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Settlement Size DISTRIBUTION **AND** DEVELOPMENT in 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 settlement size distribution pattern in development in the Niger Delta region.

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Size Distribution of settlements

The spatial pattern of settlements of various sizes has considerable impact on the distribution of social and infrastructure facilities such as health, education, extension services, water and communications services. The vast proportion of the Niger Delta States comprise largely rural communities with scattered settlements mainly in tiny compounds whose population range from 50 to 500 people, most of who are farmers or fishermen. On a national scale a rural settlement has been defined as any settlement whose population is below 20,000 while settlements with 20,000 and more people are classified as urban settlements. This definition may not be realistic in the most parts of the Niger Delta States where the level of urban development is quite low. It is therefore appropriate to recognize different sizes of settlements in the Niger States as a basis for the understanding of the settlement pattern.

For the purpose of analysing the pattern of settlement size distribution in the Niger States, the following categories of settlements may be identified:

- i. Settlements with less than 1,000
- ii. Settlements with between 1,000 and 5,000 people
- iii. Settlements with between 5,000 and 20,000 people.
- iv. Settlements with 20,000 people and above.

Table 1 Size distribution of settlements in Niger Delta States

NDDC STATES	Less than 1,000 people	1,000-5,000 people	5,000-20,000	20,000 and above
ABIA	393	494	52	11
AKWA IBOM	1,236	1,098	46	7
BAYELSA	290	317	85	4
CROSS RIVER	1,170	500	56	8
DELTA	1,015	307	104	22
EDO	903	264	70	11
IMO	788	925	81	2
ONDO	1,463	278	57	16
RIVERS	428	598	213	17
NIGER DELTA STATES	7,686	4,781	764	98

An analysis of the distribution and location of each of the four categories of settlements identified above indicates marked variation among the nine NDDC States. Table 11.1 shows that NDDC has a total of 13,329 settlements of various sizes, which were clearly identifiable in the 1991 census complemented by Baseline Sector field surveys. Of these 7,686 settlements constituting about 58 per cent were settlements with less than 1,000 people while 4,781 or 35.9 per cent were settlements of between 1,000 and 5,000 people. Table 4.2 further shows that 764 settlements, which constitute about 5.7 per cent, were settlements of between 5,000 and 20,000 people. Finally, only 98 settlements, which

constitute 0.7 per cent of the total settlements in the region have populations of over 20,000. On the whole 13,231 settlements out of the 13,329 in the NDDC States, that is, about 99 per cent had less than 20,000 people. In other words only 98 settlements that is less than 1 per cent of the settlements in the state can be regarded as urban centres in terms of their population sizes.

Our field surveys and data mapping in the various local government areas of the NDDC States show that the spacing and distribution of settlements is influenced by a variety of factors amongst which are socio-cultural organization, historical influences, population density and the physical environment of the area. The average distance between settlements of 5,000 people or more vary from 10 kilometres in the densely populated local governments to 25 kilometres in the sparsely populated ones.

- (a) areas of virtually continuous settlement;
- (b) areas with villages separated by a narrow extent of farmland;
- (c) areas with villages separated by a broad extent of farmland;
- (d) areas of widely scattered villages; and
- (e) areas virtually unsettled.

These patterns have remarkable implications for the location and distribution of social and economic activities.

Policy Options and Challenges

A major policy challenge relating to population and development in the Niger Delta region concerns the need to promote the emergence of medium level urban centres that

can mediate development to rural communities. It is clear from the analysis of the settlement distribution pattern in region that an important aspect of settlement size distribution development policy must focus on the spatial distribution of settlements of various sizes. A settlement size distribution policy should be articulated and promoted in the region so that localities, which at present do not have settlements capable of delivering social and economic facilities and services can have the opportunity of the development of such centres in their locality. Here, attention is focused on issues relating to the selection of central locations and growth centres, which would form the basis of the development of a balanced settlement system in the Niger Delta region.

The selection of central locations and growth centres must be based on the analysis of the economic and socio-cultural assets of the existing settlements in the Niger Delta region. They should be towns villages already established with some economic base and political character. They must have access to labour supply suitable for training for the tasks of development. In other words, the primary criterion for selecting these central locations and growth centres should be potential economic viability i.e. locational advantages of efficient and long run operation for specified kinds of economic activities.

The spatial framework provided by the top levels of the settlement hierarchy in the individual states of the Niger Delta region can then be used to develop a series of intermediate towns. Such towns of at least 5,000 inhabitants

will provide services for the rural dwellers. The rationale for developing medium-size towns in the rural areas is provided by the concepts of the range of a good and threshold population implied in the well-known central place theory. The concept of the range of a good, which is the maximum distance that a person can normally travel to obtain a good or service suggests that rural service centres accessible to a group of villages are necessary in many parts of the Niger Delta region, especially in those local government areas where there are very few medium-size towns. This will reduce the long distances that many rural dwellers now travel to obtain some essential services. Similarly, the concept of threshold population suggests the need to build up the population and purchasing power of the selected intermediate settlements so as to make them viable central places. This will make the provision of adequate services an economic feasibility.

The optimal selection of centres of various grades will have to balance immediate need against growth potential, and will require clear definition and weighing of the factors indicating potential. But more than this, a decision will be needed on how far between the extremes of concentration and dispersal attention should be focused. The consideration of the above economic political and spatial factors suggests that the present Local Government Area structure in the Niger Delta region provides a useful basis for the selection of their central locations and growth centres.

