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A Survey On The Level Of Skills Needed And The Skills Possessed By The Youths Of The Niger Delta Region Of Nigeria For Self Reliance

D.O. Arubayi

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INTRODUCTION

For any nation to be economically viable, the quality of skills possessed by its members will determine the success of the nation's economy. The Niger Delta Region covers about 70,000 square kilometers and is noted for its peculiar and difficult terrain. The whole area is transversed and crisscrossed by a large number of rivulets streams, canals, and creeks. The people of the Niger Delta have continued to live with a lot of environmental problems from health hazards due to lack of safe water and available land. Despite the rich resources, the Niger Delta Region is characterized by the most crushing poverty level in the world. Woolen, (2003) stated that 70% of the youths in this region are on poverty line and that about two million youths are unemployed, while about 40% of the youths are illiterates.

This shocking revelation of the high unemployment and illiteracy rate of youths could be amongst some of the causes of youths restiveness and disturbance in the rich oil providing communities. Okorie (2001), observed that the high unemployment rate, massive illiteracy and high unskilled persons has hampered productive economic activity in the Niger Delta Region. Looking at the ongoing crisis in the oil rich region of the Niger Delta, equipping the individuals with saleable skills are imperative and required the urgent attention of all stakeholders. Okorie, (2000) defined skill as an organized sequence of actions, proficiency executed and usually displaying a flexible but systematic temporal patterning. Skill is the ability to do something competently and it can only be acquired through learning and practice. Practice and skill acquisition are interrelated. Creative thoughts have to be translated into practical action and through repetition, the skill in an individual is developed which subsequently becomes acquired skill. Skill development is important in harnessing the natural resources available in the Niger Delta Region. Equipping the individual with saleable skills through vocational training will help to raise their productivity level and their living standard. As the individuals are gainfully engaged, unemployment rate would reduce through economic empowerment programmes.

The Nigerian educational system has constantly highlighted, the importance of functional and practical education in the revised National Policy on Education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004), from this document on education, there is a strong advocacy for functional literacy and self reliance. Arubayi (2003), also defined functional literacy as a programme of education which provides the illiterate adult with the opportunity to learn how to read and write, acquire and apply new and more efficient occupational skills. Individuals must be empowered through functional education geared towards the manpower need of the Niger Delta. To curb youth restiveness there is the need to get them involved in an educational programmes that is functional, challenging and provide adequate opportunities to acquire and apply new and more efficient occupational skills for self reliance.

Looking at the peculiarity of the terrain and geographic location of the Niger Delta Region, Niger Delta Development Commission N.D.D.C. (2003), identified the following skills needed for occupational mobility:-

- * Boat building
- * Block molding
- * Electrical works (installation and wiring)
- * Refrigeration engineering and repairs
- * Small scale and subsistent farming of food crops
- * Fashion designing
- * Tailoring
- * Catering (indoor/outdoor)
- * Confectionaries
- * Cloth weaving
- * Plumbing works
- * Computer operation
- * Auto electrician
- * Auto machineries
- * Wheel balancing and alignment
- * Wood works and furniture making
- * Panel beating
- * Bicycle repairing
- * Watch repairing
- * Rubber work
- * Fabrication works
- * Air conditioner repairs and maintenance
- * Vulcanizing
- * Cutting of hair
- * Graphics
- * Sculpturing

- * Shoe making
- * Shoe repairs
- * Spray painting
- * Fine art and craft (cane chairs, table, and basket , mat, trays)
- * Boat servicing and repairs
- * Canoe carving
- * Distillation of gin
- * Fishing net making
- * Fishing net repairs
- * Hair plaiting/weaving
- * Hat making
- * Hair dressing/fixing of wigs
- * Bead making

Adapted from Niger Delta Development Commission N.D.D.C. (2003)

From the list of identified 33 skills needed for occupational mobility, the researcher identified six additional skills such as; fishing net making, fishing net repairs, Hair plaiting/weaving, Hat making, Hair dressing/fixing of wigs and bead making. Altogether, there are 39 skills. It is obvious that there are problems in terms of the skills possessed and the skills needed for occupational mobility.

