LOCAL ECONOMY AND HEALTH: POTATOES PRODUCTION AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR RURAL REPOPULATION IN AGADAMA, DELTA STATE, NIGERIA.
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BY

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Abstract

Agadama is an Urhobo language-speaking agrarian community in Uwheru clan, Ughelli-North LGA, Delta state, Nigeria which specializes in production of Potatoes and other crops in commercial quantity. Rather than experiencing rural depopulation, Agadama community experiences seasonal rural repopulation due to its conscious concentration in the production of commercial potatoes and the magnitude of this activity, conspicuously catches the attention of a new entrant (stranger/visitor) into the society. This is a qualitative ethnographic study targeted at exploring the socio-economic potentials and the health of a potato-producing community in the oil-rich Niger-Delta area, south-south Nigeria. It employed participant observation, key informant interview, and in-depth interview as data collection methods with content analysis involving ‘thick description’; anchored on the location theory. The study revealed that, the commercialization of potatoes makes Agadama a melting pot of culture and has potentials of making the community a center for great economic opportunities, ensuring improved standard of living, healthy population and ethnic integration, if properly harnessed. The study advocates for a ruralization of relevant industries that could process surplus agricultural products, provide storage and health facilities which has implication for rural repopulation.

Key words: Rural repopulation, ethnic integration, agricultural production, Depopulation, health, local economy.
INTRODUCTION

The gradual but steady depopulation of rural areas in Nigeria is best assessed from its fatalistic consequences replete in urban areas like increased unemployment, overpopulation of city centers, hyper-skyrocketing crimes against humanity such as kidnapping, theft, and armed robbery, human trafficking, prostitution, pick-pocketing, among others. On the other hand, the rural areas in Nigeria has a share in the fatalism of depopulation which includes, rupture of existing primordial social networks, existence of a disproportionate population filled with the aged, rape of aged women by youngsters at night, loss of able bodied men and women for agricultural activities, among others. According to Pinilla et al. (2008:2), “Depopulation may be viewed as a specific case of a more general phenomenon, which was the rural exodus caused by modern economic growth. During the period of industrialization and the subsequent economic growth, cities expanded rapidly, concentrating the location first of industry and then services. This expansion required the recruitment of a large labor force drawn mainly from rural areas, where the increasing substitution of farm machinery for muscle power further encouraged significant rural-to-urban migration.”

Contrary to the above, what is obtainable in Agadama is urban-rural migration which might be termed repopulation unlike the over-utilized cliché rural-urban migration. Repopulation in this study implies the conscious mass return of able bodied population back to the rural areas for the purpose of engaging in agrarian activities. Several reasons give credence to rural repopulation in Nigeria, like graduate unemployment, inability to secure admission to the very few Nigerian universities, frustrations of city life which makes residents to adopt the culture of poverty in cities, recent economic crunch/recession which resulted to the sack of workers in banks and local industries, retirement, among others. It is pertinent to point out that rural repopulation is not a common phenomenon in Nigeria. Thus, this agrees with Pinilla et al. (2008:3) that, “until recent times, interesting signs of repopulation may be found, which are associated with a range of causes”. Howbeit, repopulation (urban to rural migration) has lots of socio-economic outcomes in places where this phenomenon has been observed. Thus, ibid, (2008:19), reports that in recent decades however, the new phenomenon of urban-to-rural migration has emerged in many countries, affecting the rural environment together with other
developments such as changes in the economic functionality of the territory. The case of Agadama community is seasonal repopulation where natives return back home in mass during planting season in order to engage in their traditional local economy (to plant/cultivate potatoes in commercial quantity).

