



Youths And Restiveness: Examining The Landscape Of Inequality And Social Injustice In Ohaji/Egbema

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the landscape of inequality and social injustice through the lens of current restiveness among the youths in Ohaji/Egbema communities of Imo state, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey design based on Focus Group Discussion and Key Informant Interviews. A total of 42 KPI and 80 FGD section were held. Descriptive qualitative and narrative reporting was employed to elucidate the responses based on the research objectives. The findings reveal how youths are finding consolation and cohesion in crimes to seek legitimacy over their restiveness. The study revealed that youths have rejected the existing power structure and injustice in the handling of oil and gas business in their local communities. The study thus concludes that restiveness varies across purposes but not beyond socioeconomic permutation and sharp inequality and social injustice evoking unruly values system. The study recommends that the government should stop all forms of politicizing key infrastructural and human capital development meant for the communities and to help in meaningful engagement and empowerment of at-risk youths.

Keywords: Youth Restiveness, Inequality and Social Injustice, Imo State.

INTRODUCTION

Hale, Hayward, Azini et al, (2013) noted that “the devil makes work for idle hands”, making “poverty to become the mother of crime”. The implication of these as with all folklores, and proverbs contains a kernel of truth, but as with much “common sense” they need careful interpretation. First, it suggests that work, gainful employment, is important in preventing crime. Thus those who do not have jobs, the idle hands, are more likely to become involved in criminal pursuits partly perhaps, to provide for their daily needs and partly because they lack discipline and structures to employment. To this end, the causal relationship between socioeconomic marginalization and youth restiveness as recurrent themes in security concerns of oil producing communities in Nigeria is consistently examined to get the different shades.

Inequality been central to the many root cause of the problems in all human social life and existence is now a social norm in the sociopolitical and environmental governance of resources in Nigeria. Its manifestation in current marginalization of youth and their development has remained recurrent concepts in social sciences researches in Nigeria’s Niger-Delta communities. The concept of marginalization can be defined as some sort of powerlessness and exclusion experienced by a group, resulting from inequality of control in ‘resources and power structures’ within society. However, Marxist theory emphasized the roots of social inequality as the gamut of class in all societies (Marx 1844).

Marx, Engels, Adam Smith and other thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries identified material resources like land, labour and capital as the basis for social contention and stratification. Thus, the term marginalization which has been historically responsible for social change and social problems of the 18th and 19th Century in Europe has been sustained for the increasing indices of the social problems plaguing the Nigerian society today (Akujobi, Jack, 2017) such as; armed robbery; advance fee fraud (419); internet-cybercrime (yahoo-yahoo); drug peddling and drug abuse; student and youth unrest;

insurgency and militancy; cultism; cultural violence; religious intolerance amongst other prominent orders among them.

Burton, Kagan, (2003), perceived marginalization as a shifting phenomenon that may vary with individuals' conditions, impacts on individuals who may be satisfied with their social status at some period of time, but when social change takes place, they lose this status and become marginalized. Based on the above, one could surmise that the state has been repressive in negotiating sustainable and productive future for the youths hence peace, stability and development of communities are constantly compromised and in consternation for restiveness in Nigeria. This has resulted in current landscapes of violence and reproductive forms restiveness amongst the youths. It is thus reproducing negative orders that are detrimental to community development and human capacity growth in Nigeria.

The key aspects of marginalization are social exclusion which produces negative consequences and long-term damage to the living conditions, social and economic participation, health status and emotional life of young people. It however leads to the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Patoni, 2012). The implication of the above could imply that the effects of marginalization undermines the social mobility and access of the youth to power and resource control in the affairs of state especially, as evident within the repressive forms of military and pseudo democratic administrations of the Nigeria state particularly, the Southeastern states and the Niger-Delta communities. There have been several tensions from interactions with oil relations in the Niger Delta communities. These have continuously evoked several socio-political and economic crises when infused into the eruptions of the everyday failures and inadequacies of governance in instituting transparency and accountability in natural resources have constantly ensures militancy and cultism supremely driving in the region (Ubleble, 2019).

