



A report on

# Niger Delta Region Youth Assessment



**June 2011**

PIND AA-YA-01-October 2011

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**Cover page photographs:** Youth participants at the FGD session in Port Harcourt, Rivers State

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**Abbreviations**

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| AGDC      | After Graduate Development Centre                                    |
| DFID      | United Kingdom Department for International Development              |
| GDP       | Gross domestic product   |
| HISARD    | Harambee Incubator for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development |
| ICT       | Information and communications technology                            |
| IYF       | International Youth Foundation                                       |
| NDDC      | Niger Delta Development Commission                                   |
| NDPI      | Niger Delta Partnership Initiative                                   |
| NGO       | Non Governmental organization  |
| NIDPRODEV | Niger Delta Professionals for Development                            |
| PIND      | Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta                           |
| RQ        | Research question  |
| FGD       | Focus group discussions  |
| KII       | Key informant interviews   |
| NLNG      | Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas  |
| NYCN      | National Youth Council of Nigeria                                    |
| RSSDA     | Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency                          |
| UNDP      | United National Development Programme                                |
| USAID     | United States Agency for International Development                   |

## Executive Summary

The Niger Delta generates nearly 80% of Nigeria's revenue, yet the majority of the population there remains in dire poverty and the region has been beset by violent conflict. Current development efforts and assistance recognizes that much more effort is needed to improve socio-economic conditions in the region if its problems are to be sustainably overcome. No single organization can address these problems on its own and thus the best solutions lie in the establishment of effective multi-stakeholder partnerships.

In an attempt to better understand and reflect the needs and desires of youth in the Niger Delta in its programs and project, the foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND), a non-profit organization established a guiding principle to integrate youth participation and mainstreaming of their issues into every aspect of project design and implementation to foster equitable participation and benefit for all. The foundation intends to design, fund and build broad stakeholder support for programs and activities that will empower communities and youth to generate equitable socio-economic development in the Niger Delta to achieve a peaceful and enabling environment for equitable economic growth.

Since its establishment in 2010, PIND has engaged a broad range of stakeholders to gather feedback and input in developing its strategic objectives and priorities. It has commissioned studies to better understand the needs and issues of youth and women in the region and held focus group discussions with entrepreneurs, government officials and civil society organizations (CSOs). The information obtained from these stakeholders has helped to shape PIND's strategic direction. This youth assessment report is therefore a product of the study PIND commissioned the International Youth Foundation (IYF) to conduct in late 2010.

The purpose of the assessment was to:

1. Collect quantitative and qualitative baseline data on youth in the Niger Delta, including:
  - The demographic profile of youth
  - Key aspirations and issues of concern to youth
  - Opportunities and challenges facing youth
2. Identify existing youth-related policies and programs, and determine what lessons have been learned related to youth development in the region

In order to capture relevant data for the study, a number of methods were used which include a review of relevant reports, books and journal articles, in addition to Key Informant Interviews, Focus Group Discussions and a Rapid Youth Survey.

Based on data collected to answer the above questions, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The government and oil companies were blamed equally for the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta. Young people blamed the government for rampant corruption that worked to redirect development away from the Delta, or away from those most in need. Oil companies were cast as extractors who did not do enough to support local employment.

**While there is no uniform definition of youth in the Niger Delta, it is common to view young people from this area using a “deficits model”. That is, young people are often characterized as poorly educated, lacking job skills, and prone to militancy or violence. The data from this assessment revealed that young people view themselves in much more nuanced ways. In particular, young people see themselves as having great potential and motivation to improve their circumstances. However, they described their lack of access to skills or resources that could assist them in succeeding as a major obstacle to their development.**

- Young people in the region were portrayed, and many also see themselves, as having an “*entitlement mentality*”. This was characterized as Delta youth believing they are an oppressed group and, as such, entitled to compensation from those that are taking advantage of them, namely the government and oil companies.
- All participants (be they young people, government officials, or private sector employers) agreed that young people in the Niger Delta require employability training and support. Life skills, such as teamwork, communication, and conflict management was seen as particularly important.
- Additionally, there was a shared belief that youth would also benefit from programs that provide them with training and capital support to create small businesses. There was also a felt need to improve the quality of education in the Delta.

## Background

Nigeria is home to the largest population of any country in Africa and is the second largest economy by GDP (after South Africa) in sub-Saharan Africa. Of the country's 148 million people, more than 60 percent are youth under the age of 25. In the past 30 years, the country has been educating and assimilating into the workforce only a small fraction of youth while neglecting a larger uneducated population. Of the educated, only a small percentage finds stable employment after graduation. 69 percent of university and polytechnic graduates are unemployed, while employers have described Nigerian graduates as unemployable, lacking needed workplace skills.

These issues are exacerbated in the Niger Delta region. The population of the Niger Delta region is young with nearly two-thirds of its population – estimated at 29 million – below 30 years of age. Despite vast oil resources, the Delta region is characterized by extremely high poverty levels. 70 percent of youth in the region live below the poverty line. The youth (15-24 years) unemployment rate is 40 percent, far exceeding the national average youth unemployment rate of 14 percent. Youth un- and under-employment has ultimately become both a driver of conflict and a formidable obstacle for peace and regional development. Despite these persistent problems, the current government-sponsored amnesty in the region offers improved security and a more favorable environment for growth. Central to breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and conflict will be the creation of productive opportunities for young people.

