

Achieving the Millennium Development Goals Through Fisheries in Bayelsa State, Niger Delta, Nigeria (Review Article)

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Abstract: This paper reviews fisheries as an important tool in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) in Bayelsa State. Fisheries is recognized as a key instrument for increasing productivity, ensuring food security, improving market access for the rural poor (including women and youth), fortifying persons living with HIV against the susceptibility to secondary diseases, promoting sustainable development and strengthening the local people's performance in global market. However, there are challenges militating against the realization of these goals in Bayelsa State. These include, inter alia, corruption, security challenges, massive pollution and destruction of fishing grounds, absence of well-planned fisheries policy, inadequate, insufficient and untimely supply and high prices of inputs, absence of skilled manpower in sea fishing and absence of effective support services (credit and marketing facilities). For Bayelsa fisheries to play a major role in attaining the MDG's, this paper is therefore recommending that Community - Based Resource Management should be adopted in the management of fisheries in the state; Liberal credit facilities should be provided and existing financial services publicized; well - funded and equipped Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Unit should be established; skippers to man fishing vessels should be trained; fishers should also be trained in proper and hygienic fish handling techniques; an agricultural procurement agency should be established; and a state fisheries/plan policy should be put in place urgently.

Key words: Millennium development goals, bayelsa, fisheries, Niger Delta and Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) are a linked set of objectives – a portfolio of targets that represent a coherent assault on the problem of development (Hall, 2005). It expresses the shared commitment made by the Global community to fight poverty. This MDG was endorsed by 189 nations as international commitment to the priorities for achieving sustainable development (CGIAR, 2005). It has 8 goals, 18 targets and 48 performance indicators on poverty reduction, human well-being, social opportunities, economic conditions and a healthy natural environment. Broadly, these goals are:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global Partnership for Development

Presently, MDG is being supported through numerous programs at local government, state, national, regional and global levels. Regionally, the New

Partnership for Africa's development (NEPAD) has taken on the MDG agenda and is becoming a leading proponent of an integrated approach to development. Within NEPAD's Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), fisheries has been recognized as a key instrument for increasing productivity, ensuring food security, improving market access for the rural poor and strengthening Africa's performance in global markets (Worldfish Center, 2005).

Nigeria was one of the 189 nations that endorsed the MDG's in 2000, but she did not initiate any concrete plans/policies towards achieving these goals until 2004 when she came out with National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and the Local Government Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (LEEDS). NEEDS seeks to reorientate values, reduce poverty, create wealth and generate employment under the presidential initiative on fisheries management and development amongst other initiatives. The ultimate goal is to make Nigeria self sufficient in fish production in the short term with a target annual production of two million metric tonnes by the year 2010 (Areola, 2007).

Bayelsa State dissected centrally by longitude 6° 0 00" E and Latitude 4° 30" N is located in the heart of the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Her population is estimated at 1.8 million people (by 2006 estimate) spread over a land

area of 12,000 km². Its 185 kilometers of coastline, the numerous rivers emptying into Atlantic Ocean and the relatively wide continental shelf provides a diverse assemblage of fishery resources. Consequently, most of her residents have fishing as their major occupation. In fact, available records showed that Bayelsa state contributes 5% of Nigeria's annual fish production (BSG, 2008a). In addition, the State located in the heart of the Niger Delta is rich in petroleum resources and contributes 30% of total national crude oil production (Nigeria Information Guide, 2009). The implication of this is that the State is believed to be among the rich States in Nigeria. Yet, there is widespread poverty with close to 70% of the population living below the poverty line (NDDC, 2006). Besides being poverty stricken, the State has low level of industrial development, high unemployment rate, poor health facilities, high infant mortality rates, public corruption and deteriorated social institutions.

