

**SKILLS ACQUISITION TRAINING A SEQUENCE OF SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: UGBOBI KINGDOM AS AN EXAMPLE**

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Abstract

Skills acquisition training that constitutes part of the sustainable community development, an initiative of the oil companies for their host communities in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, underscores the main thrust of this paper. The target is Ugbobi kingdom an Ekpeye community of about ten villages, located in Ahoada West Local Government Area of Rivers State. Here, two major multi-national oil companies, viz; Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) and the Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) have their operational concessions also known as oil mining lease (OML). They have over the years introduced it to bolster their statutory responsibilities for their host communities. The dynamics of the discourse is grappled as the paper has posed a pertinent question that its answer remains critical for the study; it is; 'is skills acquisition a panacea for sustainable community development'? It affirms that skills acquisition being integral of sustainable community development is key to the growth of any nation. It serves as a catalyst for employment generation and a requisite for self-reliance. Its introduction in Ugbobi Kingdom by Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) and Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) by and large, is designed to equip her youths so to mitigate unemployment that has always resulted to restiveness. Alas, youths of the kingdom should be equipped with employable skills and knowledge for them to meet the increasing demand for technical cum vocational manpower needs amongst others. Thus, the imperatives of skills acquisition for sustainable community development.

Keywords: *Development, Kingdom, Skills Acquisition, Sustainable Community, Training*

Introduction

Unemployment rate in Nigeria has been a challenging phenomenon. It has alarmingly been on the increase year in and year out. Youths of the country have kept on searching for job opportunities with dashed hopes. Granted that government at all levels, be it , federal, states and local are duty bound to provide employment opportunities or create jobs for the youths, the question then remains how many of such opportunities abound? This is amidst the growing rate of population on the one hand, and the available opportunities in the means of dwindling economy on the other. Putting it in straight terms; the corollary is that the population of the country has gotten to the point that it can no longer cope in relation to providing employment to the population. It is unimaginable to believe that job will easily be available upon graduation from school.

One recalls that in the 1970s and 1980s, employment opportunities were said not to be as elusive as they are today. By then upon graduation from school, job was readily available for fresh graduates. One was said to be either gainfully absorbed into the government establishments or into the private sector, the choice was ones. The number of graduates turned

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out from the tertiary institutions then easily matched the available jobs, however, with the increase in the number of students admitted into the universities and other tertiary institutions of learning now as well as the accreditation of new courses, the number of graduates have also increased concomitantly. The irony this phenomenon poses is that graduates go to the unemployment market and increase the number. Whatever is the consequence of unemployment to the economy and indeed to the government is not within the purview of the present work. But it suffices to mention that youth unemployment according to Wilson (2002) has often resulted in restiveness. Allied to the increasing number of tertiary institutions especially the universities is the fact that they are too liberal and too theoretical (Onwuchukwa, 2002).

Their programmes are oriented towards theories rather than skills and practical experiences. As a result of which public impression about vocational and technical education had been apathetical and derogatory. The reason to this was that graduates of technical and vocational education were dubbed “never-do-wells”. Who could not secure admissions for other disciplines. By then, people regarded vocational education as a course for the never-do-wells. Thus, parents preferred their children and wards to study courses like Pharmacy, Medicine, Law and Accounting etc. (Ellah, 2014). Granted that our university system was theoretical and literary in nature at foundation, the question remains whether that foundation was really right in view of the fact that the needed skills which enhance self-realization, self-employment, diverse job disposition, employment generation, effective function and crime reduction are seemingly lacking? African universities are said to be lacking in impartation of skills on the students (Uzochukwu, 2014). Besides, Nigeria’s educational practices were tailored towards acquisition of the so called “White Collar” job after graduation. These so called jobs are no longer there and have not also led us anywhere in the development of our nation (Oguejifor, 2014). Unemployment has soared as a result of our universities not paying too much attention to skills acquisition or entrepreneurial skills, as a result, there has been an urgent call for more emphasis on skills acquisition as the only sure way of stemming unemployment of youths and graduates in Nigeria. Vocational education is a panacea for unemployment. It is a tool for securing employment and sustainable development, albeit sustainable community development. It is designed to offer training so to improve individual’s general proficiency and capacity especially in relation to their present or future occupation. Skills acquisition is important for self-economic sustenance and self-motivation in terms of labour relations.

