

Internal Migration AND THE **DEVELOPMENT** OF THE **NIGER DELTA REGION:** **POLICY ISSUES**

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Preface

CPED's Policy Brief is a short publication designed to inform policy makers and other stakeholders at the federal, state and local government levels in Nigeria on the key policy issues emanating from the action research and intervention programmes carried out by CPED and its collaborators. The Policy brief series for 2011 will focus largely on the challenges facing development in the Niger Delta region under CPED's research theme on growth and equity in development in Nigeria. This first number in the series is on internal migration factor in development in the Niger Delta region.

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Patterns and Implications of internal migration in the Niger Delta region

During CPED's demographic and baseline survey of the Niger region, an attempt was made during the survey to determine the degree of mobility characteristic of the population in the various communities in the region. Consequently, the surveyed households were classified into non-migrants and migrants on the basis of the status of the household heads. A migrant household head was defined as that person who was not born in the community where he/she is now resident. On the other hand, a non-migrant head of household is that person who was born in the community where he is resident at the time of the survey. Table 5 indicates that 79.1 per cent of the surveyed heads of households are non-migrants while the remaining proportion can be classified as migrants. It should be noted that no attempt was made to include the children of the heads of household in the analysis so as not to confuse the criteria used in distinguishing migrants from non-migrants.

A further examination of Table 5 indicates that the proportion of the migrant and non-migrant household heads vary among the states and ecological zones. In Akwa Ibom, over 92 per cent of the household heads were born in their present location and have never migrated anywhere. The situation is different in Delta (70.7 per cent), Ondo (72.3 per cent) Abia (76.2 per cent) and Rivers (73.0 per cent) where the proportion of household heads who were born in their present location is less than 80 per cent, suggesting a relatively higher level of migration in these states compared

with the others. The dominant form of internal migration is rural to urban areas. Consequently, localities characterised by large settlements tend to have high levels of internal migration while largely rural localities have less or no form of migration. The findings of the survey show that rural to rural migration is quite limited in the region. The trend is for people to move to urban areas.

With an estimated 88 per cent of rural dwellers in the Niger Delta region living below the poverty line, more and more people are being pushed out of the rural areas and pulled into the urban cities and towns in search of a better life. The migrants from rural to urban areas are predominantly the most physically active, especially products of the primary and secondary schools who are often neither able to fit into traditional fishing and farming, nor readily find other white or blue-collar work in the rural areas. The magnitude of the exodus from rural areas to urban centres has had serious consequences: environmental degradation, overcrowding, spread of communicable diseases, poor sanitation, pressure on transportation, and food insecurity among others.

A large part of the wetland areas of the Niger Delta region is characterized by low population density, which can be attributed to the harsh environment and economic condition in those areas. Added to the problem of sparse population is the observed phenomenon of out-migration by young adults from these largely disadvantaged rural communities to the urban areas in the upland areas of the state and in deed other parts of Nigeria. The drain of young adult males from their villages has created a deficit of

natural leadership. The gloom of the traditional farm and fishing economy, lack of job opportunities and modern amenities push young men from home. This loss of population through migration robs the villages of youths who are talented and enterprising. The villages are denied the leadership that these young men could have provided in motivating the people for community self-help development projects. If young adult males continue to leave their farms, rural depopulation will be experienced. Physical resources will be under-utilised (e.g. farmland) because of labour deficiency both in size and quality.

The emergence of petroleum production has further complicated the migration phenomenon in the Niger Delta region. This has led to the massive migration into the urban centres of the Niger Delta region, which are the operational centres of the oil companies. The migration usually involves the relatively young who search for jobs in the cities. They come not only from within the Niger Delta region but from other parts of the country, and some cases from other countries. Not only the skilled but also even more predominantly the unskilled are involved in this migration, leading to rapid decay and deterioration of infrastructure in the major urban centres that attract the migrants. Thus increasing attention is being paid to these urban centres in socio-economic development without success at the expense of the smaller wetland settlements. The dichotomy between the few urban centres in the upland areas and the wetland communities in terms of development is one of the major problems confronting integrated development in the Niger Delta region and it must be addressed urgently. The rate of

population growth in the upland urban centres is therefore more rapid. The growth of Port Harcourt into primate status is particularly evident, whereas the relative stagnation of Sapele is probably due to its peripheral status in the oil economy. This pattern also affects the direction of migration within and into the Niger Delta region.