To reverse this trend, a well planned MDG programme with appropriate innovative and diversified intervention strategies are needed. One sector of the economy that can be identified as capable in achieving these MDG's is fisheries. It has been estimated that about 200 million Africans eat fish regularly; FAO estimates that fish provides 22% of the protein intake in sub-saharan Africa; in Nigeria fish provides about 40% of the dietary protein which is as high as 80% in coastal and riverine communities (Areola, 2007). In fact, fishing provides 6 and 9 million full and part-time jobs and the income from fishing supports 30-45 million people of this number, many are women involved in fish processing and trade who lead single headed households (Hall, 2005). For them, fish is the primary and sometimes the only source of income to support their livelihood and their children.

But, according to Worldfish Center (2005), the contributions of fisheries to the MDG's are of two kinds: Direct contribution to specific goals and indirect support to all the goals through enhanced livelihoods. For example, many Bayelsans (resident and non-indigenes alike) are engaged in labour intensive small - scale fisheries which serve as "Safety nets" for the poor, who might work in fisheries during hard times when opportunities elsewhere are absent and also serves as engines for rural development, creating wealth and bringing commerce to rural areas. For them fish is an important part of their nutrition, accounting for a large percent of their animal protein, since it is often the most affordable source of protein. Fisheries can therefore play a role in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger in Bayelsa State (Goal one).

The contribution of fisheries to the goal of universal primary education (Goal two) is significant but indirect. Poverty and irregular income are the leading causes of low educational attainment in Africa (Worldfish Center, 2005), Bayelsa State inclusive. Eradicating poverty and supporting business opportunities in fisheries is therefore, an important contribution to the educational development of children in Bayelsa State.

In Bayelsa State, most women are very active in artisanal fisheries, especially processing and marketing of fish (Alfred-Ockiya, 2000; Kingdom *et al.*, 2008), therefore supporting them is to ensure regular income and encouragement to participate in other social activities such as ensuring that nutritional benefits from fish reach other members of their households and communities. This will promote gender equality and empowerment of women (Goal three).

The persistently high child mortality rates in this region (Niger Delta) are among the highest in the world (NDDC, 2006), and those are attributed to malnutrition, with mineral, vitamin and protein deficiencies standing out as leading causes (Pelletier, 1994). In addition, recent studies associated low birth weight, as a leading factor in child mortality (McCormack, 1985), with insufficient supply of Omega - 3 - fatty acid during gestation (Allen and Harris, 2001). This acid can be obtained almost exclusively from fish and it is important for both mental and neurological development of infants (Goal four) (Innis and Friesen, 2008). Fish consumption during pregnancy and lactation period will further improve the nutritional and health status of women and children, thus reducing susceptibility to disease (Goals four and five).

Bayelsa State had an HIV/AIDS Sero prevalence rate of 4% as at 2004 (BSG, 2004). HIV/AIDS prevalence is believed to be very high among residents of fishing communities (Bene *et al.*, 2007). This they attributed to the migratory life pattern of the fishers and transient settlements. HIV/AIDS lowers the income and food purchasing power of households (Haddad and Gillespie, 2001). Fish has been shown to contain combinations of protein, vitamins, and minerals that help fortify affected persons against the susceptibility to secondary diseases, while improved nutrition also increase the effectiveness of anti - retroviral drugs (Goal six). Also, incomes from fisheries enable the poor to obtain further services.

Sustainable fisheries management can play a major role in environmental management (Goal seven). This is because in modern fisheries management, we are not only concerned with biological objectives, but with economical, social and environmental objectives (King, 1995). When we manage fisheries and aquaculture in a sustainable manner, then, the environmental capital and services on which we depend now are preserved for future generations.

Fish is the most highly traded food commodity in the world (Worldfish Center, 2005). Africa has turned from net importer to a net exporter of fish, with fish exports valued at US \$ 2.7 billion annually, while fish product worth US \$700 million are imported each year (FAO 2004). When we promote trade in fish and fishery products in the state and then respond to national, regional and global market products (such as shark fins.), we can earn foreign exchange which will help us to improve on our nation's trade balance.

