

STATE-SOCIETY GAP AND DEVELOPMENT CONUNDRUM IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF DELTA STATE

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Abstract

Nigeria is contemporarily plagued by a myriad of socioeconomic and political problems that are detrimental to its developmental prospects. Among the factors that have inhibited Nigeria's development, poor leadership has arguably been pivotal and highly consequential, creating a state-society gap that makes the adoption of a representative system of government through democracy look like a mistake. Hence, the study examined "State-Society Gap and Development Conundrum in Nigeria: A Study of Delta State." Two research objectives were established, from which two research questions were formulated. The study was anchored on structural theory and state-centered theory of development. The cross-sectional research design was used for the study and a sample of four hundred (400) respondents was drawn for the study using the simple random sampling technique. To collect data from respondents, a structured questionnaire was used and the data obtained were analysed using the Arithmetic Mean and Standard Deviation. The data analysis revealed that the poor collaboration of government and associations/unions negatively impacts development in Delta State and the disintegration of the government and other social institutions has facilitated social instability in Delta State. Based on these findings, it was recommended that Delta State government should actively engage with associations, unions, and community-based organisations in planning, implementing, and monitoring development projects and ensure that development initiatives align with local needs and priorities, among others.

Keywords: State-Society Gap, Development, Conundrum, Social Institutions.

Introduction

Globally, the government is regarded as a fundamental element in the socioeconomic development of any country. This is because its responsibilities include the enactment and implementation of effective policies, the provision of employment, infrastructure and security, supporting entrepreneurial ventures and maintaining the overall stability of society. These are some of the reasons adduced by John Locke to have facilitated the undertaking of the social contract by the members of different societies worldwide. It is against this background that people pay taxes and surrender their autonomy to the government. In many countries of the world, governments make meaningful efforts to drive development, and in some others, the government contributes to the impoverishment of its subjects over time (Akahomen, 2018). While most countries in Europe are already highly industrialised and developed, some others in Asia and South America have made huge strides in the development trajectory - some non-Western countries like Japan, Singapore, and South Korea, etc., have already reached the status of developed nations - African countries, especially those in Sub-Saharan Africa have failed to attain meaningful levels of development. According to

Hassan (2022), Sub-Saharan African countries have been plagued by underdevelopment since their independence from the colonial masters. Indeed, post-colonial African countries have widely experienced extreme poverty, unemployment, inequalities, insecurity and other socioeconomic ailments that have persisted in the region.

Nigeria has a population of over 216 million placing it among the 10 most populated countries on the planet (IMF, 2022) and despite the abundant resources and access to cheap and vast labour, this has not translated to development instead the vast oil reserves in Nigeria have been a curse for the country (Akinola, 2020; Lashitew&Werker, 2020). Nigeria is contemporarily plagued by a myriad of socioeconomic and political problems that are debilitating its developmental prospects. Over 60 percent of the population is below the absolute poverty line, the unemployment rate is abnormally high, and the nation grapples with a lack of economic diversification, insufficient infrastructure, a high inflation rate, weak and inefficient institutions, insecurity, and poor leadership. These problematic phenomena are inhibiting the socioeconomic development efforts within the country (World Bank, 2021). This is why the World Bank made a recent press release emphasizing the need for Nigeria's government to urgently reduce inflation, as the current rate is one of the highest worldwide and the principal cause is due to gasoline prices (World Bank, 2022). Nigeria's development conundrum has further been intensified through rising unemployment rates and the inefficiency of the poverty reduction programs that are products of poor governance (IMF, 2022 and World Bank, 2022).