Various levels of militancy coupled with cultism in the Niger Delta have manifested in different forms of hostage taking, sea piracy, political hooliganism, terrorism and pipeline vandalism in widespread dimension in the region (Ojo, 2015). The Niger Delta has become known in most extant studies for a form of "alienation caused by ethnicity based political domination, oil based environmental degradation, corruption and parental neglect..." (Ibaba, 2008). The implication of these is sufficient to illuminate the level of marginalization and restiveness in the regions. Studies in Nigeria on socioeconomic marginalization and youth restiveness such as; Yusuf (2014), Chukwuemeka and Aghara (2010) have argued that poverty, unemployment and lack of access to education have been responsible for the unprecedented increase in youth restiveness in Niger Delta. Their study found that dissatisfaction of the people of Niger Delta especially, the youth on the level of attention given to the development of their region and damages of their ecology by oil spillage are major causes of alarming youth restiveness.

Mezieobi, Nwaubani, and Anyanwu (2012) investigated factors associated with increasing incidences of youth restiveness in South Eastern States of Nigeria and the implications of the menace on nation building in Nigeria. In the survey-based study, data was generated from a structured questionnaire administered to 300 respondents who were selected through purposive random sampling technique. The data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages. Results revealed that youth restiveness is caused by multiple factors and that the menace has severe influence on nation building. The causal factors include sponsorship by interested groups, inadequate possession of skills for life sustenance, poverty in the family, gangsterism and peer influences, influence of hard drugs, economic purpose of enrichment, and youth unemployment. The menace affects nation building by destabilizing the security of the state, destroying or stagnating the economy, and above all, hinders foreign investments.

Also, results indicated that national measures can be employed to curb youth restiveness. Such measures include: introduction of civic education, infusion of peace education into school curriculum, entrepreneurial education, development of skills acquisition centres, use of dialogue, public enlightenment against violence, rehabilitation of youths, and introduction of youth council of Nigeria to chart progressive course for the overall development of Nigerian youths. The study concluded that adequate political will is needed to extensively promote youth education, create jobs and effectively control the alarming rate of youth restiveness in Nigeria.

From the above extant literature, this study examined how socioeconomic marginalization is perceived from the lens of present inequality been experienced by the youths whose composition have expanded to a more complex category as a result of the integration of a minority of female youths and adolescents to seek legitimacy in their restiveness. The study argues that the outcomes of perceived marginalization have failed to provide the needed ‘social sovereignty’ and localized frameworks of order to give room for the coherent articulation of livelihood. This however has distorted the collective social ties that should have been a social control to incoherent complexities and stark decline of overall livelihood security within the communities. We leverage on the study of Rodgers (2005), cited in McLean Hilker & Fraser, (2009) to argue the context of failing state control over the changing patterns of restiveness in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State.

Theoretical Framework

This study attempts to explain the relations between socioeconomic marginalization and youth restiveness by utilizing Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs as a theoretical framework. Maslow’s (1943) theory comprises of two main points relevant to framing risk factors for youth involvement in restiveness. First, he posits that all humans have a hierarchy of basic needs that must be met in order to reach positive outcomes. These needs include physiological, safety, love, and esteem. Second, he claims that the necessity to fulfill these basic needs drives nearly all motivation. Only after all of these basic needs are met can an individual begin to achieve self-actualization, or the drive to be the best that one can be (Maslow, 1943). If these basic needs are not met, an individual is motivated to fulfill them by any means necessary, regardless of consequences (Maslow, 1943). Therefore, individuals who do not have their basic needs met by their families and environments may seek out gang membership as a way to fulfill them. He identified the needs to include; physiological needs, safety needs, love needs, and esteem needs. When one’s physiological needs are not met, individuals yearn to satisfy them however they can (Maslow, 1943). Marginalization has been found to be a correlate of cultism and insecurity in Niger-Delta Studies. Thus, while money itself may not be a physiological need, hunger and housing (e.g. shelter from dangerous elements and environmental pollution) are related to youth restiveness where livelihood insecurity and unstable living conditions are reinforced and predictive of involvement. Maslow’s (1943) theory would suggest a causal relation between these variables in which individuals are using restiveness as a source of income and empowerment to the violent groups to meet their physiological needs of food and shelter. Because legal means of income are inaccessible to youth who have been affected by the imbalances in the politics of oil resource and its distribution, or simply unattractive for employment with the oil multi nationals due to the power indifference. Maslow (1943) explains that all individuals have a need to feel safe in their environment. Marginalized Youths living in areas where violence is now a means and dominates community values for safety are at an increased risk themselves (Li et al., 2002), which may be due to safety needs. In other words, marginalized youth are often exposed to violence as an accepted way of life. This makes them feel that their safety is at risk and that they do not have means to protect themselves nor fight thus, the justification for belonging to cult group to fill enabled and to appropriate these needs.