Obstacles to attaining the MDG'S through Fisheries in Bayelsa State: Governments in the State are implementing numerous policies targeting the majority

poor; however, poverty still remains high and pace of poverty reduction is slow. This is attributed to many reasons which include inter alia:

The policy implementation has been difficult because of lack of understanding. Poverty alleviation policies are developed without proper consultation with stakeholders. This therefore does not reflect the real needs of the targeted groups. This 'top-down' approach to policy implementation is the greatest flaw in the past poverty alleviation strategies in Nigeria. Besides, most recent poverty alleviation programmes are focused on men and elites in the communities, at the detriment of the women and youths, who are in the majority in most communities of the Niger Delta (Anyanwu *et al.*, 2007).

The Micro Finance Policy of Federal Government of Nigeria (CBN, 2005), which is meant to contribute to rural transformation, reduce unemployment and enhance the implementation of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) is yet to be fully implemented in the state. All the Micro Finance Banks opened so far are all sited in Yenagoa, the State capital, far away from the fishers who are resident in the remote fishing camps/ communities. Besides, their knowledge of such a policy is even highly doubted.

The development of fisheries and aquaculture is beset with inadequate, insufficient and untimely supply and high price of inputs – fish fingerlings, agro chemicals, outboard engines, spare parts, fishing gear (netting materials), fish feeds, etc.

There is presently no Bayelsa state fishery law or regulation, neither is there any form of monitoring, control or surveillance. Therefore, there is uncontrolled exploitation of the fishery resources which is a ready precursor to overfishing.

Rapidly increasing population in the state capital and other urban areas has increased the build-up of domestic waste which is dumped indiscriminately in our aquatic environments, thereby degrading the environment. Pauly *et al.* (1989) also raised the possibility that, given poverty combined with population growth in many small – scale fishing communities, "Malthusian overfishing" is occurring in Africa as in other developing regions such as Asia. They explained that population growth among small scale fishing communities may lead to increasing demands for fish and fish-related income as well as push migration. This sets in motion a circular pattern of over-exploitation and depletion of fish stocks, at areas of origin as well as migrant destinations.

The disruption of the economic life in erstwhile fishing communities due to massive pollution and destruction of fishing grounds has caused severe hardships.

The absence of effective supporting services (credit and marketing facilities) and fisheries infrastructure such as fishing terminal, fish landing/berthing jetties and fishing boats are also a major challenge.

Absence of skilled manpower in sea fishing and fish farming technology is also contributing to the slow pace of development of fisheries in Bayelsa State.

The non – existence of fisheries development policy in the state has given room for haphazard and disjointed fisheries programmes which are often not executable.

Poor fisheries infrastructure and transportation as well as lack of knowledge of modern fish handling techniques affect much of their landings in Bayelsa state. The poor quality fish products made it difficult for small-scale fishers to meet international standards and therefore cannot partake in regional or global fish trade. In fact, in the Brass River coastal area, during the season of glut, lot of fish (Sardine) is either buried at the shore or thrown back in to the Atlantic dead.

The intrusion of industrial fishers into the 5 nautical miles, non- trawling zone, designated for use by artisanal fishers is causing a lot of destruction of the nets of artisanal fishers by trawlers. This leads to avoidable crises.

The present security challenges in the riverine and coastal communities have made fishing a risky venture in Bayelsa state leading to poverty as observed in IFAD (2006) report which states that poverty and violence are closely related concepts. For instance, Igbabele a once thriving fishing village on Cape Formosa in the Brass River, reputed, then, to be the largest fishing camp in West Africa is now a shadow of itself, so also are other fishing camps in Bayelsa State.

The major challenge to achieving the MDG'S in Bayelsa state is the high incidence of corruption in the various tiers of Government. For instance, where most of the revenue allocation from the Federation Account to the Local Governments do not get to the expected destination is unacceptable.