## Purpose and Scope Assessment of the Study

The purpose of the assessment was to:

1. Collect quantitative and qualitative baseline data on youth in the Niger Delta, including:
  - The demographic profile of youth
  - Key aspirations and issues of concern to youth
  - Opportunities and challenges facing youth
2. Identify existing youth-related policies and programs, and determine what lessons have been learned related to youth development in the region

The assessment objectives were framed under six research questions (RQ):

**RQ1:** How are youth defined in the Niger Delta and what are key elements of the youth demographic profile?

**RQ2:** What are key aspirations and issues of concern to youth in the region?

**RQ3:** What opportunities exist for sustainable and equitable youth-focused economic development in the Niger Delta?

**RQ4:** What skills, resources, or capacity building do governmental, non-governmental, and community-based organizations have or need in order to effectively support youth development in the region most effectively?

**RQ5:** What opportunities exist to foster youth stability and peace-building in vulnerable and conflict-impacted communities in the region?

**This youth assessment analyzed the needs and resources of youth, as well as the policies and programs that impact youth development. It integrated qualitative data about youth knowledge, perceptions, and skills with quantitative data on the status and performance of youth and programs in different sectors designed to meet youth needs.**

**RQ6:** What information, resources, or networks can be leveraged or created to promote understanding and awareness of youth-related socio-economic needs in the Niger Delta?

## Methodology

**As part of the Niger Delta youth assessment, the assessment team examined existing socioeconomic data related to youth in the Niger Delta and collected primary data to answer the research questions. The methodology involved a review of existing documents and extant data as well as the systematic collection and analysis of primary data from reliable human subjects through focused and flexible data-gathering instruments.**

**The focus of the study was young people in the Niger Delta. Data forming the body of this report includes information on young people aged between 15 and 35. Data was collected by Nigerian researchers in cooperation with key youth organizations and youth leaders in the communities. Data was collected from senatorial districts in Delta, Bayelsa, and Rivers States. Data on youths from Edo, Akwa Ibom, Imo and Abia States was also collected.**

The content of this report includes a statistical picture of Niger Delta youth using data from the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics and other information sources. It also includes statistical data collected from a rapid youth survey conducted during the assessment.

### Literature Review

The definition of “youth” varies by context. As such, it is useful to conduct a literature review to provide a framework within which the assessment can be contextualized. Placing Niger Delta youth in context allowed for logical, valid and theoretically substantive conclusions. The literature review consisted of two parts: 1) identifying the most significant sources that were related to the subject of youth development in the Niger Delta; and 2) making a comparative analysis of the sources to arrive at valid conclusions. The findings of the literature review served as a baseline for determining:

- The various perspectives from which youth are viewed and the needs that are associated with their stage of growth;
- Those institutions that is associated with youth development and the basic assumptions underlying their approach to youth interventions in the Delta.

The literature review included an assessment of previously established findings and provided a context for conducting field work. It helped us to identify key informants who were pivotal to the assessment process. Four categories of literature were consulted:

- Secondary data sources;
- National and regional youth policy;
- Reports and research manuscripts from government ministries and donor agencies;
- Academic research of youth issues in the Niger Delta

### Key Informant Interviews

The assessment team employed individual interviews to collect data from national and local government officials, civil society

organizations, donor agencies, private sector leaders, and others active in youth development in the Delta region. Interviews were conducted using structured interview guides designed by IYF and collaboratively revised with the local research team.

The assessment team conducted all interviews, with a team member assigned as a lead interviewer to facilitate the respondents through a series of prescribed questions, while encouraging them to expand upon their answers. Interview guides were tailored to a respondent’s particular focus: for example, business owners’ and entrepreneurs’ perspectives of young workers, particularly their on-

the-job challenges or need for additional training. The interview guides included separate “skip patterns” that allowed the interviewer to use prescribed question-sets for particular respondents. The purpose of these interviews was to capture the detailed and nuanced understanding of Niger Delta youth, information about past and current programs and any measured outcomes of youth programming. Taken together, these interviews shed light on the policy and development environment for youth empowerment, document lessons learned, and suggest areas where increased intervention would be useful.

## Focus Group Interviews

The assessment team conducted group interviews with young people throughout the Niger Delta. On average, focus groups lasted 90-120 minutes and used a structured focus group guide. Printed guides for focus group discussions included a structured set of questions intended to elicit youth opinions on the major research questions. The guides consisted of major topical questions with suggested follow-up questions to address predictable responses or prompt unresponsive groups. It was important that the focus groups, like the key informant interviews, delve beneath initial or superficial answers and get to the less understood dynamics of youth development, or the lack thereof, in the Niger Delta. IYF believes that the compilation of these focus group data provide a “snapshot” of youth circumstances in the Niger Delta and help “tell the story” of youth in this context.

## Rapid Youth Survey

The assessment team administered a short survey to youth respondents in order to collect basic quantitative data. With the survey, the assessment team collected basic demographic data including sex, current community of residency, community of origin, ethnic identity, marital status, and age of respondent. Other substantive information included in the survey included:

- Years of completed schooling and level completed;
- Work status (employed, self-employed, family worker, unemployed);
- Exposure to violence;
- Participation in post-schooling training, such as vocational/technical education/training, traditional apprenticeship training, or other continuing education;
- Participation in civic activities;

The survey was short and administered in 10-15 minutes. The instrument consisted of closed-set, multiple-choice questions and several simple open-ended questions.