Among all the aforementioned factors that have inhibited Nigeria's development, poor leadership has arguably been pivotal and highly consequential. The poor leadership has created a state-society gap that makes the adoption of a representative system of government through democracy look like a mistake. This is because most of the government officials that were supposed to represent the people (society) in government, now represent only themselves and their family interests (Hassan, 2022), consequently leaving issues of public good unattended to. The link between Nigeria's bad leadership and underdevelopment is unambiguous. The various military regimes and the final transition to democratic rule which has been marred by electoral rigging and violence have inevitably culminated in the massive lack of infrastructures and a significant percentage of Nigerians that live below \$1 daily. Indeed the Nigerian government cannot vindicate itself from the current travails of underdevelopment in the country. It is not an overstatement that the government no longer stands or represents the will and needs of the people with the current state of things in the country (Dennis, 2023; Akahomen, 2018).

Sadly, Delta State which is one of the major oil producing regions of the country is following a similar trajectory as the country itself. The level of infrastructural development in the state is dwarfed in comparison to states like Lagos, Rivers, AkwaIbom, etc. The level of unemployment in the state is alarmingly high and youth restiveness (especially cultism) has become prevalent. It seems like mismanagement of funds is the norm with the government of Delta State seeing that there is a very high level of poverty in the state in spite of the huge federal allocation it gets. The political elite in Delta State have become a class of their own, alienating the ordinary citizens from politics. There is no visible cooperation between the government and other social institutions, associations, unions and NGOs in the state. Furthermore, citizens lack a direct platform of channelling their grievances to the government.

These factors which characterise the state-society gap have contributed to the appalling state of Delta State. In spite of the imperativeness of this problem, many studies have failed to specifically investigate this subject.

Statement of the Problem

The development conundrum in Nigeria is a paradox when considered against the background of its vast human and natural resources. According to Bailey (2022), Nigeria is ranked 163rd in the United Nation's Human Development Index (HDI) report. This places it among the least developed countries of the world despite being regarded as having Africa's largest economy. The National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] (2023) reports that based on the Multidimensional Poverty Index survey, more than 133 million people (that is, about 63 percent of Nigerians) in Nigeria suffer from multidimensional poverty. This poverty rate is among the highest in Africa. Apart from poverty, other underdevelopment phenomena like unemployment, insecurity, inequality (both gender and income inequality), youth restiveness, infrastructural deficiency, and corruption are prevalent in the Nigerian society. The preponderance of these phenomena significantly diminishes the chances of Nigeria's development (Hassan, 2022). While Nigeria is lagging behind in the community of nations, Delta State is following a similar trajectory in regards to development. The State is among the most underdeveloped in Nigeria, in spite of its humongous crude oil deposit. The level of poverty and unemployment in Delta State is appallingly high. Over the years, political efficiency has been clouded by corruption and other political ills. Funds that are meant for the building of public projects are pocketed by government officials and used for personal ventures. It must be stated that while factors like corruption, incompetence, lack of funds, over-dependence on crude oil, ethnic and religious pluralism, etc., have been identified and investigated as major factors inhibiting development in Delta State and Nigeria in general, the impact of the increasing gap between the government and those they govern - the alienation of the public from the administrative process - on underdevelopment has not been properly investigated.

In recent times, government officials have gradually become a class of their own and failed miserably at representing the people who elected them. Many of the policies and programmes developed do not accurately reflect the needs of the people in the society. Also, there has been a failure of government to partner with those associations or unions that are nearer the people to better understand the development needs of the people. This is a big oversight in the quest for development of any State. Unions like the Urhobo Progressive Union (UPU), Isoko Development Union (IDU), among others, are not integrated into the development agenda of Government. All of these contribute immensely to the incessant increase in poverty, unemployment, insecurity, infrastructural deficiency and inequality in the State. However, seeing that there is a paucity of literature on this subject, this study was designed to bridge the existing gap in literature. The study took a diversion from the traditional studies of development conundrum that mainly concentrated on issues like insecurity, corruption, ethnicity, etc., and investigated the role that the state-society gap has played in the underdevelopment of Delta State.

Research Objectives

The study specifically aimed to:

1. Find out the impact of weak poor collaboration between government and associations/unions on development in Delta State; and
2. Determine the extent to which the disintegration between the government and other social institutions has contributed to social instability in Delta State.