Governments have been concerned about the recurring incidences of youth unemployment in the country, Ugbobi kingdom in particular. Both the federal and state governments have made remarkable efforts to ameliorate the situation. They have established agencies and also planned programmes for youth employment. For instance, in 1987, the Federal government under General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida established the National Directorate of Employment (NDE,). The National Directorate of Employment according to Useni et al., (j2014) had so much lofty programmes including vocational skills development in form of fashion designing, furniture, carpentry, GSM repairs/maintenance, auto-mechanic foundry, metal works, and iron bending etc. were undertaken by the directorate. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was also not left out in the crusade for the introduction of skills acquisition programme in its scheme. During the one month orientation for the Corp members, skills acquisition is taught them. It is then envisaged that upon passing out in the year, they should have acquired the skills for them to engage themselves thereafter.

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Furthermore, we have to also note that the National Policy on Education (2013) has training and impartation of skills on individuals who shall be self-reliant as one of its goals. By and large, if this goal is achieved, it will certainly lead to sustainable technological development.

The present study is Ugbobi Kingdom an Ekpeye speaking people of about ten villages that is located in the present Ahoada West Local Government Area of Rivers State. Two major oil companies are operating in the area. They are the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) which started operation there since 1963, and operated (OML 58) and the Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) which have been there since 1980s and operated (OML 63). The two companies through their sustainable community development programme have barely assisted in training about two hundred youths in skills acquisition.

Skills acquisition training programme organized by the oil companies was designed to solve the perennial problem of unemployment in the country particularly, their host communities, in this case Ugbobi Kingdom. By this, it was anticipated that upon completion of the duration of the programme the recipient would be self-employed and also employ others. The multiplier mien of this is gravitational. The problem of unemployment is not only felt by the unemployed, but also by the government, the parents of these youths, the society in general and the oil companies according to Chief Joseph Ayipi of Ukpeliède Town, Ugbobi kingdom during an oral interview in his residence.

On the part of the government, unemployment rate when it becomes over bearing, makes government feel that it is not responsible. This is owing to the fact that government is the major provider of employment opportunities for her citizens and any government that cannot create job opportunities for her citizens is dubbed irresponsible. On the part of the parents of the youths, they are worried that their children would continue to depend on them even after they had trained them and expected that they would not be independent. On the society generally, unemployment is a societal problem because the society will not be strong financially, anarchy could reign supreme in the society. And for the oil companies, youths of the community could resort to restiveness and prevent them from their usual operation. All this constitutes the problem. What is therefore paramount to this study is to seek for a way out of these maladies. The only recipe is skills acquisition so that youths would be self-reliant or self-employment; and it will foster sustainable community development on the long run.

Skills acquisition and sustainable community development: A Semantic Interpretation

In this section, both shall be defined, this is to give them their desired meaning in logical contexts. According to Ogundele (2013) ,skill is the ability to do something that is needed, while acquisition is the act of getting new knowledge, skills etc. Skill can be acquired through training, education or experience. The essence is to inculcate into the individual how to carry out or discharge his/her responsibilities very well with the new knowledge acquired. And Okorie, cited in Aliyu et al., (2008) defined skill as the “habit of acting, thinking and behaving (attitude) in a specific activity in such a way that the process becomes natural to the individual through repetition or practice, for example, a skill worker who uses hammer to drive in a nail into a hole, employs quick thinking and attitude to be able to get at the point of his target on the nail (Aliyu et al., 2008). Skills acquisition, also known as “vocational enterprise-based skills” is the process whereby practical knowledge is imparted on the trainee who is also the recipient. The main purpose of skills acquisition training is basically to teach technical and