Policy Options and challenges

The major policy challenge for the Niger Delta region, which emanates from the experiences outlined above, is to ensure the provision of basic health care services in all communities and promote the utilisation of the services. This would contribute to the reduction of the demand for more children that characterises most rural communities in the region. Furthermore, considering the fact that the use of social pressures have been quite successful in many parts of the less developed world in terms of controlling family size, a community-based approach should be adopted in which communities in the Niger Delta region are mobilised to take part in the education of their members with respect to fertility control, especially within the framework of programmes designed to control the spread of the deadly HIV/AIDS. There is no doubt response from community-based approach to fertility control would be effective in the communities of the Niger Delta region.

Secondly, migration is a key challenge facing population and development in the Niger Delta region. Generally, internal migration policies aim at encouraging permanent internal migration to selected areas, for example, sparsely

population areas, discouraging internal migration especially rural-urban migration and altering the ethnic or occupational composition of an area. Policies designed to modify or guide the spatial distribution of population take a wide variety of forms and these are as expected complemented as to their effect on migration. The first are direct policies while the second are indirect policies. Among the most direct policies to affect the spatial distribution of population are resettlement schemes to induce migration to selected rural areas. These policies have for a long time been implemented in some parts of Africa.

Another direct way in which governments in the Niger Delta region can influence internal migration is through legal controls enforced by the police. However this is difficult in a free democratic society. This has been tried in many countries as in China where passes are required to leave a rural area, to enter an urban area, to secure the transfer of use of food ration cards, to move within the transport system and to secure accommodation. In Indonesia, a slightly simpler regulation governs migration to Jakarta: the legal prohibitions against moving to the city are used as a method of intimidation rather than as an enforceable law. Comparable controls of one form or another have also been used in Tanzania and South Africa. In the latter, effective controls of African rural-urban migration were carried, apart from the regulation of the ethnic composition of its white areas which comprised 87 per cent of the country during the period when apartheid was in place in the country.

Some other countries have adopted less stringent control measure than those described above. In Cuba, for example, movements to the capital city, Havana, is controlled through housing. Any Cuban moving to Havana must present evidence that he/she has secured housing with a certain minimum area of floor-space per member of the family. Korea, which has been particularly successful in re-directing migrants to non-metropolitan cities, has achieved this through a number of explicit policy measures, including tax and credit incentives for industrial investment in other locations.

In view of the problems and human rights issues involved in direct control of local migration, indirect policies affecting the pattern of internal migration are the most appropriate and these are quite varied. Some of the major ones include: efforts to narrow the rural-urban income gap; attempts to increase the relative disposition of public services in rural areas and medium-sized cities; administrative decentralization and relocation, regional development and industrial location policies; and general town-planning principles.

The efforts to reduce rural-urban income gap usually involve income policies to keep urban wage rates from rising and price supports for agricultural products to raise rural incomes. This policy has been adopted in some African countries such as Kenya. At the more general level, it also entails rural development programmes that generate employment opportunities in rural areas. The purpose of such rural development programmes is to raise incomes

relative to those in urban areas and as a result reduce the pace of rural-urban movement. Another aspect of integrated rural development programmes that are designed to reduce rural-urban migration relates to the provision of public services such as transport, electrification, education, health and housing in rural areas.

The belief is that since many migrants move to urban areas because of these facilities, they will be forced to remain in the rural areas once they are provided. The administrative decentralization of government offices to state and local levels have been adopted in many large countries, including Nigeria, as a way of reducing congestion in the major administrative capitals. Regional development and industrial location policies have been used to re-direct population to selected growth centres in many countries. Finally, town planning regulations such as creation of green belts around cities, zoning law's and land use and density controls have been used to curb as well as rationalize urban growth and keep migrants away from such centres.

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