## Research Sample

This assessment required two sampling strategies: one for key informants (e.g., government representatives, development partner institutions, private sector firms, and provider and advocacy organizations) and another for youth participants (e.g., focus groups and youth surveys). Each sampling process is discussed separately.

**Key informant sample:** The key informant sample came from government/donor/ private sector/provider staff and consisted of individuals with the most informed opinions regarding youth conditions in the Niger Delta. The sample included representatives of key organizations and programs with a youth orientation. National-level government stakeholders were included as were representatives of local government. In addition, the sample includes representatives of youth employers, trade and business associations, as well as non-governmental and advocacy organizations, including youth-led organizations, that serve young people, such as civic and human rights organizations. A list of key informants is provided as an annex to this report.

**Focus group sample:** The assessment team facilitated focus group interviews in all senatorial districts of Rivers and Delta State. The team convened homogenous groups of youths who did not necessarily know each other. In some cases the team had heterogeneous groups such as students and non – students. Age of focus group participants ranged from 15 to 35. The team conducted 43 FGDs in total (see Table 1 for specific information on focus group distribution).

**Table 1: Regional focus group distribution**

| State           | Senatorial District | City/Town/Village | Quantity |
|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Rivers State    | Rivers West         | Omuku             | 3        |
|                 | Rivers South East   | Bori              | 2        |
|                 | Rivers East         | Port Harcourt     | 7        |
| Delta State     | Delta South         | Warri             | 5        |
|                 | Delta Central       | Sapele            | 5        |
|                 | Delta North         | Asaba             | 5        |
| Edo State       | Edo South           | Benin             | 5        |
| Akwa Ibom State | Uyo                 | Uyo               | 1        |
| Bayelsa State   | n/a                 | n/a               | 10       |

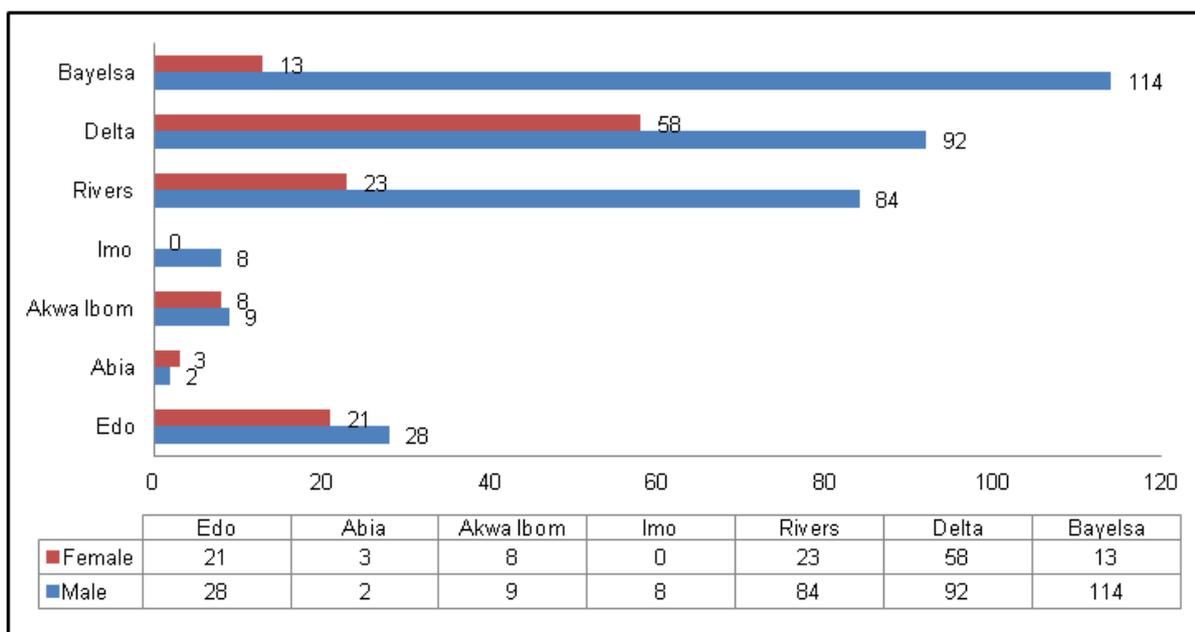
Due to the political tensions in Bayelsa State, the assessment team was advised to bring youth participants to Yenogoa, the state capital, rather than travelling to the other senatorial districts. Using this approach, the assessment team successfully conducted 10 focus groups of youth from: Yenogoa and Kolokuma/Opokuma, representing Bayelsa Central Senatorial District; youths from Sagbama and Ekeremor, representing Bayelsa West Senatorial District; and youths from Nembe, Ogbia and Brass representing Bayelsa East Senatorial District.

**Rapid youth survey sample:** The assessment team administered 464 surveys with a 100% response rate (see Table 2). The sample was generated using purposeful methods, that is, non-probability methods were used to select young people into the study. Purposive sampling is useful for situations where one needs to reach a targeted sample quickly and where sampling for proportionality is not the primary concern.