Studies by Alleyne & Wood, (2012); Hill, (1999) found that individuals living in neighborhoods where there was a significant gang presence had a greater likelihood of joining a gang. Same is with youths in Ohaji/Egbema and their current engagement misdemeanor. Alleyne and Wood (2012) suggest that learned behavior is the cause of this relation, where the feeling of marginalization is still being sustained and justified for the numerous violent behaviors.

The implication of the above signifies that marginalization and youth restiveness is not static but changes in temporal conditions. Hence, Maslow sees this period as a time when young people discover a void in their lives and seek to satisfy this need. Two key factors that are often perceived by youths as standing in the way of satisfying these needs are; Over-aged Youths: who control collective resources and use their position of power or authority to employ brutal force and to yield popularity amongst the youth groups. The “Flesh” or “Self-will” of the youths themselves, the fear of consequences of their actions can also become an inhibition to taking the actions they may desire to take. Both of these forces produces the

belief that under the influence of certain external powers on the youths and their will power which hitherto control their fear or feelings of uncertainty.

We examined socioeconomic marginalization and youth restiveness by using Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs as a framework for understanding why such factors increase youths' involvement in restive activities. Such a review is necessary to inform future research and policy decisions aimed at addressing the increasing engagement of youths in activities that are antisocial and impacts negatively on their communities. Going by local reports on crime in the study communities, we observed that most of the people at the forefront of any violent conflict are youths, who are willing to risk their lives to indulge in militancy, armed robbery, kidnapping, vandalization and cultism to achieve their temporal need or goals. In Ohaji/Egbema communities, much of the youth restive activities have been harnessed by the "political go-between" to build an army of thugs used for various purposes. However, these sets of youths are more valued, rewarded and living in affluence as a result of the largesse they receive by their sponsors. They are seen as achieving a sense of financial and social independence, recognitions and empowerment from government.