Research Questions

The following questions were posed to guide the study:

1. What is the impact of inadequate collaboration between government and associations/unions on development in Delta State?
2. To what extent has the disintegration between the government and other social institutions contributed social instability in Delta State?

Government and Associations/Unions' Collaboration and Development in Delta State

An association/union is a central resource that increases trust (Ostrom & Ahn 2008; Putnam, 2000) and connects individuals, different groups and societies (Verba & Nie, 1987). This refers to a collection or union of people which shared interests. This refers to a simple union made up of people whose overall aim was promoting their social, cultural, economic and political interests. Associations or unions are part of the democratic process of the Nigerian society. All over the world, the maturity and strength of a country's democracy is often measured by the level of development and political efficiency in that country. Hence, highly democratic countries such as Canada, France, U.S.A, Great Britain, among others, have a high level of development and political efficiency and accountability, while countries like Nigeria, Zimbabwe, among others have a low level of development and political efficiency implying a more infantile democracy in them. It must be stated that the political awareness and massive involvement of citizens in political matters signifies political stability and democracy (Arisukwu, et al., 2020).

Associations/unions such as the Urhobo Progressive Union (UPU), Anioma Progressive Union (APU) and Isoko Development Union (IDU), among others have been developed by different ethnic groups in Nigeria to foster and promote their collective development and to have a voice in the polity of the country. They represent associations formed by people of the same ethnicity or region with very a simple structure to promote collective interests. Development can also be fostered through Town Unions. The interests fostered are not only political but also include cultural, social and economic, among others (Adelakun, 2011). A union has always been a community agency through which political actions for development purposes have been pursued for the people. Apart from undertaking several social, cultural, and development projects, they continue to serve as the organ for local administration for ethnic people. The influence of the union has over time stimulated political awareness and interest in the people represented by the union (Denis, 2020). Since in a democratic political system, the citizens can be involved in the political process and decision making by joining political party, voting during election, participating in electoral campaign, community affairs and other political activities, associations help to facilitate the process. The level and pattern of political participation of the citizens determine, to some extent, the success of the political system (Odebode, 2011; Bertucci, 2007).

Ultimately, associations like the UPU and IDU are able to get the people which they represent to become more politically active as these people begin to feel that they have a voice and socio-political identity that is represented and signified by the association. This overtime has a tendency of improving people's political engagement and overall development. In the Delta State and Nigeria in general, the government hardly cooperates with associations and unions pragmatically. Some of these associations operate independently of government support or collaboration. Often times, government does not collaborate with existing unions in the formulation of policies, development of programmes and infrastructural installations. This is why the needs of most of the associations/unions and by extension the needs of those they represent, have not been met (Falade, 2014; Lundin, Nordström-Skans & Zetterberg, 2016).

Disintegration between the Government and other Social institutions and Social Instability in Delta State

Social institutions are the mechanisms through which the society achieve its various needs and achieve social stability. The responsibilities of providing vital social services such as education, health, promoting family values, economy, politics and promotion of moral values in the society are giving to the social institutions (Abeka, 2021). Social institutions are interdependent; change in one institution inevitably causes adjustments in other areas. For example, changes in education by way of producing unqualified graduates can affect the quality of service in the labour market. Edeh and Udoikah (2018) opined that over the years, the Nigerian government has refused to support social institutions like the family, education, economy and health among others. The needed services to strengthen and empower social institutions to stimulate social development are lacking.

Social problems such as unemployment, insecurity, poverty and corruption are becoming more amplified than the dividends of democracy. Sustainable democracy is an aspect of democracy whose focus is to address issues of disparity, inequalities, discrimination, and oppression, marginalization of minority groups, insecurity, unemployment and poverty. There are weak institutional structures, pervasive poverty, unemployment, insecurity and corruption in Nigeria. These problems are quite worrisome as they affect people at all levels of social arrangements. Studies have identified poor learning environment and shortage of facilities as factors crippling the activities of the educational institutions (Okeke, 2015). The educational sector in Nigeria has suffered a lot of setbacks in the past administration. Some of these setbacks cut across delay in payment of salaries of teachers, acute shortage of staff, lack of infrastructural facilities, and incessant strike action by the teachers due to insensitivity of government to their plight and others.