Way forward for Bayelsa State Fisheries: For fisheries to assist in achieving the MDG's in Bayelsa State, the following 'way forward' strategies are proposed:

A radical change from our traditional resource management style to modern Community – Based Resource Management (CBRM) approach. According to Sajise (1995), this is a process whereby the people themselves are given the opportunity and/or responsibility to manage their own resources, define their goals and aspirations, and to make decision that affect their wellbeing. This is in agreement with the Code for Responsible Fisheries which states that "States ... should ensure that fishers and fish farmers are involved in the policy formulation and implementation process (FAO, 1995). The Community - Based Natural Resources Management Programme of IFAD in the Niger Delta is therefore a welcome development. The program has made community development fund available to support community initiatives in sustainable livelihood improvement, natural resources management and the provision of small – scale community infrastructure (IFAD, 2006).

Initiation of an effective and liberal funding approach. In this approach, the Federal, State and Local Governments in conjunction with private Financial Institutions should be involved. Rural financial services

and improving access to credit are keys to reducing poverty (IFAD, 2006). The microfinance policy needs to be publicized the more. Small-scale fishers/farmers should be informed about the existence of financial services and how these can be accessed (FAO, 2008).

The establishment of modern fishing terminals at strategic seaports (Brass, Akassa, Koluama, and Agge) provided with facilities for berthing, repairs of vessels of medium to large sizes, fishing gear repairs, cold storage, marketing of fish and bunkering of vessels should be given top priority by the State Government. The proposed Brass Deep Water Port Facility by the Bayelsa State Government (BSG, 2008b) is a welcome development, if only it would be executed. In addition, provision of access road to link these terminals to urban centres will facilitate easy evacuation of fish, minimize post harvest spoilage and encourage fish production.

The establishment of an effective, well – equipped and funded Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) Unit in the State Department of Fisheries will ensure sustainability of fisheries resources in the State (World Bank, 1995). In addition, the State Government Environmental Agency should be alive to her responsibility in waste management and water pollution control.

Establishment of effective training programmes. These may include producing skippers to man fishing vessels, by sponsoring youths to the Federal College of Fisheries and Marine Technology, Lagos and the Maritime Academy of Nigeria, Oron. On the other hand, the State Government can establish her own fisheries/maritime institution(s) to train her indigenes.

The establishment of an effective extension unit in the State's Agriculture Development Programme (ADP) to train women in new fish farming techniques so as to increase their opportunities is here been suggested; also, to enable the small – scale fisheries to benefit from export trade in fish and fishery products, fishers should be given sufficient knowledge on proper and hygienic fish handling techniques. This will enable them to overcome the problem of complying with international standards such as Hazzard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) (FAO, 2008).

The State Government should establish an agency that will be responsible for procuring fisheries and aquacultural inputs for sale to fishers/farmers at low prices. The Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP) mandate is for extension and not marketing. Similar agencies such as Delta State Agricultural Procurement Agency and Lagos State Agricultural Inputs Supply Authority have been established in Delta and Lagos States respectively.

The Bayelsa State government should as a matter of urgency design a fisheries policy/plan for the state. This she can do by first conveying a state conference on fisheries where all stakeholders (fishers, academics, administrators, security agents, women, youths, fisheries organizations) can make their contributions on how fisheries can be developed in the state.

Minimizing the problems of corruption and the current security challenge in the state and the Niger Delta region as a whole is beyond the scope of simple fisheries management policy and requires country wide reforms (World Bank, 1995). We need to transform the government from a haven of corruption to an institution that spurs development and serves the people. Good governance and visible dividends of democracy will reduce these challenges tremendously.

CONCLUSION

We are just six years to the target year (2015); Bayelsa State can still achieve the MDG's. A ready window to achieving these is fisheries. Fisheries has shown it has the capacity to generate wealth for artisans, women and youth like, make vital nutritional contribution to human development and effectiveness of anti - retroviral drugs, and also environmental management.

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