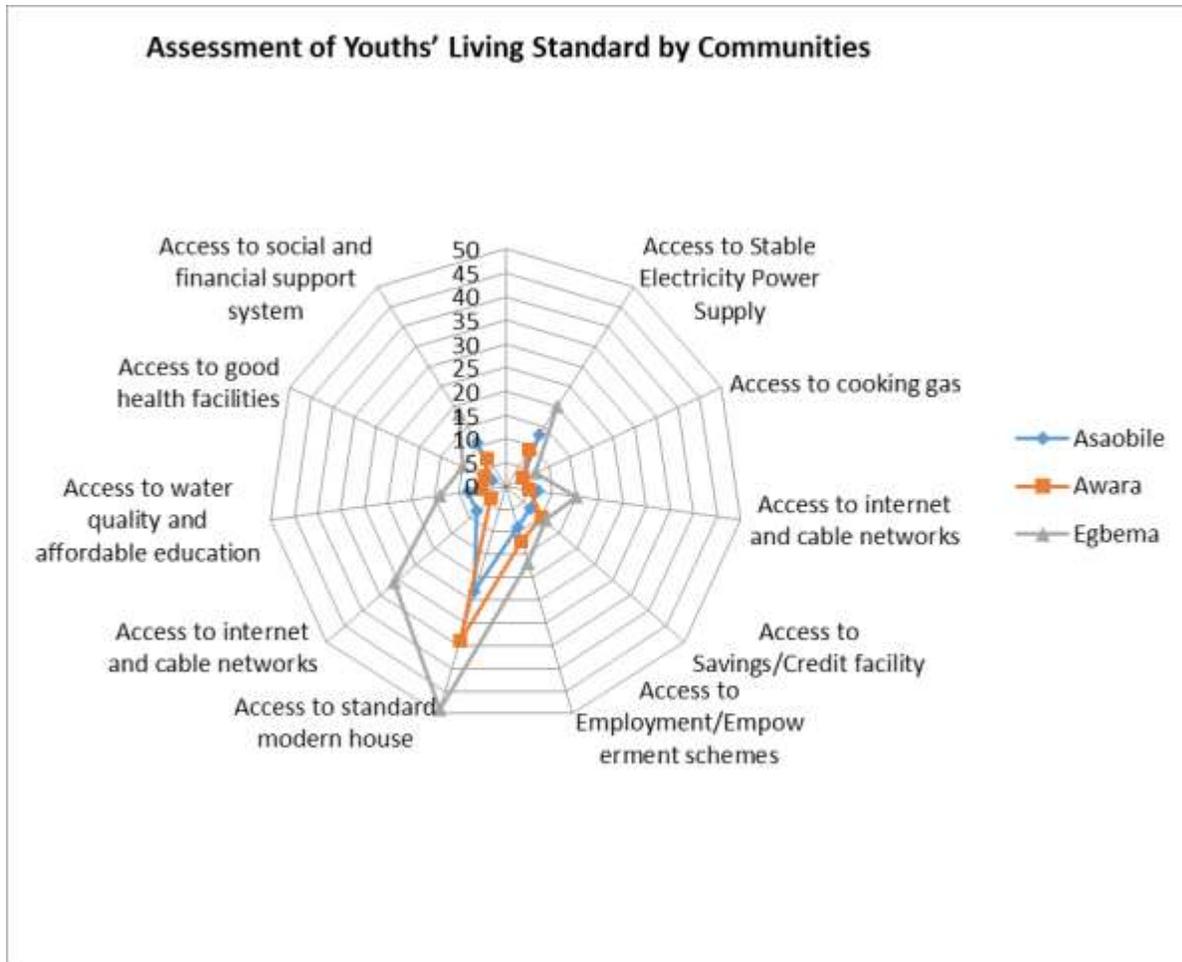
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted cross-sectional design. This involves the systematic collection of data in standardized form from an identifiable population, sample or representative. In determining the population, the study includes all youths in the study area. Hence multistage sampling technique, the study first employed a random sampling to give every youth the equal opportunity for representation. The snowball sampling was then employed to get key informants for the interview sections who were assumed to be key stakeholders in youth and community affairs. In the first stage, Ohaji/Egbema Local government area was purposively chosen based on the availability and operations of oil multinationals in the locality. The second stage involved the purposive selection of Eight (8) towns and each from the local government areas. This constituted four villages each from Egbema and Ohaji in which two (2) focus groups participant comprising of Ten (10) participants each were gathered so as to elicit information. The rationale behind the adoption of the FGD is that there is need for a certain category of individuals among the Ohaji/Egbema to observe the changes in the patterns of marginalization and youth restiveness in the oil producing communities of Imo State. The table below shows the distribution of the Key Informant Interview (KII) and the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The study purposively engaged seven Key Informants in each of the six communities thus totaled to 42 key informants interviewed. Similarly, two (2) sets of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in each of the communities across three groups of youths, women and men groups thus amounting to One hundred and eighty (180) discussants. In sum the sample drawn were totaled, two hundred and twenty-two respondents. The reported data from the KIIs and FGDs were reported verbatim and presented thematically. Data for this work was from both primary and secondary source. The study adopted both qualitative method of data analysis. Under the qualitative method, the qualitative approach was used to analyze information gathered from the FGD and interview sessions. The method in qualitative analysis involves the transcription of observed outcomes into conceptual codes that are transcribed into thematic areas for discussion. These themes are cross-referenced in order to find relationship which will inform the formation of new models and theories that are focused on solving identified scientific problems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The survey utilized several basic indicators to assess the landscape of inequality and social injustice among the youths at community level in Ohaji/Egbema. First, their current livelihood assets were sorted for.

Figure 4.1: Distribution of Livelihood Assets of Youths by Communities



Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2020.

Assessing youth's living standard by communities, finding revealed that whereas 34% of the youths in Asaobile agreed that they have access to stable electricity supply, 23% in Awara and 52% Egbema. With regards to access to cooking gas 81% of youths in Asaobile affirmed that they do not have access to cooking gas 92% in Awara while 20% in Egbema. The implication of the above indicates the level of deprivation and unequal access the communities have in appropriating the gains of the oil resources in their land for common use.