Local economy therefore refers to an indigenous population’s system of production, distribution and consumption of resources (Kottak 2004). Ethnographic reports reveal that the interplay between economy and environment is one of the bases for health concerns among communities (Dao and Brieger 1995; Oyadoke et al. 2004; McElroy, and Townsend, 1989). It is therefore, obvious that all communities despite their levels of developments have evolved their common and preferred economic ways of life, shared and accepted among members of the group (Ajala 2009:72). This shared way of life trigger mass return and attracts other ethnic groups to the community. The reasons for this mass return to Agadama village is often economic inclined like improvement of personal standard of living and growth, but may not be attributed to commonly rehearsed reasons of unemployment, collapse of business ventures, and the like. The Agadama environment if complemented with adequate access to quality health care facilities is conducive for their preferred local economy (agricultural production). According to Embers (2007:230) health is a mirror to culture. A healthy environment is thus, equal to a healthy agrarian population for optimum production output, all things being equal. But observations and life experiences show that all things are never equal as a state of complete health may not be attainable. Hence, Hans et al. (2003:4 citing WHO, 1978, WHO, 2004) in their definition of health captures the above position, “health is therefore a state of complete physical, psychological, biological, social and cultural balance and not a mere absence of diseases”. If the above definition is accepted, then the attainment of a state of complete health is a utopia and therefore not attainable in most rural communities in Nigeria. The attainment of complete health in rural communities is dependent on several factors among which are location/proximity of health facilities and the ease at which health care services are accessed by those who need it in terms of ‘availability, accessibility, and affordability’ (Massoud, 2008: 15-24). Following from the above, the researcher sought to investigate the origin of Agadama community in relation to their primary occupation, to establish what
category of the population are involved in this primary occupation, what health facilities are available in Agadama and how accessible, affordable; evaluate how economically viable is this occupation and in what specific ways has it developed the Agadama community and identify government and community roles/efforts as well as limitations to commercialization and rural industrialization of the products of this primary occupation in Agadama community.

Methods and Theoretical Discussions
This qualitative ethnographic study employed participant observation, key informant interview (KII) and in-depth interview (IDI) as data collection methods with content analysis involving ‘thick description’ anchored on the location theory. The study was based in Ughelli North Local Government Area (LGA) of Delta state. Ughelli North is one of the twenty-five (25) local government areas (LGAs) in Delta state. The state has about 2.93% (4,098,391) of Nigeria’s over 140 million 2006 population census figures out of which Ughelli North boast of about 320,687 inhabitants (FRN Official Gazette 2009: B26).

Specifically, respondents were randomly selected and inter-subjectively interviewed; IDI consisted of open-ended questions covering both the research questions and objectives. KII involved mainly people who are considered to be knowledgeable or aware of happenings (18 years and above) in the community and how its affairs are managed like community heads/leaders, among others. The researcher employed participant observation by living with the natives and immersing oneself daily in the activities in Agadama community for about one year August 2008 to September 2009, and has been embarking on series of verification visits after the field work, the last of which took place in December 2012. Huge qualitative data was generated; content analysis involved routine interaction with the data, which entails transcription and translation of data collected with electronic devices, from Urhobo language to English language. This was subsequently followed with sorting of data according to research objectives to enable report writing and some ethnographic extrapolations to be made.

The location theory was employed as an explanatory framework for this study as it emphasizes how economic factors affect the availability, accessibility, affordability and utilization of public facilities. The central point of the theory is the location of welfare services in areas where
aggregate transportation costs is minimized (Asakitikpi2001:42). The theory focuses on the spatial distribution of economic activities with focus on transfer costs, and this refers to both transport and inconveniences of transporting one’s self to and from the place where such services are rendered/accessed.

FINDINGS

Origin and Primary Occupation of Agadama Community

Agadama is one of the numerous coastal communities in Ughelli-North LGA of Delta state, Nigeria. Historically, Agadama is associated to a hunter known as Idama, who migrated from Uwheru clan (‘main town’ as it is often called by the Agadama natives) through a bush path/track. Oral tradition (prehistory) has it that, the main town Uwheru gave birth to five children, with the last being a female known as Ohoro, namely:

(i) Erovie:- Uhwoviooro, Uruvwrigbo, Odja
(ii) Ehere:- main town, Agadama, Okugbe-Owarovwo, Ogode, Uvwriche, Ophororo
(iii) Urede:-main town, Oreba, Avwon
(iv) Egbo:-Oro-ohonor
(v) Ohoro

Kingship formerly resides with the first child ‘Erovie’ but with enlightenment and civilization, other sub-clans began to agitate and as a result, leadership of Uwheru clan is now rotated among five sub-clans that makes up the main town/clan.