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vocational skills, as implicit in sustainable community development of the recipients. Skills acquisition is defined as a “specific form of learning” and learning, it is the representation of information in memory concerning some environment or cognitive event. Learning refers to an organism storing something about its past in the memory. Skills acquisition refers to a form of prolonged learning about a family of events (Stort, 2005). According to Uzochukwu (2013), skills acquisition is the ability to be trained on a particular task or function and become expert in it, to be skilled is when one undertakes a task and gets used to the functionality of that task.

According to Wilson (2002), skills acquisition is a process whereby practical tasks are properly laid out, planned and steps taken to bring about solution to certain manpower jobs. Gambari (2014) posited that skills acquisition involves the development of a new skill practice or a way of doing things usually gained through training and experience. In defining or outlining the concept of sustainable community development, thoughts will be based on the positions of Bridger and Luloff (2022). For both have stated that, any definition of “the sustainable community development” depends on the definition of sustainable development”. This is understandable because sustainable community development evolved from sustainable development. It “parallel the definitions of sustainable development”. This being the case, we shall begin first by defining sustainable development as a concept.

Sustainable development has been defined as, “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This definition amongst others is the most welcome. It came from the World Commission on Environment and Development (“Our Common Future”) an agency of the United Nations (1987). Similarly, Shell Petroleum Development Company’s Bulletin; “Environmental, economic and social well-being for today and tomorrow” seems to concur with the World Commission on Environment postulate. It defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need”. Further, it says that this definition “contains within it, two concepts; viz

- The concepts of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- The idea of limitations posed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs”.

Further, according to the bulletin, every definition of sustainable development envisions that the world is a system – a system that connects space and time for the humanity. What it implies here is an ideal society that has all the goodies, social organizations etc.

In another of its bulletin as out-lined in its website; <http://sww-sd.shell.com/>. Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) says that “Sustainable Development is about balance and integration. Integrating the economic social and environmental aspects of everything we do and balancing short-term wants with long-term needs. Sustainable Development applies to everyday choices we make such as how we dispose our waste as well as to large regional project”. Adebola in Oguejiofor and Ezebasili (2014), posited that sustainable development is a kind of development that can be initiated and managed properly in such a way as to give attention to community and preservation as people explore and exploit available resources for the enlargement of their existence. Kundan in Ugoh (2008) describes sustainable development as “a construct which envisions development as meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generation”.

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Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) calls it “Sustainable Community Development” implying it is a strategy that places greater emphasis on building and working through strategic partnerships with government, local and international development organizations, the communities and other stakeholders. Its emphasis is focused on economic empowerment, human capital development, healthy living and basic needs (SPDC Annual Report, 2004).

Reasons why oil companies introduced skills acquisition training in their Host communities: Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) & Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC)

There is no gain saying the fact that oil companies, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) and the Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) introduced skills training for the youths of their host communities. Albeit that their efforts could be said not to be enough, but it is apposite nay appropriate to maintain that they introduced skills training as part of their sustainable community development strategies. Reasons shall be expressed in details .In people and the environment: Annual Report on Sustainable Community Development (2004), Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) reported that in its Sustainable Community Development Strategy, it trained 335 youths of its host communities under its “youth development schemes to equip them with vocational (enterprise-based) skills”. This strategy was basically to enable the youths of its host communities to be self-employed and self-reliant. Under it, vocational training equipment were distributed to the youths after the training.

In Shell “Youth Skills Development and Sports” News Bulletin (2005), Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) asserted that it established its Youth Development Scheme (YDS) essentially in support of the national effort to reduce growing unemployment among youths. Further, it opined that Youth Development Scheme (YDS) was its part of intervention strategy for developing youths in its host communities. And that it was aimed primarily at equipping the youths with appropriate skills necessary for creating employment opportunities, and to place emphasis on self-reliance and entrepreneurship. The company maintained that it was constrained by the capital intensive nature of the oil and gas industry for employing more youths from its host communities. To get around this difficulty, Youths Training Scheme (YTS) was launched.