**Table 2: Age distribution of survey sample (Source: Rapid Youth Survey)**

| Age          | Frequency  | Percentage  |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Under 15     | 5          | 1%          |
| 15-18        | 27         | 6%          |
| 19-21        | 77         | 17%         |
| 22-24        | 97         | 21%         |
| 25-27        | 90         | 19%         |
| 28-30        | 72         | 16%         |
| Above 30     | 86         | 19%         |
| Unspecified  | 10         | 2%          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>464</b> | <b>100%</b> |

While attempts were made to ensure proportionality, given the time in-country and the ability to quickly recruit youth into the study, the survey consisted of more males than females. Figure 1 shows the gender frequencies of the sample, and reveals that the sample drew heavily from male participants. While more than a quarter (27%) of respondents was women, follow-on studies may want to consider a concerted focus on women from the Niger Delta.



**Figure 1: Gender frequencies**

As it concerns education, of the surveyed youth, over a third (38%) had graduated from a secondary school. Another 24% had graduated from a university, with another 14% having graduated from a technical college.

Figure 2 and Figure 3 reveal that of these sampled youth, more than 60% stated that they were not currently working. Over a quarter of the sample (27%) stated that they were working, with another 11% indicated an “unspecified” employment status. Of the states where the survey was administered, Bayelsa exhibited the highest frequency of unemployed youth, with 91% reporting that they were not currently working. In contrast, a higher frequency of youth in Edo State reported being employed, with over half indicating they currently had jobs.

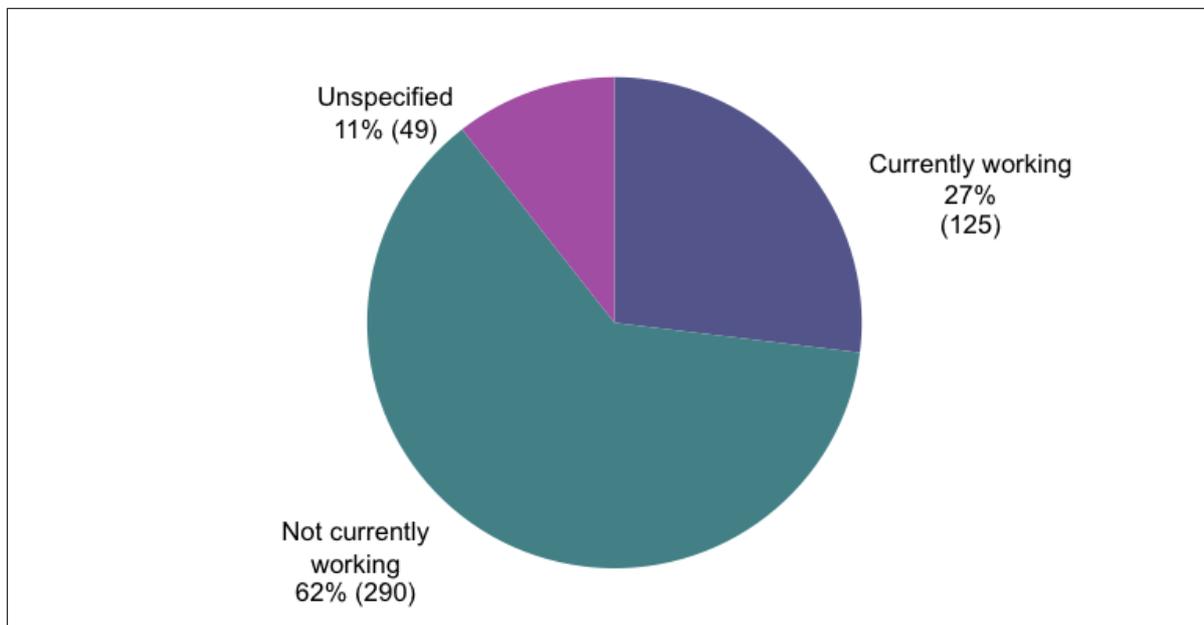


Figure 2: Employment status (Source: Rapid Youth Survey)