The migrating hunter (Idama) located a space (Agadama) within a forest which was favorable to hunting, fishing and farming occupation than where he came from (Uwheru) and decided to reside there. Idama then invited his brothers and friends to his new found space and they lived peacefully concentrating on fishing, hunting and farming. It was other people who used the track (‘oga’) found by Idama that named the space after the founding father as ‘Oga Idama’ meaning ‘track of Idama’. From constant usage, the community derived its name as Agadama. The name Agadama is often mistaken for an ijaw (Izon) town in Bayelsa state known as ‘Agudama’, this mistaken identity was advantageous to Agadama people for a while, as they
secured employment in the Bayelsa state civil service as teachers, police, military etc; but when it was discovered, the opportunity was blocked (Personal communication December, 2012). This reflects that, tribalism and ethnicity plays a great role in job placement or employment opportunities even for the minutest job in Nigeria.

The Agadama community is divided into two quarters (a) Uruvworo and (b) Ururhere. Each of the quarters is subdivided into three (3) streets (as they are locally called among the natives, but may not be same in English meaning of streets). The first quarter (Uruvworo) is made up of Oteka, Ogbijo and Ogbewe, and the second quarter includes Enyerukoni, Etovie and Ogbese. The two quarters in the community often competed during festivals and ceremonies through wrestling matches, etc (Pers. com. 30/12/2012).

The indigenes of Agadama majorly engage in farming, complimented with fishing and hunting. Agadama community numbers about 5000 persons, 70 percent of which are farmers, 20 percent are learned graduates from Nigerian universities, mostly civil servants, who combine their jobs with farming activities, while 10 percent are trained artisans, shop owners, cyclist/bike riders, among others. The community market day takes place once in every eight (8) days, where farm produce like fresh fish, okra, groundnuts, pepper and potatoes are sold. There is also a special market known as ‘Ode market’ which opens only during the harvest of potatoes in commercial quantities, where people from various parts of Nigeria come to buy potatoes with trucks, pick-up vans, and buses. The people are so engrossed in the production of potatoes such that schools and churches record low turn-outs in attendance especially during planting and harvesting seasons as well as on market days.

**Community Labour-Supply and ethnic integration in Agadama Community**

Labour-supply is an essential aspect of most agrarian communities and its importance to agriculture can therefore not be over emphasized. In a tropical environment like Agadama community, labour is required at all stages of potatoes production like clearing the land of grasses, (slash and burn) McElroy and Townsend, (1989:176-179), digging/tilling of heaps or mounds, weeding, harvesting, transportation etc. Potatoes is propagated vegetatively (Pers. Com.28/12/2012) through nursery, thereafter the leafy strands are cut and planted on tilled soil.
surfaces like mounds and ridges. These mounds are not dug/tilled by Agadama indigenes but by hired labourers or migrant farmers, mostly able bodied youths and men from other parts of Nigeria like the Tiv from Vandekia LGA, Benue state (alias food basket of the nation), Taraba state boys particularly Jukun tribe, people from Ogoja area in Cross-river state, others are from the Nupe, and a few Igbo tribesmen, who are attracted to the community mostly to tap latex/rubber. This seasonal repopulation makes the community a melting pot of cultures and encourage ethnic integration as the various tribes are seen interacting in the evenings, after returning from farm work; while indigenes use the opportunity to negotiate for the next days’ labour-supply. A ‘portion of land’ (traditionally measured 10 feet (width) by 20 feet length) is tilled for one thousand eight hundred naira (₦1,800) or more, although the price for labour/tillage is not fixed, but depended on the degree of interaction between demand and supply of labour. This is because these labourers are not permanently resident in Agadama community as they are seasonal migrant farm workers/labourers, who migrate from their various states of origin to the community as suppliers of labour for potatoes and other agricultural crop production. In one of the interview sessions (pers. Com. 28/12/12), some of the migrant farm labourers from the Tiv tribe revealed that:

‘they are attracted to the community because they want to earn money to pay school fees and meet other needs; as most of them are secondary school students in Benue state, only a few of them are married men who are either poor, orphans, motherless/fatherless and as such helpless’.

