

Impact of Green River Project on Livelihood of Farmers in Rivers State Nigeria

I. Ogunlade, O.I. Oladele* and M. B. Ogunsola

Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development University of Ilorin, Nigeria
**Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development University of Ibadan, Nigeria*
E-mail: oladele20002001@yahoo.com, iogunlade@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the impact of Green River Project (GRP) on farmers' livelihood in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study utilized primary data obtained from 140 crop farmers located in three different host communities to determine their awareness level, and examine the impact of the programme on their livelihood. Data collected were analysed using frequency counts, percentages and t-test statistics. It was found that majority of the respondents are aware of the GRP activities and obtained planting materials and experience improvement in their livelihood. The t-test analysis shows that there exist a significant difference in the livelihood before and after GRP intervention. It implies that Green River Project has been able to influence the respondents' livelihood to a certain level. The paper recommends that youth programme should be incorporated into the GRP programmes and more planting materials be made available to ensure the continuity of the programme.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been wide spread violence and youth disturbances in the Southern part of Nigeria. This is particularly serious in the Niger Delta region (Adesope 2000). The nature of exploitation of the Niger Delta at the expense of other indigenes has been a major source of worry to many in this area. Environmental pollution has decimated the region to an extent that they now live at the mercy of the degradation. Ismail (1994) summarized this by stating that the Nigerian State benefit from oil royalties by allowing the exploration of mineral resources which result in pollution and disruption and thence, deprivation of farmlands and fishing ports, without providing adequate compensations.

The Niger Delta has for long been neglected by government and non-governmental agencies. The neglect has possibly led to the suffering of the people (Adesope 2000). It is not unlikely that because of the neglect, and devastation, the economy of the area is now impoverished. The impoverishment seems to be in all ramifications of health, education, rural water supply, electricity, agriculture, women and youth development This is not unrelated to why the area is categorized as educationally disadvantaged (Abokede 1998). According to Meshack- Hart (1999) the development needs of the Niger Delta have been so watered down that they remained almost at the bottom of the ladder of development.

Nigeria's export of 12 million barrels of crude oil a day comes from 12% of the country's land, and indigenous minority communities in these areas receive no economic benefits. Indigenous groups are further impoverished due to environmental degradation from oil production and lack of adequate regulations on multinational companies, as they become more vulnerable to food shortages, health hazards, loss of land, pollution, forced migration and unemployment (Ismail 1994). The people of the Niger Delta cited deep seated frustration because of the absence of opportunities for self actualization and the lack of basic necessities of life. The implication of all these is that the Niger Delta area needs serious attention to meet up with the development challenges in the country (Njemanze 2000).

The Nigerian Government awareness of the Niger Delta plight requested all the oil companies to develop agriculture within the area of their concessions. Consequently, oil companies, well aware of local development needs and aspirations have promoted throughout the years, projects aimed at the socio-economic well being and also at protecting the environment of the region. The Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) after an appraisal of the situation of the host communities provided extension services to farmers in its areas of operation. The main thrust of the extension services is to empower farmers towards sustainable agricultural development (Omagbemi 1998). SPDC provides agricultural

extension services to farmers in its area of operations in Rivers, Bayelsa, Imo, Abia and Akwa-Ibom states. The host communities of SPDC have benefited from the company's development programmes of health, education, rural water supply, electricity, agriculture, women and youth development through the Community Development Department (Nnodim 2002). Other oil companies in the area include Chevron, Texaco, Total to mention a few. The Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC)'s awareness of local development needs led a growing involvement in initiative aimed at promoting the well being of the local communities. The Green River Project (GRP) is the social project promoted by NAOC. It is a modular, integrated rural development programme whose goal is to improve the socio-economic condition of the rural population of the Niger Delta, particularly those in Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta and Imo states, where more than 400,000 people live by subsistence agriculture (Omagbemi 1998).

To encourage the understanding, management and diffusion of new techniques among farmers, the setting up of associations and co-operatives was promoted. The project transmits, especially through women, information on correct utilization of agricultural products, good nutrition sanitary and hygiene practices and home economics. Fish production and rearing techniques using improved techniques were also introduced. Machinery to prepare the land, transport goods and process agricultural products were provided to the communities. The objective of the study was to determine the impact of Green River Project on the Livelihood of farmers in Rivers state Nigeria. Specifically, the paper examined respondents' awareness of the Green River Project activities and identifies the innovations adopted by the farmers as well as the influence of Green River Project on farm families' livelihood. Also, significant differences between the livelihood of the respondents before and after the intervention of Green River Project were explored