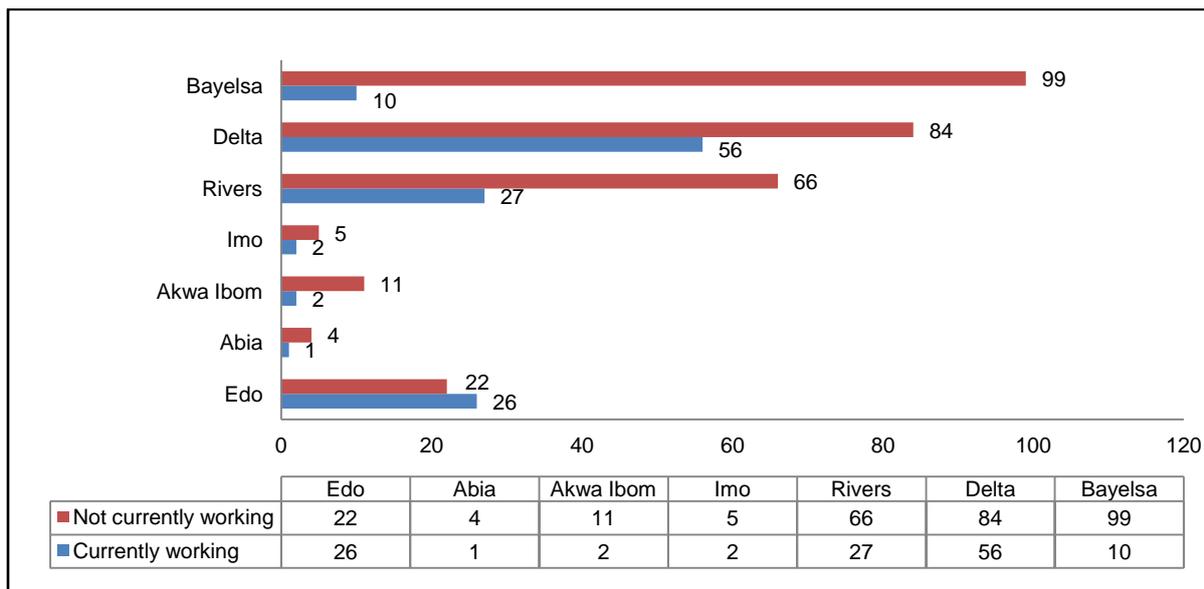


Figure 3: Employment frequencies (Source: Rapid Youth Survey)

## Limitations

There are limitations with all research activities, especially as one attempt to condense years of lived experience into a short field work exercise. In the case of this assessment, there were two main limitations:

1. **Time:** PIND requested that IYF conduct a rapid youth assessment. By nature, rapid assessments occur over very limited durations, ranging from several days to several weeks. Field work for this activity lasted three weeks, during which 464 surveys were administered; 43 focus groups were conducted; and 53 individual interviews were conducted. This represents a substantial dataset by which to draw findings. However, datasets of this size and structure cannot be used to examine changes over time or to measure impact.
2. **Sample:** Rapid assessments typically use two types of sampling strategies: purposeful and convenience. Purposeful sampling is the process of collecting data from those that are most informed on a given topic, so to get the most information on the topic. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling, which involves the sample being drawn from that part of the population closest at hand. Both strategies allow the researcher to collect as much information as possible in the shortest amount of time. The advantages of using these two strategies are: 1) they are the quickest to implement; 2) the data collected tends to be rich and of high quality; and 3) the costs are less prohibitive compared to large, randomized control trials. In this assessment, IYF worked with its local consultants to ensure that focus groups included a suitable gender balance, socio-economic status balance, and ethnic balance.

Despite these limitations, the assessment team feels strongly that the findings presented here are valid. Validity was ensured in three ways:

### Validity was ensured in three ways:

1. **Triangulation:** In order to confirm our findings, IYF employed a variety of methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups, surveys) from a variety of sources (e.g., youth, donors, civil society, private sector, public sector, and extant data). These data were examined across and within topics so to confirm or nullify hypotheses.
2. **Peer debriefing:** This is a process whereby the researcher convenes a group of knowledgeable colleagues to review data analysis at all stages, from a preliminary review to the final production. The purpose of the peer debriefer is to provide an opportunity to “reality check” findings, assessing whether results converge or diverge from commonly accepted understandings. In the case of convergence, it is important to employ the peer debriefer as a “devil’s advocate”, examining to see if there were analyses that were ignored. In the case of divergence, the peer debriefer is used to examine the specific reasons for the difference, to suggest reanalysis and/or to confirm the credibility of new understandings of the data. IYF employed a peer debriefing team to review all results.
3. **Confirmability:** Confirmability is the degree to which findings are the product of the inquiry rather than the biases of the researcher. IYF’s evaluation methods ensured confirmability through the production of an audit trail, which is evidence and examples of raw data that can be reviewed.

1. **Triangulation**
2. **Peer debriefing**
3. **Confirmability**

## Key Findings and Observations

### RQ1: How are youth defined in the Niger Delta and what are key elements of the youth demographic profile?

It has become commonplace to define youth in the Niger Delta in terms of restiveness, militancy and poverty. The youth population of the Niger Delta is by no means a homogenous cohort, however. In truth, the only common denominator that cuts across all categories is a profound dissatisfaction with their current circumstances. In this section, we present a definition of youth in the Niger Delta that

takes into consideration young people’s opinions of themselves and their peers, the views of key stakeholders as well as the wider research on this population.

According to official policy, youth in Nigeria are those aged between 18 and 35. Table 3 presents the age composition of youth in the Niger Delta.

**Table 3: Age composition of Niger Delta youth (Source: Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics)**

| AGE GROUPS | ABIA      | AKWA IBOM | BAYELSA | DELTA     | EDO       | IMO       | ONDO      | RIVERS    |
|------------|-----------|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 15-19      | 342,186   | 458,814   | 199,148 | 471,245   | 362,413   | 466,441   | 391,248   | 604,685   |
| 20-24      | 289,992   | 388,866   | 167,662 | 418,609   | 354,840   | 397,704   | 339,862   | 549,285   |
| 25-29      | 247,054   | 336,925   | 146,861 | 357,452   | 303,111   | 332,920   | 300,576   | 486,825   |
| 30-34      | 191,223   | 260,231   | 116,574 | 272,878   | 216,121   | 256,101   | 233,102   | 376,281   |
| Total      | 1,070,455 | 1,444,836 | 630,245 | 1,520,184 | 1,236,485 | 1,453,166 | 1,264,788 | 2,017,076 |