Though, an indigenous respondent observed that ‘there is this believe that what attracts the Tiv boys to Agadama is that there is little money in circulation in Benue state compared to the oil-rich Niger-Delta areas, Benue state only have surplus cheap food but no cash’(Pers. Com. 28/12/12). These farm labourers migrate to the community from November/December and return in February (as schools resume from Christmas vacation) to their states of origin. A few indigenes who could not afford the prices charged by the labourers use their able-bodied sons/husbands who are often reluctant to do so, while the women/wives plant nursery, weed grasses, and tend the crops to maturity. Migrant labourers were formerly used for weeding but indigenes complain that, it is often roughly done and as such weeding is now left for the women. The above, authenticates the assertion by Onwuejeogwu, (1992:24) that “in small-
scale societies, women are the controllers of agriculture. The husband does the hard farm work and the wife does the planting and weeding. The farm produce is controlled by her, and the husband does the trading, especially externally. The woman has to obtain all she wants and sell everything through her husband. Women are farmers because of the religious beliefs about fertility: since women are fertile they should do the farm work. Women are therefore looked upon with high esteem in Africa”. In recent times however, potatoes cultivators in Agadama community are gradually adopting the use of chemicals for grass/weed eradication, thereby relieving women of this task. During harvest, household members carry bags of potatoes on their heads to riverbanks where canoe paddlers (both male/female) are paid to transport across to track-roads leading to the residential parts of the community. After which they are taken with vehicles to ‘ode market’ for sale to buyers who come from Port-harcourt, Warri, Asaba, Bayelsa, Owerri, Ughelli and other cities.

**Camping Agriculture/farming in Agadama**

The researcher observed that Agadama community potatoes production revolves around a rare cultural practice that can best be described as ‘camp agriculture/farming’. The indigenous potatoes farmers live in their farms from January to May as they take with them beddings, cooking utensils and clothes to make their periods of stay comfortable. In most of these farms, they construct make shift houses/shelters with bamboo, raffia palms, wood, mud and sometimes zinc which is about 3 or 4 feet above the ground, this is because the environment is always water-logged in the coastal-flooded terrain almost all year round (water-level is high during the rains but low during the dry seasons), while some others live in the open under trees. Many factors inform their choice of living in their farms like the issue of time and cash management. Agadama people believe that ‘camp living/farming’; help to save time, transport cost/fares to and fro their farms the next day to farms. This notwithstanding, is not without disadvantages such as exposure to lots of health hazards like cold/pneumonia, insects and snakes bites, attacks by dangerous animals/humans (Fulani cattle herders continuously attack these farmers, (Idowu, 2012), malaria among others. The incidences and prevalence of malaria due to mosquitoes is high because the swampy environment of the oil-rich Niger-Delta
encourages water stagnation, water-logging, flooding and almost all year round wet lands. The farmers do not go to camps with mosquitoes nets. This accounts for the rate of morbidity and mortality in Agadama community. Thus, Nora and Richard, (2006:1) asserts that, today, environmental problems threaten not only natural ecological qualities but also humanity’s very existence. In spite of the above threats, the economic benefits from commercial sweet potatoes production, encourages the Agadama people/community to remain unrelenting and focused with their local economy-farming occupation.

Economic Viability and Development due to Potatoes Production in Agadama

The benefits accruing from the cultivation of commercial potatoes in Agadama community is quite enormous, as there is a host of direct and indirect beneficiaries. Direct beneficiaries are the cultivators, buyers and traders; while indirect beneficiaries includes, the transporters, tillers, weed removers, harvesters, canoe paddlers, etc. It thus, contributes to the economic, social, cultural development and improvement of the general standard of living in the community. But, it is pertinent to however state that, ‘not everybody profit equally in the economic growth of communities’ (Pinilla et al. 2008). There are variation in the economic rewards accruing to an individual and this dependent on whether one is a direct or indirect participant in the local economy.

