

## Education and Community Development in Contemporary Ogoni Society

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### **Abstract**

*There is a missing link between education and community development. This becomes glaring when considering the educational awareness vis-a-vis the level of development in Ogoni communities today. Education should come with the know-how and consequently the ease with which communities evolve, notwithstanding, there continues to be a downward slope in community development in the face of growing educational awareness. This study uses the functionalist theory of development to evaluate how subsets within communities can functionally impress on the quality of development in their locales. The study argues that development is more organized where the people are involved concluding that by education, most people have a copious understanding of the kind of community development fashionable today but do not know how to engage their kits and kin to buy-in. It recommends the kind of education which sharpens skills and abilities of the people to identify challenges and solve them as subsets in their communities.*

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**Key Terms:** Education, Community and Development

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## I. INTRODUCTION

It is a worrisome development that educational awareness does not translate to community development in this part of the World. This is as a result of skewed development approaches; one which keeps the people aloof from the development process. Education is meant to grow people into productive citizens who use their knowledge, talents, and learned skills to sustain themselves as members of their respective communities and generally that of the whole human race. However, the reality today is that educational awareness in Ogoni communities does not correspond with the reality on ground development wise.

Ogoni is one of the nineteen (19) ethnic groups in Rivers State, Nigeria (Odili, 2012). By population ratio, Ogoni is a major ethnic group in Rivers State accounting for 1/5 of the total population of Rivers State. The 2006 Population Census puts the population of Ogoni and Rivers State at 832,000 and 5,198,717 respectively (NPC Report, 2006). The estimated population presently according to public records stands at over 2 million people from the initial 500,000 people in 1963 (National Census, 1963). The people live in clustered settlement measuring 1,050 square kilometre (404 square mile). There are over 124 villages and towns in Ogoni like Bori, Bane, Bodo, Kono, Norwa, Kpor, Ogale-Nchia, Onne, Bera, Deeyor, among others. Politically, the people are spread across six kingdoms of Ken-Khana, Nyo-Khana, Babbe, Gokana, Tai and Eleme while administratively the area is calibrated into four Local Government Areas. Ogoni is situated in Niger Delta region, the third largest mangrove ecosystem in the World ([www.Unep.org>nigeria>about-og](http://www.Unep.org>nigeria>about-og) accessed 06/02/2023).

The people are educationally advanced today with higher school enrollment ratio into primary, secondary up to tertiary levels vis-à-vis her neighbours.

Toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ogoni record as it affects education and development was a far-cry from community development. Though, there is an improvement in the scenarios pictured in Ken Saro-Wiwa's literature on the people, the transitional effects of education on development is still a far-cry. Wiwa (1992) decries:

...At the moment, the number of our people in the junior and senior cadre of the federal public service and the corporations can be counted on the fingers of one hand...Our children are largely out of school and university, many families have lost their breadwinners and our economy has collapsed completely. Our position is certainly not enviable, not even comparable with other nationalities in Rivers State.

There are still more general indicators of under-development in Ogoni that do not set us at par with some nationalities in Rivers State. For instance, some Ogoni LGAs (Gokana and Tai) still have no Bank; Ogoni meteorological data or information (weather forecast) are not captured among other areas on local radio stations; local radio and television signals have remained poor in Ogoni, most GSM networks in most Ogoni communities are poor or nonexistent; with a parochial subsistent economy; there are fewer organized registered cooperatives that can access loans and grants from

public agencies and banks for common projects; electricity still has not reached 90% of rural communities in the area.

This study tasks educated people of Ogoni extraction to pilot knowledge based development in their communities. A functionalist approach is advocated where subsets drive community development unit by unit. Knowledge based development can be achieved once education is chosen as the vehicle and development as its destination. Thus, it is important to do an appraisal of the functionalist theory of development on the tripod concepts of education, community and development.