In each of the Local Government Areas, particularly those where there are few or no medium size towns, a number of settlements could be selected for development as central locations or growth centres. The settlements to be developed could be selected on the basis of an analysis of their social, economic, political and locational assets. For instance, the selected settlements should have a reasonable number of people because it is easier to attract people to a settlement, which already has a significant number of inhabitants than that, which has only a few dwellers. Furthermore, the settlements selected should have certain social and economic functions, for example, rural periodic markets or schools and postal agencies. In addition, the settlements should be located in areas accessible to the existing transport network, especially motorable roads.

A key component of the relationship between population and development in the Niger Delta region relates to the need to deliberately promote the participation of the local population in development through the building of partnerships between development agencies and the local population. In other words, population should be seen as asset for development not just as beneficiaries of development in the Niger Delta region. Building partnerships with local communities is a new endeavour for many government agencies in targeting the grassroots population in terms of development activities and programmes. It requires not only good will, but also a commitment to experimentation, fine-tuning solutions, and institution building.

Some conceptual shifts that must be embarked upon in the Niger Delta region considering the characteristics of the population relates to the need to empower the poor to identify their problems and seek their own solutions – not assuming the poor are the problem, engaging poor people as partners, not as beneficiaries, and using people-centred frameworks for planning and implementation; creating incentives for the poor as well as for private-sector entrepreneurs to mobilise resources for poverty eradication, and to move away from simply exhorting poor people to mobilize their resources or providing all the resources from the State; and seeing the value of giving the poor real rights and ownership of assets, not just a sense of ownership. If federal, state and local governments and development authorities such as the Niger Delta Development Commission take steps to make these shifts, the poor people will be more inclined to view the government as a viable partner in development.

Moving to decentralized planning facilitates participation and maximizes resource mobilization. In turn, this ensures that services will be more relevant to the needs of communities and households. Decentralization implies local plans of action, places accountability and responsibility at appropriate levels, and allows quick action following monitoring and problem solving. However, it cannot be presumed that decentralization is automatically beneficial for all groups. Communities cannot be seen as homogenous and non-hierarchical. Marginalized groups, such as poor families and minority ethnic groups, may be excluded even in decentralized processes. An understanding of norms,

values, attitudes, rules and regulations underlying decentralized decision-making at community level is necessary to ensure that vulnerable groups, such as women, children or the aged, are not further marginalized.

Experience has shown that decisions made by communities and households result in more sustainable solutions. Developing community-based decision-making and transparent dialogue cannot occur without political will at the highest level. Governments need to help catalyse the formation of people's organizations through enhance rights and building on local organizational forms. Mechanisms must be developed to ensure feedback of learning from local to national policy levels. The poor also need to be able to draw on network and links with state, market or civil society actors who will help them to access, defend and capitalize their assets.

Furthermore, effective implementation of poverty eradication programmes requires employing a gender analysis lens that takes specific note of the relationships between men and women, including division of responsibilities, labour, as well as access to and control over resources and decision-making. There needs to be concern for the inherent constraints to the achievement of gender-equality goals in the institutions, structures and processes within each sector. Important information on the responsibilities of women and men gained at household and community levels needs to be fed back to develop macro-level policies, strategies and institutions. The strategy to increase women's involvement also needs to go

beyond an analysis of their contribution to the sector relative to menus, and to consider possibilities beyond the existing division of responsibilities.

The problem of population pressure on land in the Niger Delta region is a major policy challenge facing the region. Problems associated with rapid population growth in the rural communities of the Niger Delta region are also reflected in the issue of accessibility to land for productive activities. This suggests that they may be prepared to improve their economic position if the opportunity arises. It was noted that land availability is not a major problem of the people in many communities in the Niger Delta region as land was generally available for farming activities. The communities that do complain about land shortages are largely fishermen who have been deprived of some of their fishing grounds as a result of oil exploration. The major outstanding problem, which they do not identify, is proliferation of small-holdings as well as the fragmentation of the existing holdings. It appears that these two problems are dependent on other problems existing in the communities. For example, small farm holdings may be influenced by the shortage of labour while fragmentation of farmland holdings may be due to the poor transportation system and the absence of adequate marketing facilities.

One of the problems relating to productive activities in the rural communities is the likelihood that many people engaged in agricultural activities at present, particularly farming, could abandon them to pursue other perceived productive ventures in the major urban. Consequently it is

important to find solutions to the problems confronting agricultural production in the rural communities.

Although land is not all that scarce in many communities, at least in the context of the prevailing farming methods, there is bound to be more pressure on land as the population increases, especially in the upland areas where a significant proportion of the land have been taken over for construction activities and urban development. Increasing land shortages will lead to land speculation and hence commercialisation of land which is at present not too commercialised.

In addition to the people engaged in agricultural activities, those who are at present engaged in craft production need to be encouraged. Loans should be given to individuals engaged in various craft industries and small-scale traders. But financial assistance must not be provided in isolation. It must be combined with other forms of encouragement particularly informal training in business management. This is a major problem of all small-scale industries and businesses in the rural communities. The problem of a labour supply shortage, particularly for agricultural production, will be more serious because a large proportion of those who are at present engaged in farming but who could not get paid employment will engage in craft occupations in the central locations and growth centres when they emerge. This is because apart from those who are at present engaged in these occupations, many more people will be required to practice these craft occupations since there will be a rise in the demand for their services.

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