METHODOLOGY

The Niger Delta region covers a land area of about 70,000km². It consists of a conglomerate of swamp and dry land divided into eight states: Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Imo, Edo, Akwa-Ibom, Ondo and Abia. The population is about 7 million and an annual growth rate of about 3%. It is

divided into more than 20 ethnic groups. The region plays an important role in the economy of the country. Apart from possessing the largest oil and gas reserves of sub-Saharan Africa, it has great natural resources as well as a complex and luxuriant ecosystem consisting of vast area of mangrove swamp, wet tropical forest and fresh water forests (Omagbemi 1998). The administrative headquarters and coordination office of Green River Project is located in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. From eight host communities to the Green River Project, namely: Omoku, Obrikom, Okwuzi, Ebocha, Mgbede, Oshie, Aggah and Idu, three communities, were randomly selected. Each community where GRP operates has an average of 140 farm families (Omagbemi 1998) with majority as crop farmers. From each of the three communities (Idu, Mgbede, Okwuzi) selected for this study, 33% of the farmers were selected from the sampling frame (46 farmers per community) to give a sample size of 140 crop farmers. Livelihood was operationalised using a rating scale of high -3, medium -2 and low -1 in terms of contribution made by GRP to farmers' livelihood. Structured questionnaire was used to collect responses from the farmers and data obtained were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages and t-test statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to determine the awareness level of the respondents on GRP innovations, data was collected on when the respondents heard of GRP, and adoption percentage. From Table 1, majority of the respondents got to know about the Green River Project innovations between 1991 – 1994 but the full use of the innovations by the majority was not evident until between 1999 and 2002. Also obvious is the point that awareness of GRP innovations has greatly reduced in recent times as only 2% of the respondents became aware of GRP innovations between year 2003 till date. This might be due to the provision of similar services by other oil companies.

Table 2 presents the crop for which the respondents get the most planting materials as Cassava (82%) followed by maize (59%) and then yam (46%). It can be observed that the 3 mostly grown crops by the respondents (Cassava, maize and yam) which were the ones for which they get more of the GRP planting inputs. The crop farmers tend to plant more of any crop for which they get planting materials by the GRP.

Table 1: Awareness of GRP technology

<i>Period</i>	<i>Awareness percentage</i>	<i>Adoption percentage</i>
1987 – 1990	27	12
1991 – 1994	34	16
1995 – 1998	21	26
1999 – 2002	16	34
2003 – till date	2	12
Total	100	100

Table 2: Inputs obtained from the Green River Project by respondents

<i>GRP planting</i>	<i>Materials frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Cassava stem	115	82
Stem yam	65	46
Maize seeds	83	59
Melon seeds	53	38
Pineapple suckers	32	23
Okra seeds	62	44
Plantain suckers	42	30
Irvingia seeds	14	10
Mango seeds	1	1
Citrus seeds	3	2
Pesticides/insecticides	5	4

Table 3 presents the level of contribution of GRP to the farm families livelihood. It can be observed that, the three attributes of family livelihood that have the greatest contribution of GRP include family size, family accommodation and family nutrition in descending order. Through the information, farm families get on Home Economics, Family Nutrition and Home Management, they are able to apply the knowledge which results in a greater contribution of

GRP to these attributes. Family income, access to social program and family employment rank the lowest in descending order. Lack of market for the agricultural products of these farm families could have accounted for low income, channeling social programs through cooperative bodies that people have not been educated on could reduce their willingness and participation, while low family employment may have resulted from the absence of required skill and knowledge for employment with GRP.

Table 4 presents the result of the test for significant difference in the livelihood of respondents before and after GRP intervention. The mean score after GRP intervention was higher than the mean score before the intervention. Also, $t = 18.33$ $p < 0.05$ shows that there is a significant difference in the impact of GRP on the respondents.

CONCLUSION

The paper has clearly shown that members of GRP host communities are aware of the existence of the programme in their community although they do not have equal access to the GRP activities. GRP has influenced the livelihood of the host communities in terms of family size, children education, personal hygiene, family nutrition, physical health, family accommodation and family income. The study therefore recommends that youths programmes should be incorporated to the GRP activities and more planting materials should be supplied to ensure the continuity of the programme.

Table 3: Level of GRP contribution to family livelihood

<i>Attributes of family livelihood</i>	<i>Level of GRP contribution (in percent)</i>				<i>Mean</i>	<i>Rank</i>
	<i>High</i>	<i>Med</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Non</i>		
Family size	60	21	19	-	3.18	1 st
Children Education	31	21	14	34	2.35	7 th
Personal hygiene	44	12	20	24	2.61	5 th
Family nutrition	44	11	21	24	2.75	3 rd
Access to social program	34	9	-	24	1.90	9 th
Family income	29	19	26	57	2.03	8 th
Family Employment	12	-	-	88	1.37	10 th
Family Accommodation	29	30	26	15	2.79	2 nd
Physical health	46	11	20	2	2.61	5 th
Working condition	34	4	54	7	2.74	4 th

Table 4: t-test analysis of difference in livelihood before and after GRP intervention

<i>Groups</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>	<i>MD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>
Livelihood score before GRP	140	10.70	2.64	1.12	13.91	18.33	139	0.002
Livelihood score after GRP	140	24.65	10.12	2.40				

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