitoring projects and coordinating relations between the agency and segments of the local populace. The agency also has a board with representatives from oil companies, the Niger Delta Development Commission, donor agencies, civil society groups and the Federal Government. Operationally, its functions overlap with those of a number of ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs). It is therefore possible to situate its social development interventions within the framework of the state's social policy and development regime comprising the Ministries of Education, Health, Employment Generation and Empowerment, Social Welfare and Rehabilitation, Women Affairs and Youth Development; as well as departments or agencies like the Office of the Special Assistant, Skill Acquisition; Office of Millennium Development Goals, and RSSDA.

Conceptual Clarification
Development

Development is an elusive, amorphous or inexact concept (Rai and Kumar nd:3, 51). In the words of Professor Caiden (cited in Rai and Kumar):

> Nobody really knows what the word development really stands for… economists identify it with economic productivity, sociologists with social change… political scientists with democratization, political capacity or expanded government.

In the same vein, Kalagbor (2004:1-2) asserts that the concept of development is nebulous. Tamuno (2009:3-6) views it as a broad, loaded and abstract concept, adding that there is still no consensus about its meaning. Each scholar has thus tended to define development in his or her own way, relying largely on his or her orientation or world view. Recognizing the problem, S. Onyeiwu (1988) (cited in Kalagbor, 2004) identifies eight categories of scholars working on the meaning of development. They include:

1. A large number of economists who distinguish between growth and development depending on the degree of structural change involved. Most definitions here stress that structural change involves social, political and economic elements while others insist that development is structural change plus increases in output.

2. Another view of development stipulates that it is not merely a process of creating more and more output but also a process of distributing it more evenly.

3. A third group of scholars consists of those focusing on the range of available economic choice as an index of growth and development. Some of the scholars argue that it is growth which gives a wider range of alternatives to people while others see development as offering more choice.

4. Those who have not even bothered about definitions, preferring instead to discuss the goals of development, approaches to its study, and what underdeveloped countries look like.

5. Those who define both growth and development in terms of increases in total per capita income or output, seeing both processes as identical.

6. A different group of scholars focuses on the origin of the process – on whether the primary stimulus is endogenous or exogenous.

7. Another group of scholars views growth and development in terms of the expansion of productive potentials, with part of the group seeing this as growth and the other as development. Both sides tend to agree that the two aspects complement each other.

8. The last group of scholars takes growth and development as alternating processes, with some arguing that growth rates must reach certain levels before economic development can occur and others contending that economic development must pass from slow to fast growth rates.

Despite these various conflicting perspectives, a number of definitions of development have been offered as a guide. G.M. Meier (1976) (cited in Tamuno, 2009) defines economic development as "the process whereby the real per capita income of a country increases over a long period of time".

Ake C. (cited in Tamuno, 2009) defines development as "a systematic (and continuous) increase of man's capabilities for mastering his environment, satisfying basic human needs, and for realizing his potentials. Articulating a related view, Rodney (1972:9-10) asserts that as a multicentric process, development at the individual level underpins increased skill, capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being; and at the societal level increased capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. Todaro (1992) similarly defines it as "a multidimensional process involving change in structures, attitudes and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of

inequality and eradication of absolute poverty". Still along this line, Seers (1969:3) contends that it is a misnomer to talk of development if poverty unemployment and inequality have worsened in a given society over a given period even if income per head doubled in the period. This tallies with Jhingan's (1996) idea that development is all about increasing improvement in the welfare of people. The underlying basis of the foregoing indicates that development is a multifaceted process combining increasing economic growth and welfare, and social change.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development revolves around the idea of sustainability (Domfeh nd). Sustainability involves operating in a way that takes full account of the impact of human activities on the planet, its people and the future. Accordingly, something is said to be sustainable if it is enduring and lasting or can continue or be nurtured for a long time. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources explains that "for development to be sustainable it must take account of social and ecological factors, as well as economic ones; of the living and nonliving resources and of the long term as well as the short term advantages and disadvantages of alternative actions (Domfeh nd).