**Ogbeifun categorized Niger Delta youths according to three categories...**

The guiding youth policy document in Nigeria, the Nigerian Youth Employment Policy Plan, defines youth based on their deficits. The document refers to the “youth employment challenge” and presents the step towards “minimizing the risks to national security” and “our national development” posed by rising youth unemployment, underemployment, militancy and violence. Other have described Niger Delta youth in more

subtle ways; that is, including the problems and obstacles noted by the government, while also suggesting Delta youth are disciplined and have a strong sense of justice. [Ogbeifun<sup>1</sup>](#) categorized Niger Delta youths according to three categories:

1. Youths engaged in genuine agitation for their rights and restoration of the dignity of Niger Delta;
2. Youths who are seeking revenge for the “use and dump” attitude of the elites in the region;
3. Youths engaged in criminal activities.

The first group questions their current socio-economic situation and the disadvantages associated with it. They agitate the government to address issues such as destruction of their means of livelihood, unemployment, poverty, environmental degradation, lack of basic social amenities, and infrastructures, etc. While this group is generally thought as interested in the positive youth development, their means of achieving these goals can be, although are not always, through violence or civil disruption.

Ogbeifun’s second category includes those young people who have been manipulated by corrupt leaders. These young people are typically employed as thugs to exert pressure on the public to acquiesce to certain policies or demands. Ogbeifun writes that the young people “in this group are very ferocious and deadly in their operations because they perceive society as being unfair and unkind to them”. Therefore as a way of dealing with social and political problems, they use violence, intimidation and extortion to fight for what they believe is rightly theirs. As the assessment team learned, this is usually demands for jobs or money.

The third category of youth claim to be engaged in civil disobedience to better the circumstances of the Delta. However, as Ogbeifun notes, they are often agitating for more selfish reasons. This cohort is often blamed for sabotaging oil pipelines, stealing oil and kidnapping private sector executives. Ogbeifun notes that their primary purpose is to extort money through ransoms and bribes.

There are clearly other categories that can describe youth and many of the youth in the Delta region see themselves as highly motivated and ready to work and be constructive members of their communities. At the same time, Mitee<sup>2</sup> identified another category of Niger Delta youth as the “stay-at-home” cohort. This group organizes periodic protests against oil companies with demands for employment. Some work through legal representatives or organized community elders. As a means of pacification, Mitee notes that oil companies often pay stipends to these young people. Such concessions, Mitee notes, have helped to create a class of idle youths who neither want to go to school nor work. Ultimately, and as Osaghae et al<sup>3</sup> state, the result of placating young people or defining them by a list of deficits, is the creation of an attitude and identity in which young people “no longer believe in hard work as a virtue [and instead] seek easy means of wealth.”

These key informants described this as an *entitlement mentality* and one of the biggest obstacles to sustainable youth development in the Niger Delta.

In focus group discussions, young people suggested that the government and oil companies were the primary culprits in stimulating an entitlement mentality. In particular, young people blamed the government’s amnesty program by rewarding the *repentant* youths in the Delta. Repentant youth are those that publicly renounce their past as agitators and request clemency from the government. In response, the assessment team was told, the government heralds these youth as reformed and provides them with a monthly living allowance. For many young people, these stipends contribute to a view that militancy is profitable. During focus groups, young people suggested that amnesty has, in turn, led to increased youth idleness and, ultimately under-employment. In Bori, for example, participants stated that between 70 to 80 percent of the young people enrolled in the amnesty programs were not militants at all. Rather, due to high unemployment, many present themselves as “repentant militants” in order to receive the stipend. In some cases, young people go as far as to sell the employment opportunity to another young person who is ready to work, with an agreement to collect a certain percentage of the person’s earnings based on their new job.

## **RQ2: What are key aspirations and issues of concern to youth in the region?**

The majority of youth participants – who were primarily either students or unemployed youth (with a very low percentage of youth in paid employment), although the assessment did include some semi-literate, informal sector workers (such as street vendors or motorcycle delivery vendors) – when asked to state their aspirations, said, “...just to survive.” In Port Harcourt, Bori, and Bayelsa, young people told the assessment team that they try to occupy their time with positive activities such as educational seminars or church activities. There were strong indicators that the youth in urban areas, such as Port Harcourt, Warri, Benin, and Asaba, were trying to “take charge of their lives” by engaging in casual work to earn small amounts of money. During the focus groups in Port Harcourt, most participants also said they did casual work to supplement their income as their families could barely afford to maintain their own costs. Female participants commonly

**Over the course of the assessment, key informants, both within the government and the private sector, revealed a belief similar to that of Osaghae. Namely, young people in the Niger Delta, be that due to neglect or placation, have become unemployable. Of the policy makers and senior government officials that were interviewed as part of this assessment, many echoed this notion. This unemployability, it was noted, was due to an internalized belief that they were “owed” something, either by the state or by multinational corporations.**

**Youth in Port Harcourt referred to incidences in which even where companies offer young people jobs, such positions were often rejected because, to quote one focus group participant, “they prefer to earn money without working”.**

**The majority of youth participants, when asked to state their aspirations, said, “...just to survive.”**

responded that they worked in hairdressing salons or tailoring shops for small salaries. Some participants admitted that they engaged in illegal activities “to survive” because these activities “bring in more money”. Illegal activities mentioned include petty theft, Internet fraud, and selling stolen property.