## II. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### A. Functionalist theory of Development

Functionalism was developed as a social science theory in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Talcott Parsons. This contribution was a synthesis of the insights of Durkheim, Webber, and others. Parsons' functionalism takes the form of a schema or descriptive framework of society, its component parts, and the interactions between them. After the Second World War, the new framework was widely embraced by the growing army of researchers conducting empirical research into social phenomena for which they were fiercely berated by social theorists. This led to new variants of functionalism as existing programmes were re-examined. New schools of functionalism also evolved.

Functionalists view education as one of the more important social institutions in a society. They contend that education contributes to two kinds of functions: manifest (or primary) functions, which are the intended and visible functions of education; and latent (or secondary) functions, which are the hidden and unintended functions. There are several major manifest functions associated with education. The first is socialization. Beginning in the preschool and kindergarten, students are taught to practice various societal roles that extend beyond the school setting. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), who is regarded as one of the founders of the academic discipline of sociology, characterized schools as "socialization agencies that teach children how to get along with others and prepare them for adult economic roles (Durkheim, 1898).

Another role of education which is of interest is that schools teach students conformity to law and respect for authority. By organizing schools as bureaucracies, much like what is found in the labour market and in other social institutions, schools teach children what is commonly referred to as "the hidden curriculum". Thus, educational awareness should be the precursor of community development.

### B. CONCEPTUALISING EDUCATION

"Plants are shaped by cultivation and men by education...  
We are born weak, we need strength; we are born totally unprovided, we need aid; we are born stupid, we need judgment. Everything we do not have at birth and which we need when we are grown is given by education"

– Jean Jacques Rousseau

Etymologically, “education” is derived from the Latin word “Educare” (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/re...>). It is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Educ...>). From all intent and purpose, education is meant to grow people into productive citizens to use their knowledge, talents, and learned skills to sustain themselves as members of the human community and generally that of the whole human race.

However, this does not match the reality and impact of education in most communities today. That means, education has categories; we should be concerned here with the typology that develops our communities with a focus on the “student community”; this applies to all categories of persons or subsets so long as they are teachable and willing to use learned skills for the good of the community. The question before us is, “what is the true meaning of education in context?” Education should be measured by the growth of a student into a true human being and a “civil being”. A civil being is someone who believes in and obeys the rule of conduct within a subset and the larger system subsuming all other held moral and parochial beliefs to the former. That is to say, an educated person is not arrived at merely by the marks scored. True education tries to develop creativity and inspires relationship; it gives life a meaning, purpose, wholeness and peace. True education therefore entails the learning and application of learned skills to human and community development. It is worth noting that ‘true education’ operates a life-based curriculum, providing people of all ages the opportunity to learn and apply learned skills in their community. Thus, there are categories of learners and education systems. The three main types of education are formal, informal and non-formal. There is no assignable age limit that restricts anyone from outsourcing information for community development and so no one is excused.

### C. CONCEPTUALISING COMMUNITY

“if children have a problem, it is said to be society that is at fault...there is no such thing as society, there is a living tapestry of men and women and people and the beauty of that tapestry and the quality of our lives will depend upon how much each of us is prepared to take responsibility for ourselves”

- Margaret Thatcher

Sometimes, one would have to go off convention; “locked in ideas” of what a “community” is to what it should be. One of the hallmarks of effective learning for learners is going *tabula-rasa* on subject-matter. The conception of “community” here encourages collectivization of actions, which discourages organization that seeks to provide shade for people who maintain some sort of social distance from their social ugly, caused by their actions or inactions. Therefore, imbued in one’s sense of community is membership of organizations which imposes on him or her a duty or sense of responsibility. It is in this wise that one is persuaded to admit in argument that society for want of a better taxonomy lies at the heart of an ideal community organizing:

Society includes every kind and degree of relationship entered into by men, whether organized or unorganized, direct or indirect,

conscious or unconscious, cooperative or antagonistic...the whole issue of human relations ...without a boundary or assignable limit. Society encompasses all of humanity, that is, the varied and multiform relationships into which men necessarily enter in the course of group life. Society could include any of the multiplicity of groups, units or organizations found among men (Anyaele 2003, p.9)