Statement of Problem

Woolen, (2003) observed that despite the rich resources in the Niger Delta Region, this area is characterized by neglect and a high poverty level in the world. Statistics showed that 70% of the people in this region are on poverty line and about two million unemployed youths, while a striking 40% of its people are illiterates. This raises some serious question in the mind of the researcher. How can an oil rich region like the Niger Delta be characterized by such high poverty level, youth restiveness, illiteracy, high unemployment, food insecurity and land degradation? No nation can improve its standard of living except through the proper education of its members through skill acquisition, this gives rise to the pertinent questions of this research work which were formulated to provide a lead to this study.

Research Questions

- What are the skills needed by the people of the Niger Delta Region?
- What are the skills possessed for occupational mobility and self-reliance?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to find out the level of skills needed by youths in the Niger Delta Region and the skills they possessed in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

Significance of Study

This study will be of great benefit to the people of Niger Delta Region and the entire Nation. Skills development through education would help to provide means of livelihood to the people. The people would be gainfully employed, their creative ability, intelligence would be channeled in the right direction, thus giving the people a feeling of belonging which would help them build their emotional and psychological make up.

With acquired skills, youths would be either self employed or employed by cooperate bodies. With the means of livelihood, youth restiveness would be curbed as their standard of living improves with improved economical situation.

Lecturers, Researchers, Students and Government parastatal would have information and knowledge from this research study that might be beneficial for further research studies. Stakeholders from the Niger Delta Region would use the information provided from this research work to plan programmes that would improve the condition of living of the youths.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

An expost facto research design which is descriptive in nature was adopted for this study. There was no manipulation of variables. The researcher only studied

events after they have occurred. The target population for this study consisted of all youths estimated to be 8,000 in the Niger Delta Region. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to select 210 subjects for the study. The questionnaire was administered and 207 completed questionnaires were return of in usable form which made up 96% of returns.

To generate the data for this study, a questionnaire with a list of identified 39 skills was used. Subjects were made to tick (✓) for any skill they already have and tick (x) for any skill they do not yet possess. The questionnaire was made up of two sections. Section A solicited for demographic information such as sex, age, marital status, and educational level. While section B consisted of 39 skills identified as needed for the Niger Delta Region. The data collected was analysed using simple frequency counts and percentages. The total responses of each item was tabulated and the findings are presented below.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of data was based on the response of the 207 participants of this research study. Simple frequency counts and percentages were the statistics used to analyse the data. The results have been presented in Table 1

Table1. The skills needed and possessed by the Youth of the Niger Delta Region.

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Participants	No	Skills needed	No	Skills possessed	%
Males	119	29	74.3%	3	8%
Females	88	10	25.6%	7	18%
Total	207	39	100%		

Shown on table 1, above are the number of skills needed and possessed by the youths of the Niger Delta Region. There were 207 (two hundred and seven) participants in the research study, out of which the males population was 119 (One hundred and nineteen) while the females population was 88 (eighty-eight). Thirty nine 39 skills were identified as skills needed by male and female participants. Out of the thirty-nine skills needed by male and female participants, 29 (74.5%) were identified as needed skills by males while 10, (25.6%) were needed by females. Out the 29 skills needed by males, they possessed only 03 (8%) of the identified needed skills; while the females possessed 07 (18%) of the identified needed skills. The skills possessed by males were; small scale and subsistent farming of food crops, catering (indoor/outdoor) and computer operation, while the skills possessed by females included small scale and subsistent farming of food crops, catering (indoor/outdoor) tailoring, computer operation, Hair dressing/fixing and bead making, (see Appendix).

Generally males and females possessed 26% of the identified needed skills. This finding is contrary to what the National Policy on Education (2004) document advocated, that education should be made functional and provide practical experiences that would enable its recipient acquire skills needed for self-reliance. The findings from this work goes further to support Woolen (2003), earlier assertion that 70% of the youths in this region are on poverty lines unemployed and lacked adequate skills for occupational mobility.