Despite the fact they are host to Multinationals, they lack the financial capital and access to basic needs due to the financial constraints and cost of living. Data on access to internet and cable networks shows that 29% of the youths in Asaobile have access to good internet and cable network, 15% in Awara, 75% in Egbema. Information on access to savings and credit facilities indicates that there is no access to savings and credit facilities across the breath of the Ohaji/Egbema communities. Examining data on employment and empowerment schemes, information gathered shows that 12.3% of the youths in Asaobile are employed within the state-owned institutions like Local Government schools, hospitals and rubber plantations while 11.2% are from Awara and 19.8% from Egbema.

Similarly, data from figure 4.1 above indicates that most youth don't have financial capital to afford access to standard modern house as 29% of youths in Asaobile have access to standard modern houses, 19% in Awara while 43% for Egbema. Data on figure 4.1, also examined youth's access to quality and affordable education. It was revealed that 25.9% of youths in Asaobile had access to quality and affordable education, 29.3% in Awara while 36.3% in Egbema. In same vein data examined access to good and affordable health care availability across the communities. Data showed that there is poorly

managed and understaffed healthcare system in the locality. Hence in Asaobile, 13% of the youths sampled in Asaobile had access to healthcare services 32.5% sampled in Awara community had access to health care facilities, with 45.2% sampled in Egbema had access to health care facility. This notwithstanding, most health facilities across the communities were dilapidated and abandoned with no professional doctors and nurses (medical personnel).

In these communities, most youths and their households rely on local chemist where they purchase self-medicated drugs or as prescribed by the pharmacy attendant or auxiliary nurses therefore exposing their lives to dangers of medical abuse and associated health risks. Irrespective of these realities, the hospital in Obioakpu and Mgbriichi are yet to be upgraded through the Memorandum of Understanding between the host oil communities and by the Nigerian Agip Oil Company, SEPLAT/NNPC and Waltersmith. Also, in assessing the availability of roads connecting the communities, villages and farmlands in the sampled communities, findings revealed that 23% of the youths sampled in Assaobile had access to roads leading to their villages and farms, while 21% of the youths sampled in Awara had access to roads leading to their communities and farms. However, data showed that 57% of the youths sampled in Egbema had more access roads connecting their communities and to some village farms. This is because these communities were amongst the first that had contact with the Oil Mutinationals operations in their communities.

Drawing from the foregoing analysis, the relative general poor level of livelihood assets of more than average young persons or youths in the study area is an indication of the level of perceived poverty, inequality and marginalization of the youths leaving them with no fewer option than to resort to appropriating legitimacy for their restive activities in the communities through localized frameworks of livelihood strategies such as; the incoherent upsurges in cultism, prostitution and drug and substance abuse which have stark consequences to overall livelihood security and community health of the communities. From the above, the qualitative Focus Group Discussion revealed thus as elucidated in the responses of the discussants and the key informants been presented verbatim.

Respondent 3:

For me and for what I am seeing in this community, the youths are very energetic and vulnerable population to be impacted by any socioeconomic order. This has rather widens the already existing gaps. To create the notion that the youths are in charge or have a say in the collective affairs of their community is a blunder considering the fact their voices are suppressed by the political class. The youths however can anticipate the political behavior and response of the government and thus take to violence as a medium to vent their aggression and perceived marginalization and by so cultism becomes the foundation sustaining and creating a widespread fire that could guarantee them leverage for negotiation, recognition and sustenance KII/Male/Amakaofia/29years.

Data from the FGD corroborates the Key Informant opinion

“I still reiterate that the cause of cultism and consequent killings in Ohaji/Egbema has been ongoing especially in Asaobile for no just cause. The struggle, the contention, political connections or agitation for self is still unclear with regards to the killings and cult related activities ongoing in the community. To me, this is simply a fight for supremacy between the cult groups. This leaves me with so much anger that instead of these energies to be channeled on government and the oil multinationals to come to terms with engaging the youths meaningfully and in key positions of opportunities and economic power relations, it is wrongly channeled. In the past we have it on record in on several forms of agitations such as peaceful protests, killings, kidnapping, that was once rampant in this region as a result of its been a boundary community to Rivers state and Omoku to be precise which harboured Don Wani and his cohorts who had his network of cult gangs fomenting kidnappig in Egbema here before he escaped to Enugu. (KII/Male/44years/Youth Leader/Awara., FGD/Male/48years/Ochia/Asaobile/Youth Leader.)