A community should connote a system of subsets with each subset working for the functionality and overall performance of the former. Systems (communities) thus exist for the wellbeing of the subsets within them. This shows a symbiotic rather than a parasitic relationship evident in most systems. An ideal subset does not work at cross purposes with another in a system. Subsets should be able to identify purposes which are injurious to the interests of the larger whole. That's the community spirit the people should carry in their varying subsets as community leaders, politicians, faith-based organizations, social entrepreneurs, youth groups, educationists, students groups, professionals and other informed socio-political and economic appellations under which people operate.

A community of subsets should endeavour to engender communication within and also between subsets because the meeting of minds or dearth of it explains the developmental differences between societies which practice them. It is imperative to take a clue from the "Commune" system practiced in ancient China during the reign of Chairman Mao Tse Tung around AD 1500. This is necessary in building a new perspective for the emergence of a new informed community:

A 'commune' expresses the institutions, structures and organizations of the system of communalism. Communes were usually very large; perhaps as large as our local government areas ...each plans and manages all aspects of its government, economy, education and development. And each elects representatives into its Governing Council, and the People's Assembly at the national headquarters (Anyaele 2003, p.24).

As practiced, there were ample qualities that made it a reference point, some of which are remedial to the social issues in human communities today. In discussing development, one notes it pays when various subsets participate in decision-making from cradle rather than ostracizing them; this was one of the cultures of the commune system. Where effective communication is conspicuously absent, perceived marginalized subsets may react. This is most avoidable if communication among subsets is frequent. One may ask why opportune subsets and individuals marginalized others from participating in the 'just' allocation and ownership of community resources.

Fear and greed most often underscore this anti-community spirit and this happens if one feels insecure, literally social insecurity. There is need to put in place some measure of social security for not just "the Ogoni-Poor" but also persons with record of selfless service to the community. People who serve and feel insecure will go into primitive accumulation.

#### D. CONCEPTUALIZING DEVELOPMENT

There are several meanings ascribed to the concept of development. Prof. Naanen describes development as “the incremental improvement in the living standard of a people or society” (Public Lecture. March 2005). It is the macro effect or the improved performance of a system different from economic growth. An instance of development is when a society begins to produce more products and increase its overall wealth ([www.yourdictionary.com](http://www.yourdictionary.com/economic-...)> economic-...). Development is equally seen as the process by which a nation improves the economic, political, and social wellbeing of its people (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Econ...>) as opposed to the abstraction of economic growth based on increased inflation-adjusted market value of goods and services by an economy over time and conventionally measured as the percent rate of increase in real gross domestic product (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Econ...>).

The difference between economic growth and development lies in the latter as a policy of intervention which aims to improve the economic and social wellbeing of the people as opposed to the former which is a phenomenon of market productivity and rise in GDP. Economic growth deals with increase in the level of output, but economic development is related to increase in output coupled with improvement in social and political welfare of people....therefore economic development encompasses both growth and welfare values (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Econ...>). Social scientists believe when local quality of life is improved, there is more development (<https://simple.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/E...>). And ‘improving living standards’ to most social scientists have come to mean among other indicators higher level of education and literacy, improved workers’ income, health, and lifespans (<https://marketbusinessnews.com/econo...>). Other social indicators of development of interest are “birth and death rates, Human Development Index (HDI), infant mortality rate, literacy rate and life expectancy” (<https://www.tutor2u.net/reference...>). Interestingly, development thrives on improved infrastructure, education, health and wellness, justice, safety, human rights, consumer protection and fair competition (<https://simplicable.com/new/econ...>).

In a nutshell, development is a complex and difficult term to define that requires unpicking and deconstructing, not simply taking for granted its meaning at face value. However, what underlies the nature of development is the process of economic and social advancement in terms of quality of human life (<https://www.mytutor.co.uk/...>>). It must be a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components(<https://www.sid-israel.org/What-is-Dev...>).