The implication of this finding is that, if the youths who made up the workforce possess only 26% of the skills needed to make them productive contributors to the economic well being of the nation, then serious thought must be given to address the issue. For any nation to be economically viable, the quality of skills possessed by its members would determine the success of the nation's economy. These findings, further buttressed Okorie (2001) assertion that there are high unemployment rate, massive illiteracy and high unskilled persons in the Niger Delta Region.

Skill acquisition is very valuable to modern educational practices, thus Okorie (2003), sees skill acquisition as the bedrock of modern educational practices, needed to fit individuals into the world of work, education for living (life skills) and self reliance. Unfortunately, these findings are contrary to "sane" thinking as it was revealed that skills such as canoe carving, distillation of gin, Arts and crafts were amongst the notable skills needed, for but was surprising to note that these skills ranked the least possessed by the youths. It is necessary to note that skill development is very important in harnessing the national resources available and arresting youths restiveness in the Niger Delta Region.

Conclusions

Conclusively, this study looked into the skills needed and the skills actually possessed by the people of the Niger Delta Region. Findings from this study, paints, a gloomy picture of very low level of skills possessed by the youths. Thirty-nine (39) skills were identified as skills needed to be acquired by respondents for occupational mobility, unfortunately, only 26% of the skills needed were possessed. The rate of unemployment, massive illiteracy and poverty could be reduced if the individuals are exposed to learning by doing or skill acquisition, which places the individual in a better position for economic empowerment. Moreover, the issue of youths restiveness could be curbed if they are exposed to creative thinking which can be translated into practical action through repetition and practice. This would help to raise the productivity level and standard of living of the individual.

Recommendations

- Based on the findings of this research work, massive campaign should be mounted and awareness created on the importance of skill acquisition as a means of economic empowerment.
- [if !supportLists] → · More NGOs and oil servicing companies should be engaged in equipping youths with “saleable skills by initiating skill acquisition programmes that are practicable and meet the needs of the people in their geographical locations.
- Incentives should be given to youths who participates in these training programmes such as ‘starter packs” to help them put to practice what they have learnt.
- Curriculum planners should ensure that the curriculum is reviewed and geared towards innovations in the area of skill acquisition for wealth creation and self reliance.

QUESTIONNAIRE

IDENTIFIED SKILLS NEEDED BY THE YOUTHS OF THE NIGER REGION

A SURVEY ON THE LEVEL OF SKILLS POSSESSED AND LEVEL OF SKILLS NEEDED BY YOUTHS IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION.

Educational Background: Primary school ☐ Secondary Education ☐
NCE ☐ Graduate ☐
Marital Status: Single ☐ Married ☐
Age Range: 15-25 ☐ 25-35 ☐ Above 35 ☐
Instructions: Tick (✓) for section actually skills possessed and tick (x) for Skills not possessed.

S/N	IDENTIFIED SKILLS NEEDED	ACTUAL SKILLS (✓) POSSESSED NEEDED	SKILLS NOT (X) POSSESSED
1.	Boat building		
2.	Blocking molding		

3.	Electrical works (installation and wiring)		
4.	Refrigeration engineering and repairs		
5.	Small scale and subsistent farming of food crops		
6.	Fashion designing		
7.	Tailoring		
8.	Catering (indoor/outdoor)		
9.	Confectionaries		
10.	Cloth weaving		
11.	Plumbing works		
12.	Computer operation		
13.	Auto electrician		
14.	Auto machineries		
15.	Wheel balancing and alignment		
16.	Wood works and furniture making		
17.	Panel beating		
18.	Bicycle repairing		
19.	Watch repairing		

20.	Rubber work		
21.	Fabrication works		
22.	Air conditioner repairs and maintenance		
23.	Vulcanizing		
24.	Cutting of hair		
25.	Graphics		
26.	Sculpturing		
27.	Shoe repairs		
28.	Shoe repairs		
29.	Spray painting		
30.	Fine art and craft (cane chairs, table, and basket, mat, trays)		
31.	Boat servicing and repairs		
32.	Canoe carving		
33.	Distillation of gin		
34.	Fishing net making		
35.	Fishing net repairs		
36.	Hair plaiting/weaving		
37.	Hat making		

38.	Hair dressing/fixing of wigs		
39.	Bead making		

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