*FGD Session in Bori, Rivers state*

While young people expressed their aspirations in abstract terms as “just to survive”, when probed, it became clear that they had specific concerns about their circumstances and how to survive in the Niger Delta. While there were numerous issues offered, the majority of young people suggested that the primary obstacles that prevented positive youth development in the Niger Delta revolved around low quality and irrelevant education, limited opportunities for livelihood creation, corruption, and militancy.

## Education

**Young people suggested that the current types of education being offered in the Niger Delta did not match the needs of young people. Some did mention high academic achievement as their greatest success, others suggested their education was worthless as it did not translate into a job or improved livelihoods for the community.**

Delta youth revealed a deep understanding on how the quality of education determines one’s job skills and subsequent opportunities for employment. Youth respondents placed the blame for the poor education system in the Delta squarely on the shoulders of government. Young people in Akwa Ibom believe that they have been denied the opportunity to grow beyond their current situation due to a lack of funds and basic amenities in their community. Most of the youths felt that financial hardships and high levels of poverty have denied them opportunities and access to development options. In Bori, the youths felt that the most valuable form of ‘empowerment’ would be ‘free and high quality education for all the Niger Delta youths’.

The UNDP (2006) provides a stark reminder of the inadequacy of the current education system in the Niger Delta. With a population of over 8 million people and an area of 30,000 square kilometers, as of 2000 there were only 2169 primary schools. Equally problematic, but more dire in terms of outreach to young persons, there were only 545 secondary schools throughout the Niger Delta. For secondary schools, the school-to-student ration ratio is 1:14,679, with each school serving an area of 55 square kilometers. Just as important is the perception on the part of the youth of the poor quality of the education offered.

Data collection revealed that foundational skills such as literacy and numeracy were quite low, particularly in Bayelsa, Omuku and Bori. Some of the participants who had claimed to have completed secondary school education could not read the survey questionnaires administered by the

assessment team. Similarly, graduates and polytechnic students in Bayelsa and Bori were unable to interpret some of the basic vocabulary used in the questionnaire.

## Livelihoods

It was repeatedly stated that while the oil companies make tremendous profits off the natural resources of the Delta, the belief was that they do little to support development, in general, and employment, in particular. Young people in Bayelsa were particularly vocal about oil companies' refusal to employ them. Rural youth, such as those in Bori and Omuku expressed the need for economic empowerment. These youths, as well as those from Akwa Ibom, stated that they had been denied the opportunity to develop beyond their current situation due to a lack of resources and basic amenities. While some young people expressed high levels of motivation and a willingness to work (as one respondent stated "Poverty is the greatest motivation anyone can have"), many expressed that nothing in their environment served to motivate them. Almost half of the respondents in Warri and Sapele expressed extremely low levels of motivation and little hope for the future.

While young people did express an interest and motivation to become self-employed, there was less evidence on how this would be accomplished. More often, when asked about employment and earning an income, young people suggested that the public sector was responsible. That is, it was the public sector that was both responsible for providing job training, but also for supplying stable employment to residents of the Delta. Young people expressed indignation that the public sector was not hiring all the young people that needed jobs. The belief was that the public sector jobs were available, but for reasons they assumed were due to corruption and nepotism, residents of the Delta were not being offered these jobs. It should be stressed here that young people regularly expressed that it was primarily the public sector that should supply jobs. There were certainly expressions that the oil companies were a major employer. Young people expressed that they were eager to gain employment in the oil sector. However, the overwhelming majority of respondents suggested that the most attractive jobs were those within the public sector.

Regarding the perceived role of the oil industry as it concerns employment, young people expressed a number of beliefs. Primary among this was a desire for oil companies to provide greater access to training and jobs. In many ways this was presented as an issue of entitlement. That is, young people suggested that given the benefit that the companies were gaining from extracting oil from the Delta, residents of the Delta should benefit in some capacity. For some, this was an issue of training. Young people suggested that the oil companies should go farther in providing training to residents of the Delta to serve in their companies. Many stated that while the oil companies do hire in significant numbers, employees tended to not be from the Delta. These "non-indigenes", as they were described, were often presented as a poorly qualified ("They cannot speak good English" one respondent said), but are hired because of a perception that Delta residents are prone to militancy and lack suitable skills. Others suggested that the oil companies are often complicit in the corruption of the region. Many young people stated that hiring managers at the oil companies often ask for bribes to prospective employees or steer their friends and family members to positions. Thus, many young people noted that they felt excluded from the opportunities that the oil companies present. The leader of the students' association in one of the host communities felt that the oil

**Youth perceived the creation of sustainable livelihoods (be that formal employment or entrepreneurship creation) to be a dire need in the Niger Delta. As repeated throughout focus groups, young people believed that their current unemployment problems were the result of oil industries being the predominant employer.**

**In rural areas, young people interpreted empowerment as "opportunities to provide for themselves."**

**While it is likely the case that local governments are a primary employer in the Delta (as it is the case in many developing countries), young people did not appear to fully appreciate their ability to look beyond public sector employment.**

**In Bori, the youth felt that the most valuable form of 'empowerment' would be 'free and high quality education for all the Niger Delta youths'. In the urban areas, some of the participants also perceived empowerment as a priority need; however, they attached empowerment to entrepreneurial development including access to finance and participation in decision making on issues that concerned youths.**

companies were responsible for the poor condition of youth in the region. He said that they had made many efforts gain employment the oil company in their community but have been unsuccessful. We noticed that the 'entitlement mentality' expressed by key informant interviewees was prevalent in the youths of host communities (Ekeremor and Omuku).