The production of potatoes in commercial quantity is not only done in Agadama but has also been observed to be the major pre-occupation of most farming communities located within Uwheru clan in Ughelli-north LGA of the oil-rich Delta state. Other crops planted in commercial quantities are groundnuts, cassava, okra, pepper, rubber/latex plantations, among others. Early clearing and planting of potatoes begins November to March, late clearing/planting starts from April/May. Both periods exhibits extreme weather conditions, but has positive and negative results: early planting of nursery potatoes strands/leafy stems is often affected by excessive heat from sunlight/rays; while late planting of potatoes is affected by excessive rainfall being a water-logged terrain/environment. Most respondents (90%) revealed that the best period of planting potatoes is February-March as the climate is moderate at this period. The amount/price, and quantity and quality of harvested potatoes are dependent on climate, time
of planting and fertility of the soil. The potatoes are uprooted/harvested at varying periods depending when it was planted (early or late), and they come in different sizes (bigger sizes are often harvested from distant fertile farm lands, while smaller size are harvested from infertile over-used farmlands which are often closer to the residential areas); the smaller ones are locally described as ‘santa’, and the size of the potatoes determines the price. Early planters and harvesters are often very few because only a few can take the risk of tilling a hard soil under a scorching sun before the rains, thus early harvesters could sell a bag of potatoes as much as two thousand five hundred to three thousand naira (₦2500 - ₦3000). The more the potatoes supplied to the ‘ode potatoes market’, the lesser the price, thus at surplus-peak period, the price of a bag of potatoes could drop as low as seven hundred to five hundred (₦700-₦500) naira per bag. An average potatoes cultivator in Agadama cultivates ten to twenty (10-20) ‘portions’ of land and harvests about 250 bags, while full time cultivators could harvest more in a farming season/year; thus, making up to seven hundred and fifty thousand to a million (₦750,000-100,000,000)naira after harvest. This could run into millions of naira for an
individual, where more than 20 portions of lands were cultivated.

![Image of bags of potatoes]

Figure 1: Some bags of potatoes ready for sale at Agadama market.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of potatoes yields per portion of land</th>
<th>Number of harvested bags per portion of land</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor yield</td>
<td>5 bags of potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate yields</td>
<td>15-20 bags of potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorably high yields</td>
<td>30-40 bags of potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptionally high yields</td>
<td>50 bags and above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Shows the number of potatoes bags harvested per the traditional ‘portion of land’ (10 feet in width by 20 feet in length).

Developmentally, commercial potatoes production has immensely improved the standard of living of the Agadama people individually and collectively as a community. Cultivators’ per capita income increases seasonally during harvest and is reflected in their increased purchases of new vehicles, motor bikes, clothes, good diets, marriage ceremonies and other cultural celebrations done at this period. Though, about 60% of Agadama population still lives in mud
houses with thatch roofs, pockets of new block/cement houses with modern corrugated roofing sheets could be sighted within the nooks and crannies of the community. A few are able to send their wards to secondary schools and universities to acquire formal education. It was observed that most graduates from this community even when they are employed make it a point of duty or necessity to return home (some return permanently and go to work in urban centers from the village while others chose to remain in urban centers but return seasonally) to embark on sweet potatoes production in commercial quantities, the output are sold and cash rewards are used to embark on capital projects like building houses and marrying a new wife, since the people are not averse to polygamy. This is what most respondents described as ‘marriage-competition’ at this period of harvest. However, optimum output is often not realized due to a host of limiting factors that are environmental, socio-cultural, and economic and policy related.

**Factors Inhibiting the Commercialization of Potatoes Production in Agadama Community**

According to Oke, (2006:139), factors like environment; culture and technology determine the efficiency of the type of subsistence pattern or economic systems employed by any society. This study observed that, these factors also serve as limitations to local economies. There are myriads of inhibiting factors to the commercialization of potatoes production in Agadama. Environmentally, the community is located within a coastal, swampy water-logged terrain of the Niger-delta south-south, Nigeria and as such the environment is always flooded, farmers need canoes to move to their farms as there are no roads to the farms, only a few tracks/paths created by constant usage. When the rains are at its peak, the water levels become so high and scare farmers from going to harvest their crops on time/early. When crops are not harvested on time they get rotten due to the ‘acidic nature of the soil of West African soil’ (Ogundele, 2001:14), thereby leading to economic loss to the farmer. Thus, environmental determinism plays outs in regulating and shaping the activities, occupation, type of technology utilized, and the general culture of the people in Agadama community even in the entire Niger-delta as a whole.
Socio-culturally, one limiting factor to the general agricultural practice in this area is the poor literacy level of the community population as about 60% of the people are non-literate; they lack effective planning skills in terms of managing money as they squander money made during harvest on frivolities/ceremonies after harvest and sales; only to start searching for lenders during farming seasons. The farmers often get capital for cultivation by borrowing from cooperatives and other lending outfits or wealthy individuals whose percentage interest is overwhelmingly high. Thus, there is need for the Federal Government through the Ministry of Agriculture to popularize/familiarize rural farmers with its programs on the ‘e-wallet initiative’ in conjunction with states and local governments which is designed to provide funds, and farm inputs such as fertilizers, fish fingerlings, seedlings, chemicals etc for farmers (Radio Nigeria Jingles March, 2013).