Again, in its “People and the Environment Annual Report” (2004), Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) opined that development of human capital motivated it to introduce skills training in her host communities stressing that human capital development programme combines formal education and youth development programme. Our focus during the year remained on growing essential human resources in the region by improving educational standards, offering university and secondary school scholarships and supporting the development of appropriate school curricula which also includes promoting essential enterprise values among community stakeholders especially the youths”. Further, the company says that they trained 335 youths under their youth development schemes so to equip them with vocational enterprise-based skills.

Total Oil Company asserts that its primary objective for introducing skills acquisition training in its host communities was basically to prepare the youths to contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of their communities through gainful self-employment in their various trades, and in the long run developing themselves to develop others. Wilson (2002) expressed

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why ELF Petroleum Nigerian Limited (Now Total Nigeria Limited) introduced skills acquisition training for the youths of its host communities. He asserts that the main reason why the oil company established the skills acquisition programme was to avert youth restiveness in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni ONELGA Local Government Area. In his own view, Chief Ayipi, a stakeholder of (OML 58), which is Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) operational area also avers that the company introduced skills acquisition training to prevent youth's restiveness because of its failure to employ them.

Sustainable development or sustainable community development of the oil companies

Viz: SPDC AND NAOC

This paper is not an attempt to make a comparison between sustainable development and sustainable community development as concepts in the first instance. It is also not an attempt to juxtapose the two. It is primarily designed to foray into the latter, which is the tool used by the oil companies, viz: Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) and Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) of our study to measure their development strides in their host communities. But albeit that sustainable development had been of primordial adaptation, taking its cue from or variously used by the United Nations Organization (UNO) that has spanned over two decades. Saying it that although the core of the present paper is Sustainable Community Development (SCD), but a peep into the dynamics of the former, Sustainable Development (SD) is imperative and apt to consider. The essence is that Sustainable Development (SD) apart from being an environmental issue is also tagged development. Some other items, particularly those captured are integral to it and talking about development here is somewhat relative. It implies a pragmatic economic development essentially. Thus, although environment which was primarily what sustainable development tries to portray, economic connotation which is implicit in what the present study has set out to relate to, is also its concern. The baseline for our discourse is economic development that inputs skills acquisition. Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) Bulletin aptly puts it. Succinctly "what is sustainable development?. environment, economic and social wellbeing for today and tomorrow". Furthermore, there is the need to state here that the two have variously been applied interchangeably, and they are just the same. They are applied in stark semantic conditions to connote the same thing, but constitute varying degrees of application. The shift began with sustainable development and now sustainable community development. That was how the shift began with Community Assistant (CA), from 1960 – 1997 through Community Development from 1998 –2000 and then Sustainable Community Development in 2004 to present. For the purpose of the present study attention shall be paid to the latter, that is, Sustainable Community Development (SCD). This is as implicit in what the paper sets out to examine, i.e. sustainable community development that mutated into skills acquisition set up by the oil companies in Ugbobi Kingdom in Ekpeye land. My respondents in the communities visited agreed that skills acquisition training is important particularly giving the fact that their youths would benefit from it, but the fact that the oil companies brought only few forms to them meant that there was lack of seriousness on the part of the companies. For instance, HRH, N.S. Ekpete of Odhilugboji town, believed that what Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) brings as skills acquisition training form is a far cry from their expectation. He maintains that bringing only two to three skills acquisition forms to his community yearly is grossly inadequate. And to Chief U.K. Okeneme of Ukpeliende town it would have been better that Shell Petroleum

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Development Company (SPDC) does not bother to bring the skills acquisition training forms to his community than engaging them. He believes that bringing only two of the forms meant that many youths lack trust to the oil company. Speaking with Chief Nwabueze Uyi at Odhieke-Ugbobi was also like the other respondents. For he also maintained that their expectations from the oil companies in relation to the skills acquisition training forms brought to them was inadequate. Yes, and only yes skills acquisition was ideally set up by the oil companies in relation with others in the kingdom. But the question is, what is perfectly or imperfectly introduced amidst the outcry it provokes amongst my respondents when I carried out the research study? My respondents tagged the oil companies' skills acquisition as mere window dressing that did not reflect the facts of the matter.