The sustainable development concept reflects this critical need. The definition of the concept most often quoted emerged from the report of the United Nations-sponsored World Commission on Environment and Development, titled (WCED) published in 1987 (Domfeh nd). It refers to sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The idea is that development entails actions taken to enhance the ability of the environment to support human populations. WCED's call for sustainable development had an influence on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in June, 1992. *Agenda* 21, the principal international agreement that emerged from the conference, deals with several relevant issues, including social economic processes to advance sustainability and the conservation and management of resources for sustainable development. The World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002 also reaffirmed sustainable development as a central element of the international agenda and gave new impetus to global action to fight poverty and protect the environment. It broadened and strengthened the understanding of sustainable development, particularly with respect to the important linkages between poverty, the environment and the use of natural resources. Energy and sanitation issues accordingly became critical elements of negotiations and outcomes during the summit to a greater degree than in previous international meetings on sustainable development. Although some have questioned the value of these initiatives, dismissing sustainable development as a catch phrase that will eventually wither as did the term "appropriate technology", the influence of the concept has increased significantly in national and international policy development. This has made it a key element of policy documents of governments, international agencies and business groups (Domfeh nd).

Social Development

Like its base concept, 'development', social development is also an elusive concept. It is at once all encompassing and vague. One perspective holds that social development is the "prioritization of human needs in the growth and progression of society" (Goggle, 2017). It is also said to be embedded in the norms and conventions governing human interactions. The World Bank (2016) describes social development as a focus on the need to 'put people first" in

development processes. It views it as a process of development that promotes the social inclusion of the poor and vulnerable by empowering people, building cohesive and resilient societies and making institutions accessible and accountable. It designates poverty as going beyond low income to underpin larger questions of vulnerability, exclusion, unaccountable institutions, powerlessness, and exposure to violence. Social development is thus viewed as the form of development that promotes economic growth and leads to better interventions as well as higher quality of life. In the same vein, the International Institute of Social Studies (2004) contends that the essence of social development is that it puts people at the centre of development. This, according to the institute, has three implications. One, it entails the commitment that development processes need to benefit people, particularly but not only the poor. Two, it underscores the recognition that people and the way they interact in groups and society alongside norms facilitating such interaction shape the development process. Lastly, it suggests that social development implies change in social institutions.

Theoretical Framework
The basic needs approach "is one which gives priority to meeting the basic needs of all the people" (B. Wisner, 1988) (cited in Kalagbor, 2004:11-15). It was espoused by the International Labour Organization as a result of the shortcoming of the gross national product in failing to take into account problems associated with basic needs like food, health, education, water and shelter (Jinhgan, 2007: 9, 21-23). The idea is that satisfying basic needs will ultimately lead to growth. The approach has three objectives. First, it aims at raising the productivity and incomes of the rural and urban poor. Second, it emphasizes the need for poverty alleviation through the provision of such services as education, drinking water and healthcare. Third, it highlights the need for such services to be financed by the government. There is a problem, however, with assigning weights to the various needs which in the end may depend on the social, economic and political set up of each country.

A second major problem highlighted by Kalagbor (2004) is the issue of whether the poor are the ones to define their needs or should have them defined by development experts, international development and aid agencies. Two distinct positions address this thorny question. One calls for participatory development or the involvement of the poor, the presumed beneficiaries of development policies, in the development process. This entails the identification of obstacles to development by the people themselves and their involvement in addressing them. It follows that poverty as a great obstacle to development has to be identified and understood in terms of its sources, types, agents and agencies, and eliminated or reduced to the barest minimum. Secondly, people must directly and actively or through representative institutions participate in the preparation of the development agenda.

The second or weak or conservative position sees people (the poor) as recipients of development aid, assistance and packages who must receive a bundle of goods and services corresponding to their needs. According to this position, people do not take part in the determination and definition of their development (basic) needs.

Green (cited in Kalagbor, 2004) has distinguished between the radical and conservative positions on the basic needs approach, arguing that the former deals with human needs while the latter is concerned with basic needs. A number of scholars have also sought to clarify what the needs are. J. Galtung (cited in Kalagbor, 2004) identifies security, welfare, identity and freedom needs. Carr-Hill (cited in Kalagbor 2004), on the other hand, lists health, education,

employment, creative, income and economic security need physical environment, social environment, justice and social participation needs.