Technologically, crude implements such as machetes/cutlasses, hoes, sticks, human-power take the centre stage during cultivation, as there are no agricultural machineries such as tractors, plough, harvesters, and chemicals like fertilizers which could have accelerated the results/outputs of their farming activities and encourage stress-free farming in the area. The absence of these machineries affect the farmers health-wise, the people look older due to stress as they lack rest, (a respondent even observed that some Agadama farmers wish/pray there are no nights so that they can continue working all day long, Pers. Com. 28/12/12), and as such they are susceptible to a host of latent and manifest health risks like high blood pressure, stroke, hernia, and premature death. Specifically, males in Agadama constantly undergo surgical operation due to hernia.

The farmers also lack adequate skills on bush fallowing, shifting cultivation, mixed farming and storage skills. In fact, lack of storage is also a huge problem to the Agadama farmers, as they cannot harvest and keep the potatoes for long as buyers prefer ‘fresh from the farm potatoes’. Those harvested days earlier before the seasonal ‘ode market day’ which takes place every 4 days loose patronage or are sold at lower/‘give-away’ prices. Agadama community is therefore in dire need of storage facility as well as the need to construct/build local industries for processing farm products.
The year 2012 would remain indelible in Nigeria as the year the heavens let loose the rains which led to uncontrollable flooding into communities of which Agadama was completely inundated, with exception of the tarred road. Olalekan, (2012), reported that the magnitude of the flood attracted the Federal government, where President Jonathan observed that ‘25% of Nigerians were displaced and made immediate provision of a total of N17.6 billion in direct financial assistance to the affected States’ categorized into four based on degree of severity as follows:

Category A: Oyo, Kogi, Benue, Plateau, Adamawa, Delta, Bayelsa and Anambra.
Category B: Jigawa, Kano, Bauchi, Kaduna, Niger, Nasarawa, Taraba, Cross-River, Edo, Lagos and Imo.
Category C: Kwara, Katsina, Gombe, Ogun, Ondo, Ebonyi, Abia and Rivers

All Category A States received N500m each, Category B States N400m each, Category C States N300m each, and Category D States N250m each’. Lives were lost, properties destroyed, farm lands were washed away, residential areas were inundated, houses and homes were filled with water to the roof thereby chasing its occupants out to relocate to friends and relatives living at higher planes, others preferred the temporary refugee camps provided by the governments of various state, mostly in schools. Pupils and students could not go to schools while the devastating flood lasted, although temporary teachers were sent to some of these camps but most never showed up to their designated areas. Most of the flood victims complained of food shortages in the camps and where they are available, the sharing formula and who shares the items was a problem as there were accusations and counter accusations of smuggling the items out to people who were not flood victims. Some community leaders who were in-charge of
Figure 2: Entrance to Agadama community inundated with water during the 2012 flood incidence in Nigeria.

However, it is pertinent to point out that, flooding is a normal phenomenon in Agadama community and the community has devised culturally acceptable/adaptable ways of managing it but the flood in 2012 was different and abnormal; it started in September and ended in November, it was at its peak in October. The impact of the flood in Agadama was grave and it is inconceivable to state that as at the time of writing this report, the community has not got its direct share of the 500 million naira allocated to Delta state. The farmers whose crops were washed away are faced with the challenge of raising funds to buy new seedlings, stems,
The most threatening problem on the general agricultural production and health of people in Agadama community which requires urgent government intervention as well as responsive action from the Urhobo nation at home and in diaspora is the series of attacks by Fulani pastoralist on members of Uwheru clan/community. The gruesome killing of Agadama natives by the Fulani herdsmen can be traced to 2005 (Pers. Com. December, 2012), ‘when the cattle herdsmen paid the community for three years to pasture their animals within the environment in the area. The negotiations turned sour when the farmers discovered that, the cattle was destroying their crops and requested that the pastoralist leave the area on the expiration of their payment. The herdsmen never left, but became very antagonistic and resorted to violence, using dangerous weapons such as daggers, knives, opening fire with guns on citing any
They raped women, turned chemicals in drinking wells thereby poisoning the people, and stealing properties/crops left in the farms/camp huts’. Although, Timura (2011:103) observed that, “Anthropologists have developed and refined models linking natural resource scarcity to violence, leading to a more critical actor- and perception-centered account that takes the social and cultural context of resource relations as their starting point”. But we do not think the issue here is a case of ‘resource scarcity related violence/conflicts’, but that of ethnic rivalry and ethnocentrism, since groups in a plural society can still co-exist with little compromise and mutual understanding. The excerpt below is one of the many news reports by journalists on the conflicts between Agadama-Uhweru and herdsmen.