#### III. EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEMPORARY Ogoni SOCIETY

There are issues raised in course of x-raying the tripod concepts above. There is need to raise and address the following questions: Can contemporary Ogoni society be described as a system with agreeable subsets? What subsets exist in contemporary Ogoni society? What level of communication exists within, between and among subsets in contemporary Ogoni society? Who takes responsibility for community development in contemporary Ogoni society? What are development indicators absent in contemporary Ogoni society? Who are the Ogoni? Where did

they come from and where are they at the moment, development wise? What future agenda do they have for themselves? What are their needs, challenges and prospects? How and what form of education can bring development to Ogoni society? These and other sundry questions would provide mind boggling answers. Most of the questions asked above have answers at arm's length.

Contemporary Ogoni society is an educated one; she has people in all fields of human endeavours and cannot be said to be unaware of the trend of human development. Home and in the Diaspora there are people of Ogoni extraction who have risen to the peak of their career and have made important contributions in their fields; professors, of no mean fit. Beyond the academia, Ogoni people are making useful contributions in the corporate world. Some of them have attained self-sufficiency and could introduce interventionist schemes to assist others. There is also a sea of bureaucrats who are stuck in public service with less means to contribute to the development of their immediate environment. There is a student community peopled by Ogoni students who are leading lights in various institutions of learning home and abroad yearning for scholarship and grants; most have ended up losing out on good grades because they combined studies and work. There are the rural dwellers some less educated but exposed who work and earn; unfortunately, the Ogoni environment promises so little at the moment. The socio-political organizations like the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), KAGOTE, GBO KABAALI, and other socio-cultural groups like the Amanikpo are points of social cohesion. The people are organized and governed under both traditional and political leadership. These are subsets in contemporary Ogoni society.

A question has been posed above over who takes responsibility for community development in contemporary Ogoni society? It is a valid question to end the blame game. Community development like security is everyone's business because the benefits of community development like crime reduction and unpolluted environment benefit all. If community development is everyone's responsibility proper communication and community spirit should be engaged. Traditional leadership in contemporary Ogoni communities should foster consensus opinion among kit and kin. Baala (2014, p.108) identifies divisive tendencies accruing from self-embraced westernization and its associative ideals as a challenge to community development in contemporary Ogoni society. More so, Ntete-Nna traces this challenge to lack of common culture in elite recruitment where Ogoni depended on British modernization efforts to raise its elites (Ekekwe 2011, p. 112).

It is pertinent to identify development indicators absent in contemporary Ogoni society and dearth of basic modern infrastructure is first. Ogoni lacks modern basic infrastructure from good roads, health facility, post primary education, adequate electrification, and good drinking water, among others. The trunk and feeder roads crisscrossing the community are mainly ancient footpaths yearning for improved design. There is an opinion that road constructions are government preoccupation not community but one may add that development is more organized when it comes from the people. As expected every community should revisit the composition of their respective Community Development Committee (CDC) as an important governance structure of the communities.

Subsets like the Community Development Committee (CDC) corroborating with Indigenous Civil Engineers (ICE) of Ogoni, should identify and design projects beforehand that meet the needs and taste of the people; to control external designs that may take little or no cognizance of such needs and taste. Some of the roads in Ogoni communities are terribly constructed. Development must be controlled. It must be noted at this juncture that informed sons and daughters of Ogoni communities are not in short supply.

Also, there is the need to address knowledge gaps and development devils. No community develops or makes significant changes using the same method. Change comes at great cost. Sometimes, it is driven by people least expected. Other times, the old order is challenged, overthrown, deconstructed and rebuilt. The student organisations in Ogoni communities should rise up and demand their knit in the governance structure of their communities. The umbrella body of Ogoni students has a lot to contribute to the wellbeing of contemporary Ogoni society. First, the current Executive of National Union of Ogoni Students (NUOS) should begin to collate details of its members across tertiary institutions in the country, and according to their fields to serve as “Think-Tanks” for quality advice on developments par fields which may help in the advancement of Ogoni society.