RSSDA's Performance in Social Development

RSSDA's social development interventions in 2007-2010 are derived from its mandate and objectives. Relevant aspects of the mandate and objectives include promoting human capital development, including skill acquisition; executing sustainable projects and programmes in community health, water and sanitation; and engaging in developing alternative sources of livelihood. Available records show that RSSDA concentrated more resources on these and other social development interventions, investing approximated a total of N6,644,834,621.19 on the sector compared to approximately N2,141,160,287 allocated to agro and agro-allied projects in 2007-2010 (RSG, 2010:153-5). The leading areas of concentration were scholarship awards, training, community health, harnessing of information technology ICT), and the supply of instructional materials to schools. The bulk of the interventions went to scholarships followed by training. A total of 1,120 overseas and 135 local scholarships were awarded totaling N6,390,000,000. Of this, N4,377,767,926.69 was spent, leaving a balance of N2,012,232,573.31 unreleased . The training programme included the training and certification of 100 youths in computer troubleshooting with a budget of N42,500,000. Out of this, N30,005,000 was spent covering the 100 youths; N12,485,000 was outstanding. As part of the training programme, N1,524,657,200 was budgeted for the establishment a workmanship and technical training centre; N1,081,884,016.50 was released, leaving a balance of N505,773,183.50. A total of N120,000,000 was budgeted for a graduate work placement scheme out of which only N13,380,000 was spent covering 93 beneficiaries, while N106,620,000 was outstanding. A United Nations training programme with the defunct RSSDP was initially put at N130,000,000 but cost N175,000,000 with N149,825,000 additionally earmarked. There was also provision for communication lines for primary and post-primary hospitals and police stations in the state at a total cost of N47,134,000; N37,884,000 was released, leaving N9,250,000 outstanding.

There were five main intervention areas in the health sector. Hydro form projects cost N35,000,000 out of the N194,350,000 budgeted; N59,350 was outstanding. Provision was made for the establishment of emergency call centres for a total of N61,646,000; N52,590,800 was expended, leaving a balance of N9,055,200. A total of N60,000,000 was earmarked for community health and treatment mobilization. The sum of N30,000,000 was released, covering 5,700 people in six local government areas; N29,000,000 was outstanding.

ICT attracted two main projects. Local governments web portal development was budgeted for N170,000,000; with a committal of N164,613,600 and a shortfall of N5,586,400. The lead project – N500,000,000 – was for ICT capacity building for local government councils designed to encourage excellence in local governance; N365,403,718 was released, leaving a shortfall of N184,516,282. Finally, N224,700,000 was earmarked for the provision of science books, and workbook and exercise books for primary schools; N246,783,000 was spent with an added N22,083,000 left outstanding.

Conclusion

This study examined RSSDA's social development interventions and expenditure in 2007-2010. The bulk of the investments went to education and knowledge-related projects, including training and ICT. The total value was N6,454,837,321.19. The balance – N189,997,300 – was committed to health projects. Furthermore, it is important to know that of the total recurrent

and capital expenditure of N821,017,565,712.69 made by the state in 2007-2010 (RSG, 2010;2-3), the main social development MDAs, including RSSDA, were allocated N127,772,896,857.14 (RSG, 2010). RSSDA's share was N6,644,834,621.19. This gives a picture of the limited funding of the sector in overall sustainable development drive even though it was still the leading sector under the programme. Part of the problem was the persistent shortfalls in allocations amounting to N3,220,983,938.81 for the sector in the period (RSG, 2010). It reflected the overall consistent decline of RSSDA's budgets from the peak of N11.711,607,790 in 2008 to N5,000,000,000 in 2010.

Recommendation
In the light of the foregoing analysis, study recommends that:
1.   Increased allocations be made to the agency to ensure adequate funding of its various sectors.
2.   As part of this, a state sustainable development fund should be set up to ease financial dependence of the agency, encourage innovation and enhance the durability of the programme.
3.   The state should clearly articulate its social policy, with the role of the social development arm of the sustainable development programme in it spelt out.

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