“The Indigenes of Uwheru clan in Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta State, recently stormed the State House of Assembly in Asaba to protest incessant killings, maiming and raping of their people by Hausa/Fulani herdsmen. The protesters besieged the House of Assembly complex with leaves and placards to register their grievances before the assembly leadership. The arrival of the protesting villagers, who conducted themselves in a peaceful and orderly manner, was greeted with public sympathy, as they displayed the photographs of some indigenes of the community who were killed, maimed and others missing as a result of the invasion by the Hausa/Fulani cattle herdsmen in Uwheru land. Some leaders in the community, Mr Daniel Isama, Chief Emmanuel Ufoma and Mrs Christiana Etagbadore, alleged that the Hausa/Fulani herdsmen had for the past years been unleashing mayhem on their people. They said the activities of the herdsmen had led to wanton destruction of their property, including crops and farmlands. The leaders alleged that some indigenes of the community had been killed, while innocent women and girls were raped by the cattle herdsmen who also indulged in armed robberies and stealing in the community. The protesters further alleged that the cattle herdsmen were most times supported by the military detachments that followed them while grazing their cattle. They recalled that in 2004, the criminal excesses of the herdsmen led to violent clashes between the herdsmen and the people which eventually led to the razing down of part of Uwheru clan by the Joint Task Force (JTF). The protesters, therefore, appealed to the state government and the state House of Assembly to intervene so as to forestall further and imminent breakdown of law and order, recalling that the planting season would soon be over and wouldn’t want another attack by the herdsmen……” (Written by Sylvester Idowu, Warri Friday, 09 March 2012.)

The conflicts between the pastoralists and the farmers has worsened since January, 2013 but took an alarming dimension in February as killings were recorded weekly at Agadama and Ohoro throughout February 2013 (Ahon, 2013, Urhobo Times, 2013). Security wise, there is also no police station to quell interpersonal/communal uprising as the community has recorded quite a number of them.
X-Raying the Socio-cultural Problems in Agadama Community

There exist a significant dearth of essential social, economic and health infrastructures/facilities in Agadama community and this goes a long way in inhibiting the productive capacity of this agrarian community.

In terms of accessing basic health-care, the community has little or no evidence of government presence as there are no primary health centers (PHC)/hospitals; Agadama has about seven (7) patent medicine/chemists stores owned by private individuals, who are either retired health personnel, graduates from school of health, persons who acquired drug dispensing skills through apprenticeship among others. Although, 60% of the respondents asserts that government presence was only felt during National Immunization exercises (Pers. Com. December, 2012). The closest health/maternity centers are located at neighbouring communities like Owarovwo, Uwheru, Unenurhe, and Evwreni. The people makes use of Ughelli General Hospital which is about 45 minutes to one hour drive, when a health condition is critical, and in most cases victims often die before getting to the health facility. The researcher witnessed at least two of such deaths while employing participant observation at Agadama between August 2008 and September, 2009.

In terms of educational facilities, the Agadama community has one secondary school and a primary school, as well as a private nursery and primary school namely:

(i) Izeze Primary School Agadama, founded in 1945.
(iii) Koja International Nursery and Primary Agadama, schools 1990.

In terms of road network and transportation, Agadama has only one major tarred road that runs across the community dividing it into two parts. The road is advantageous to the community as it makes the community accessible to traders who come to buy potatoes, groundnuts, cassava, garri (processed cassava), fresh fish, okra and pepper. But the road has grave disadvantages being a newly constructed road by the state government, the villagers are often run-down/killed by vehicles plying the road (this researcher witnessed at least two accidents during the period of this study). This prompted the researcher to write the
community heads asking them to construct bumps on the portions of the road within the community so that drivers can slow down when approaching the community. In terms of power supply/ electricity, as at the last research conducted December 2012, the respondents complained of no power supply to the community since the last one year due to break down of their community’s transformer.