The Diaspora is another very important subset of contemporary Ogoni society. The vision of contemporary Ogoni society is safe with the Diaspora subset. More functionally, there is no community in Ogoni without a handful of her people abroad. Unfortunately, the kind of feedback expected is still farfetched. One is often lost in thought over how someone perceived to be learned in a community of unlearned people by their rating with all their knowledge takes the backseat and rather assumed the role of a community armchair critic. Such persons need to be reminded that “...knowledge exists in two forms -lifeless, stored in books, and alive, in the consciousness of men. The second form of existence is after all the essential one; the first, indispensable as it may be, occupies only an inferior position” (<https://www.mytutor.co.uk>>...>). The Diasporas Ogoni is being reminded wherever they are that Ogoni needs them, their knowledge, and resources for community advancement. One is yet to see a public Library or private one accessible to Ogoni people many years after formal education was embraced as a way of life in Ogoni society.

Ogoni scholars are doing well in the social sciences and humanities, some of them studied History and related discipline with utilitarian impacts but if one may ask, where are aspects of Ogoni History? Reconstructing the History of Ogoni may usher in an era of peaceful coexistence within Ogoni communities and between Ogoni and her neighbours and as such put paid to the endemic destruction of lives and property experienced over the years.

There is need to open up Ogoni community. One of the challenges the society face as a people (Ogoni and African people) is living in denial. Ogoni communities are a hub of cultural varieties. As a potential source of revenue, these are tourist bit-coin that has given the State of Israel billion worth of dollar in revenue. Quite amusing that even though Israelis do not believe in the reason for Christian pilgrimage they are tolerant and wise enough to allow millions of people and their money pour into their country to fulfill multi-religious obligations. Ogoni should have a socio-cultural and economic trademark. Churches and other faith-based organization should support the development of the tourist potentials in Ogoni; with this comes indicators like beautification of



ancient sites, identification and elevation of ancient settlements, secularization of deities and shrines, preservation of agricultural species, hotels and night life, and the establishment of at least cash-points. Contemporary Ogoni society should stop the fight and encourage peace with neighbours. With these come the ripple effects of urbanization and development.

There are other specific and general indicators of under-development around this axis that do not set us at par with other nationalities in Rivers State: Gokana and Tai LGAs have no Bank; Ogoni meteorological data or information (weather forecast) are not captured among other areas on local radio stations; local radio and television signals have remained poor in Ogoni, most GSM networks in most communities are poor or nonexistent; with a parochial subsistent economy; there are fewer organized registered cooperatives that can access loans and grants from public agencies and banks for common projects; Ogoni political leadership has not fared good 28 years after this surmise, "...The mentality of the Ogoni was always to keep close to the Government of the day in order to pick up crumbs from the masters' table" (Wiwa 1995, p.51). It has become a case of producing leaders who are "fellow victims" (as opposed to a declassified people-centric leadership) who are mere administrators of circumstance.

One queries the kind of leadership provided by contemporary Ogoni elites where it is easier to count on the fingers of one hand the number of communities in Ogoni which are not presently at war with another sister community. The carnage and fraternal conflicts in Ogoni communities must end and all shades of opinion leaders and organization must rise up to condemn it.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Community development is never an event but a process. It begins where people who are conscious and desirous of a change do not just identify a cause but tenaciously follows its course to maturity. By education, most people have a copious understanding of the kind of community development fashionable today but do not know how to engage their kits and kin to buy-in. Education is good but technology is better. Knowledge is good but wisdom is better. Education should sharpen people's skills and abilities to identify challenges and solve them as subsets in a system. Education should stimulate people's instinct and improve their human conditions. Education should bring about ease of doing things. All the issues raised above could transform the contemporary Ogoni society once it forms the basis of discussion in subsets with practical steps and commitment to enforce them.

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