In addition,

“when you come to most towns in Ohaji/Egbema you would see most of our youths hustling and doing some illicit forms of livelihood jobs at stealthy timing such as what most of our daughters do here at night when the town is turned into “obodo na ewu oku na abali” (a city that flames at night). Our women are worst hit and left with the burden of marginalization because they no longer have full capacity and support of the men or the youths to help them in farming. This is largely due livelihood shift and yet they are saddled with the responsibility of providing

sustenance and food for their dependent families but with little manpower support, FGD/Women Leader/Awara 39years.

On the other side, the young men when their frustration grows to a bottled up point, they go in bunkering. Although the business is becoming less lucrative because all the security agencies don't open their eyes for settlement. So umuaboy would go further to enter street so that chopping go fall in for them by so the likelihood of getting involved with kidnapping, violence and cultism to meet up is inseparable. FGD/Male/50years/Egbema.

Excerpts from these response indicates that marginalization is primarily viewed by the respondent as 'unfair treatment, sidelining and unequal distribution of resources. Most of the youths acknowledged it as "injustice meted upon the community". The findings also showed that the resources allocated to other communities of Niger-Delta in terms of infrastructure and road network are largely absent in Ohaji/Egbema when compared with the derivation of oil wealth from the Multinational operating in the communities against the level of marginalization seen all over the community from the dilapidated educational structures, unequal distribution of health centers and absent of professional health practitioners across the communities. Marginalization was believed to be normative feeling of manifestation in subtle and blatant forms of violence. More than average youths in these communities are patriots and promoters of current decadence found around adolescents' consumption of psychoactive substance and drug abuse, prostitution and robbery and sabotage of community peace. These further reinforces subjective insecurity in the community.

Data from primary source reveals that various categories of difficulties the youths have been saddled with and experienced overtime in Ohaji/Egbema communities is diverse. There are no evidences to show that they are an oil producing community because they lack governance at all levels, from the state, the local government and within the community or village political circles. A look around the community would show that there is infrastructural decay, environmental challenges such as flooding and erosion, poor capacity development of the youth. Marginalization was perceived as the worse form of injustice and inequity for a community well enriched in gas and housing multinational corporations like SPDC and AGIP, SEPLAT, and WATERSMITH but lacks the power resources and share of tangible economic development structures. Notwithstanding, the fact, the community is key to steering socioeconomic development and food security of the state yet; evidence is deficient to show for it in all ramifications of livelihood development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The existing studies on socioeconomic marginalization and youth restiveness have scarcely focused on absence of meaningful skills and empowerment projects, stark poverty, unemployment, lack of access to education, uneven level of attention to community development in most Niger Delta States. Based on the wealth of these existing studies, this research has extended efforts to bring to fore the frontiers of existing knowledge by examining not only obvious forms of restiveness that have become commonplace issues to security of lives and overall livelihood challenges within the Oil producing communities, but have added some nuance by introducing the experiences of the youths as a more complex category that is changing in composition and constantly expanding due to the inclusion and integration of a minority of female youths and adolescents who altogether seek legitimacy in their deviant behavior to become restiveness .

The study concludes that the established relationship of the oil multinationals and the youths in the communities have failed to create a roadmap of tangible development, reduce the landscape of inequality and social injustice in Ohaji/Egbema. This has failed to improve the level of access of the youths to gain employment or have economic advantage as oil producing community beneficiaries and thus have impacted on their inability to at least appropriate good living assets. In another parlance, the paucity of functional health centres, healthcare professionals within the communities have continually impacted on community's health system as it still hangs on a balance. From the foregoing, there is relative wide gap in living standard for the average youths in the communities thus, this creates a double-edge consequence to the current risky lifestyles steaming from the social relations evoked by oil politics and underdevelopment within the communities.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the study recommends the following:

The social institutions in the communities must put concerted efforts to strengthen the relationships with the youth groups in order to address the inequity and build a good support system for local governance within the community level. By this, key stakeholders in the Oil Multinationals and the beneficiaries at the community level must be mandated to commit all derivation funds towards practical skills and empowerment programs void of any form of prejudice.

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