Community/Government Efforts to Ensure Sustained Potatoes Production in Agadama Community

The community has collectively and individually displayed their potential ingenious capability of commercializing potatoes production in the Niger-delta region of Nigeria through self-help in spite of the daunting problems associated with un-mechanized agriculture. They provide most farm inputs such as nursery, seedlings, stems, fertilizers, and implements by themselves without government subsidizing the cost. There are no known records of any effort by government to support Agadama community in their local economy. Although a few respondents recalled the constituency project embarked upon by one Hon. Oshovire who provided solar propelled pipe-borne water which functioned between two weeks to a month and spoilt. The Agadama community generally relies on the use of wells, streams and rain drops from roof tops (these sources of water are contaminated with the sooth/wastes produced by oil companies drilling activities and as such not healthy for drinking). The only reliable source of ‘healthy’ drinking water is sachet-water (‘pure-water’) supplied to the community from nearby urban centers and only a few of the villagers can afford it.

DISCUSSION

Following from the above, some anthropological extrapolations could be made. As peculiar with most anthropological studies, we have holistically x-rayed the emic (insider’s) and etic (outsider’s) perspectives as relates to Agadama local economy and health. Location of welfare facilities has implication for socio-economic growth and development. In fact, the proximity of productive facilities has the capacity to holistically transform a society. This tends to agree with the neo-evolutionist theories championed by Leslie White that “cultures advance as the amount of energy harnessed per capita per year increases, or as the efficiency or the economy
of the means of controlling energy is increased, or both” (Onwuejeogwu, 1992: 15). The technological component of culture is fundamental for any transformation to take place in a society. This is because it would be a movement towards an increasing utilization of the earth’s resources as more energy is accessed. And as more energy is utilized in a system, surpluses are inevitable. Agadama community can be described as a society practicing ‘surplus horticulture’ which is generally viewed as farming carried out with relatively simple tools and methods and yet producing more than they can consume (Oke, 2006:143). A provision of modern agricultural technology and health facilities/personnel to rural areas would geometrically increase this to surplus agricultural enterprise. But, this seems to be a herculean task for the Nigerian government as most of its policies in whatever sector has never worked due to poor implementation. Thus, this study concurs with Massoud, (2008:17) that ‘primary health care delivery has failed in Nigeria over two decades after the introduction of National Health Policy launched in 1988 with its main objective of Health for All by the year 2000’. This failure has been attributed to several factors like the ‘monster- corruption’, inadequate funds, unskilled personnel, lack of purpose-driven leadership and accountability among others and all factors targeted at or revolving on inadequate ‘location’ of resources in order to increase productivity, growth and development thereby encouraging rural repopulation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In summary, we have demonstrated that the vibrancy of any local economy is dependent on the amount of energy harnessed and effectively utilized, and this has implication for rural repopulation. This was done by untangling the web linking local economy, health, ethnic integration, and productive capacity in rural areas. We stressed that an increased productive capacity of rural communities is dependent on the provision and location of essential facilities (like health facilities, agricultural machineries, and local industries in rural areas) in close proximity to those who need them.

We therefore recommend that government and private sector should rise up to their responsibilities to rural areas, while the Urhobo nation and communities should be more proactive, patriotic and attract public and private development investors to their rural
settlements in Nigeria. There is need for government to specifically, provide storage facilities for preservation of surplus agricultural products in Delta state. Local processing industries should be constructed in this area especially to process cassava, potatoes into flour in commercial quantity. Rural communities should make provisions for large expanse of lands to government in their areas to construct local industries for a vibrant local economy. This will attract the youths into agriculture and create employment opportunities for the nations teaming unemployed youths. There is also need for government to register its presence in this community by locating/building health centers and hospitals in close proximity of rural farmers, equipped with qualified health personnel and facilities. Government should also make provision for agricultural loans without stringent bureaucratic protocols and also provide tractors for hire as well as fertilizers at subsidized rates. The government through the ministry of agriculture should re-activate its policy on rural extension workers to educate rural farming communities on best agricultural techniques/practices. There is also need to construct access roads, canoes and boats for coastal agrarian rural communities to access distant fertile lands and to transport their crops to markets.

REFERENCES


Massoud, O. 2008. *Governance and primary health care delivery in Nigeria.* In Sama and Nguyen (eds.) CODESRIA.