The health sector in the country has also been negatively impacted by the activities of the government over the years. Accessibility and affordability of health care services would include evaluation of the adequacy of the numbers of healthcare facilities and the proper distribution of these facilities to allow easy and immediate access to a medical facility for every patient who needs one at affordable cost (Musawa, 2014). Generally, the relationship between the government and other political institutions has been negatively affected over time in Delta state and the level of interdependence and interconnectedness has dwindled drastically. Government has failed to fund the economy, education, family, health, among other social institutions and religion no longer exercise significant impact on government officials. This has left the political institution significantly isolated from other social institutions in the

society, which has in no small measure been detrimental to the development of Delta State and overall social stability (Okeke, 2015). There is no doubt that there is a high level of social instability in Delta state which can be seen in the poor level of economic growth, high inflation rates, surging crime rates and youth unrest, unemployment, poverty, etc. All these elements of social instability have further inhibited development in the State (Akanle, 2013; Adegami& Adepoju,2017).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework entails relevant and concise theories that have been chosen to explicate the phenomena under study. The relevant theories adopted in this study are the structural theory and state-centred theory.

> Structural Theory of Development

Structural theory of development can be traced to the contributions of Raul Prebisch, Celso Furtado, Aníbal Pinto, Osvaldo Sunkel, and Dudley Seers. The theory adopts the basic tenets of structural functionalist perspective to explain the phenomenon of development in the society. According to this theory, since society is a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability, development cannot take place where there is no cooperation between the different parts the society is made up of. This approach looks at development in the society through a macro-level orientation, which is a broad focus on the social structures that shape society as a whole; especially the political institution, educational institution and economic institution. According to Ahmed (2016), the theory believes that since society evolves like organisms, development can only take place when there is an evolution and cooperation between the various institutions and groups in the society. For example, to achieve meaningful development, society needs to properly educate its children, produce employment for them, govern its affairs, and provide security for its members. Once, these functions are not properly grown into their expected forms, there will be development conundrum. When these structures, as augmented by the government, perform their roles or functions properly, there will be progress in the society and in fact, society inherently moves in the direction of order and stability, which will subsequently lead to development.

> State-Centred Theory of Development

The state-centred theory is a theory that can be traced to Jean Bodin, Thomas Oatley and John Foran, among others. The theory developed fully in the 1980s and 1990s in response to the inadequacies of the dependency theory of development and by extension, the modernisation theory of development. The theory asserts that for socio-economic development to be achieved in a country, the state has a significant role to play. Furthermore, Malek-Ahmadi (2023) argued that the government represents a voluntary compact or agreement between the citizens which retain a dominant position in promoting their social and economic well-being. Since the state has the ability of self-governance, it can also instigate development. Therefore, national policy makers interact with economy independently, with intention of raising social welfare (Oatley, 2012). Since states are responsible for their development, it can be stated that the existing development conundrum which has a nexus with the state-society gap in Delta state, is a function of the failure of the government to efficiently perform its role and engage other institutions and organizations in the state. The government has failed to involve and develop education, the economy, NGOs, Associations, Unions, and most importantly, the people being governed. This has created several developmental challenges like poverty,

unemployment, social instability, political instability, crime, and economic recession, among others in Delta state. This phenomenon has made the state to be one of the most underdeveloped states in Nigeria, despite having one of the highest oil reserves (Amadi,2020). The high level of underdevelopment in the state is highly appalling and devastating for the citizens. This is why the state-society gap must be bridged to facilitate meaningful development in the state.