Obstacles to sustainable community development of the oil companies (SPDC) and (NAOC) in Ugbobi Kingdom

Although it has been established that Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) and the Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) adopted the sustainable community development strategy, a plan designed to attract development to Ugbobi kingdom, their host community. The blue print though lofty, but the question has remained, to what extent has the sustainable community development impacted on the society ?

First, using a global approach and then the local, for the fledging initiative in this discourse, we outline what have appeared to be the looming hindrances to sustainable community development. In their work, "Sustainable Community Development: An Interactional Perspective" Bridger and Luloff (2022) gave a clear elucidation of these hindrances. Some of them include:

- i. Power struggle and conflict
- ii. Politics of possibility
- iii. Restiveness.

However, other scholars have also outlined some of the hindrances which I have aligned myself with and which amongst other things include;

- i. Climate change
- ii. Poverty
- iii. Unemployment
- iv. Exclusion

There is no doubt that these and other not mentioned affected or stood as barriers to achieving the sustainable community development initiative in the kingdom.

The respondents in the towns visited were the targeted youths, believed that the skills acquisition initiative of the oil companies was lofty. But that the inadequacy of opportunities behind it made it look unimpressive. They made it clear that the oil companies never provided sufficient opportunities to them; that is opportunities devoid of the struggles and the unhealthy competitions they faced when the need arose. Candidly, this is akin to what Chief Joseph Ayipi of Ukpeliende town had also stated. According to Chief Ayipi, only two or three forms were provided for the teaming youths by the oil companies in each case. At this point he asked, who got and who did not get? It appears that the Sustainable Community Development as propelled by, or oriented in the skills acquisition initiative was good and applauded. As stated earlier, the perennial issue of unemployment which it was supposed to douse still persisted.

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On the part of the initiators, the oil companies, it appears that they prioritized the programme. This is given the fact that they had to also engage in other programmes that have economic values to their host communities.

Conclusion

Perhaps the saying is right and factual too, that the desire to be involved in youth empowerment in their host communities led to the establishment or setting up of skills acquisition. Abinitio, the statements have been that empowerment of the youths of their host communities remained the corporate responsibility of the oil companies. Skills acquisition training or vocational skills in specificity, barring other developmental items in the sustainable community development nexus is of utmost importance.

The underlying reality is the sustainable community development programme of the oil companies that focused on the empowerment of the youths. It has been mentioned that the inability of the oil companies to give gainful employment opportunities to them; seemingly to avoid restiveness, led to this. Also skill training was for the recipients to be self-reliant on the long run. With certitude that the programme would have a multiplier effect; essentially because the trainee would after-ward employ others is a complete elucidation. Against the backdrop of the pervasive restiveness and other anti-developmental activities going on in these communities, it has begun to cast doubts to the success of the sustainable development goal thus, a failure. Putting it in all perspectives , sustainable community development strategy is lofty. The proponents, particularly the oil companies in this regard have imputed that barring the late or recent orgies of restiveness in their host communities, the strategy was designed to be a huge success. The oil companies had severally maintained though that youth employment was never their responsibility, but that of the government's. And that even though in most cases, they had given preferences to them, it was not compelling, but due to their magnanimity.

Sustainable Community Development (SCD) coming to the reality of purposeness is ideal. For every society must be sustainably inclined. A sustainable society has all the requisites; economic status of our discourse inclusive. And when this fails, the society is unsustainable. The corollary to this is that every society desires to be sustainable.

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