Methodology

The cross-sectional research design was used in the study. Based on the National Population Commission's population projection for 2022, there are 5,636,145 in Delta State (NPC, 2020). It is from this figure that a sample size of 400 was drawn. This study used the simple random sampling technique. This sampling technique was applied through a multi-stage procedure. First, Delta State was divided according to its three senatorial districts (Delta North, Delta Central and Delta South). From the three senatorial districts, the simple random sampling technique was used to select 48 percent of the 25 Local Government Areas in Delta State, which was 12 LGAs. The 12 LGAs were distributed across each senatorial district, to arrive at 4 LGAs in each senatorial district. The selection process is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Selection

S/N	Senatorial Districts	L.G.A	Place	Sample Size
1	Delta Central	Ethiope East	Abraka	17
			Eku	17
		Ughelli North	Agbarho	17
			Ughelli	17
		Sapele	Amukpe	16
			Mosogar	16
		Udu	Aladja	17
			Oto-Udu	17
2	Delta North	Aniocha North	IsseleUkwu	17
			Unicha-Ugbo	17
		Ika North-East	OwaOyibu	16
			Umunede	17
		Ndokwa West	Ogume	16
			Utagba-Uno	16
		Ukwuani	Obiaruku	17
			Umutu	17
3	Delta South	Isoko North	Emevor	17
			Ozoro	17
		Patani	Kabowei	16
			Odoruba	16
		Warri South	Ejeba	17
			Okere	17
		Warri South-West	Okerenkoko	17
			Isaba	16
Total		12 LGAs	24 Places	400

Fieldwork, 2024

The structured questionnaire titled “*State-Society Gap and Development Conundrum in Nigeria*” was used as the main instrument of data collection. The questionnaire contained Parts I and II to reflect the two research objectives. And they comprised closed-ended questions derived from the themes of the objectives. To determine the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, it was subjected to face and content validity tests, and the test-re-test content validity tests. A reliability coefficient of ≥ 0.79 was derived, which implies excellent reliability. The data collected were analysed using arithmetic mean and standard deviation.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the impact of inadequate collaboration between government and associations/unions on development in Delta State?

4.2.1 Analysis of Questionnaire Statements

Table 2: Analysis of the Questionnaire’s Part 1

S/N	Inadequate collaboration of government and associations/unions, and development in Delta State	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	In Delta State, government does not significantly collaborate with unions in the state	3.78	0.90	Accept
2	The association/unions are hardly sought out by the political officials in the state	3.54	0.98	Accept
3	The failure of government to collaborate with associations/unions has affected their capacity to improve lives positively	3.90	0.83	Accept
4	Since associations/unions represent the interests of a specific group in society, the absence of government’s collaboration affects its ability to understand the needs of those specific groups of people	3.80	0.88	Accept
5	Lack of collaboration with associations/unions makes the government to create programmes that are out of touch with the needs of the people	3.61	0.94	Accept

Fieldwork, 2024

Table 3 shows the inadequate collaboration between the government and associations in Delta State. The respondents accepted that in Delta State, government does not significantly collaborate with unions (with a Mean of 3.78 and Standard Deviation of 0.90), the association/unions are hardly sought out by the political officials (with a Mean of 3.54 and Standard Deviation of 0.98), the failure of government to collaborate with associations/unions has affected their capacity to improve lives positively (with a Mean of 3.90 and Standard Deviation of 0.83), since associations/unions represent the interests of a specific group in society, the absence of government collaboration affects its ability to understand the needs of those specific groups of people (with a Mean of 3.80 and Standard Deviation of 0.83) and lack of collaboration with associations/unions makes the government create programmes that are out of touch with the needs of the people (with a Mean of 3.61 and Standard Deviation of 0.94).

Research Question 2: To what extent has the disintegration between the government and other social institutions contributed to social instability in Delta State?

Table 3: Analysis of Questionnaire's Part 2

S/N	Disintegration of the government and other social institutions and social instability in Delta State	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1	There is significant disintegration between the government and other social institutions in Delta state	3.76	0.91	Accept
2	The failure of the government to support the economy has created unemployment and economic hardship	4.04	0.75	Accept
3	The failure of government to support families in Delta state has increased poverty and hunger	3.93	0.80	Accept
4	The continuous decline of religious influence (especially its core values and norms) over government officials has increased the level of corruption in government	3.03	1.01	Accept
5	The failure of government to fund education properly has reduced the standard of education in the State	3.90	0.83	Accept

Fieldwork, 2024

Table 3 shows the opinion of respondents on the disintegration of the government and other social institutions and social instability in Delta State. The respondents accepted that there is significant disintegration between the government and other social institutions in Delta state (with a Mean of 3.76 and Standard Deviation of 0.91), failure of the government to support the economy has created unemployment and economic hardship (with a Mean of 4.04 and Standard Deviation of 0.75), failure of government to support families in Delta state has increased poverty and hunger (with a Mean of 3.93 and Standard Deviation of 0.80), continuous decline of religious influence (especially its core values and norms) over government officials has increased the level of corruption in government (with a Mean of 3.03 and Standard Deviation of 1.01) and failure of government to fund education properly has reduced the standard of education in the State (with a Mean of 3.90 and Standard Deviation of 0.83).

Discussion of Findings

Firstly, the data analysis showed that government does not significantly collaborate with unions. It must be stated that the lack of effective collaboration between the government and associations/unions often results in inadequate service delivery. This impacts essential public services, such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, leading to lower overall development indicators in the state. The absence of collaboration can also contribute to a lack of accountability. When government agencies and associations/unions do not work together, it becomes more challenging to hold either party accountable for their actions or the allocation of resources meant for development projects. Poor collaboration may give rise to conflicts and tensions between the government and these groups, further hampering development efforts. These conflicts can disrupt projects, deter investments, and exacerbate socio-political instability and failure to harness the expertise and resources of associations/unions can result in missed opportunities for sustainable development. These organizations often have valuable local knowledge and grassroots networks that, if engaged effectively, can facilitate development initiatives. This finding is corroborated by Falade (2014), who opined that often,

the government does not collaborate with existing unions in the formulation of policies, development of programmes, and infrastructural installations, which is why the needs of most of the associations/unions, and by extension the needs of those they represent, have not been met.

Secondly, the data analysis there is a significant disintegration between the government and other social institutions in Delta State. The disintegration of government and the social institutions can erode social cohesion within the state. When trust and cooperation between government agencies and other institutions break down, it often leads to a fragmented society where individuals and groups may pursue their interests independently, sometimes to the detriment of the broader community. A government that is disconnected from other social institutions may struggle to provide essential services, enforce the rule of law, and maintain order. This is corroborated by Okeke (2014), who argued that in Nigeria, the government has failed to fund the economy, education, family, and health, among other social institutions, leaving the political institution significantly isolated from other social institutions in the society, which has in no small measure been detrimental to development and overall social stability.

Conclusion

The state-society gap in Delta State plays a pivotal role in shaping the region's development trajectory. Poor collaboration between the government and various social institutions, including associations and unions, has been identified as a significant obstacle to development in the State. The disintegration of these vital connections erodes social cohesion, weakens governance, and contributes to social instability. The role played by political representatives in the state cannot be underestimated and the inadequate representation, political patronage, and gaps in development planning have a direct bearing on Delta State's underdevelopment. Effective political leadership is essential to channel resources and policies toward the genuine needs of the populace. In light of these, it becomes glaring that addressing the state-society gap, enhancing political representation, and promoting citizen engagement are fundamental prerequisites for fostering development and social stability in Delta State. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been outlined:

1. The Delta State government should actively engage with associations, unions, and community-based organizations in planning, implementing, and monitoring development projects.
2. The government should be regularly engage in dialogue and consultation with relevant agencies and provide support for the social institutions to build trust and ensure that development initiatives align with needs and priorities of the people.
3. There should be an implementation of efficient measures to enhance transparency in government operations, including budget allocations and resource management, and an establishment of mechanisms for independent assessment of government activities to ensure accountability at all levels of governance.

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