While some respondents mentioned academic attainment as their greatest achievement, others felt that their educational achievement was useless as it did not translate into a job or any of the benefits that it was supposed to bring. Most of the graduates that attended FGD's in Port Harcourt recounted several efforts to find employment. There was one youth in the Port Harcourt FGD who had obtained a First Class Honors degree but had been unemployed for over a year. He told us that his preferred career aspiration was to teach. He had attended several interviews at the University for a position as a Graduate Assistant but was yet to secure employment. These youths and the youths in Akwa Ibom believe that they have been denied the opportunity to grow beyond their current situation due to a lack of funds and basic amenities in their

community. Most of the youths felt that financial hardships and high levels of poverty had denied them opportunities and access to development options.

## Corruption

Young people were very aware that corruption hindered development in the Niger Delta. Across the region, participants spoke of the "insincerity of government" as a primary cause of youth neglect. In Port Harcourt, young people explained that the current administration in Abuja, while sincere in their wish to support development in the Delta, needed to curb corruption. In Bayelsa State and Rivers State, young people spoke about the insincerity of government and community leaders as an obstacle to youth development. Young people in Rivers State, for example, noted that most of the resources that were meant for youth activities were often embezzled by community leaders or redirected to support political cronies. A popular overseas scholarship program was noted as particularly corrupt.

The scholarship program, administered by a parastatal agency, provides scholarships for 300 residents of Rivers State to study medicine, engineering, law, economics and physical sciences, with the objective of enhancing the State's human capital. Some young people stated that while they had submitted applications for scholarships, they had been informed that they were not selected. They suspected the selection process was fraught with nepotism. Some young people stated that they knew people who had not submitted an application but had been awarded a scholarship and were now studying at overseas universities and training centers.

During an interview with the executive director of the agency that manages the scholarship program, these suspicions were corroborated. He explained that the creation of the managing parastatal was based on good intentions, but its activities had been hijacked by corrupt politicians. Rather than abiding by the rule of law and proper selection procedures, it was common for these leaders to use the scholarship as a reward for those families who supported his or her candidacy or policies. He stated that as executive director, local and national politicians regularly call him to include their relatives in the scholarship draw. Given his relative powerlessness, he noted, he has little choice but to meet their requests. As a result, he stated the scholarship scheme uses 75% of his operating budget, while only serving 5% of the target population, namely those of higher social classes. The Executive Director was not optimistic about the possibility of stopping this practice. He stated that the scholarship program has become such a vital tool for influence peddling that it is now difficult to rectify the ongoing problem without cancelling the scheme all together.

These sentiments were echoed throughout the focus group discussions. Young people provided numerous examples of how local government and the private sector in the Delta were riddled with nepotism and other forms of corruption. In some cases, this was a request for bribes in order to be considered for a position in a company. In Baylesa, a young man spoke emphatically about how elder politicians in the local government preserved employment positions within the public sector for their family and friends. He stated, “these [employment] schemes are being hijacked by the elder statesmen. It is just for their families and friends, for their own selfish, individual purposes.” Respondents spoke angrily about these godfathers and saw them as a major obstacle to youth development.

The private sector was not immune to the influence of corruption. Young people provided numerous examples of how hiring managers in a range of companies often requested bribes for providing a young person with the job application, demanded that the young person split their salary with them in return for a position within the company, or demanded sexual favors from female applicants in return for employment.

## Militancy

Among the youth that participated in focus groups, there was little consensus regarding the impact of militancy on development in the Delta. For many, political violence was seen as a primary obstacle to positive youth development. With upcoming elections, youth stated that politicians were recruiting young militants to exert their influence. Young people in Port Harcourt, for example, were very vocal on how youth militancy was a significant hindrance to local development. They stated that the majority of young persons in the Niger Delta were hard working but had been marginalized by both national and regional governments. They believe that most militants were lured by politicians into oil bunkering or political violence as a way to earn money. In contrast to those in Port Harcourt, young people from Okpokuma stated that militants were fighting for the emancipation of Niger Delta. They believed that the unfair balance of resources between the ‘North’ (i.e., the rest of Nigeria) and the Niger Delta was the primary reason for militancy. The Southern Baylesa youth agreed, stating that they felt marginalized by the ‘north’ and that the resources, and associated profits from the Niger Delta region should remain in the Niger Delta. A young person from rural Baylesa State said, “This criminal aspect comes from frustration too. It comes from frustration that someone who graduated from a university comes out without job. So he must look for something to earn money.” In many cases, the alternative to unemployment and lack of income is to become involved in militant groups that provide some semblance of livelihoods and social protection for its members.

In many cases, young people expressed their inability to provide for themselves as the result of being an *oppressed group*, namely residents of the Niger Delta. These young people suggested that the most effective means to solve this oppression was through direct action, either in cooperation with those in power (e.g., oil companies and the government) or through physical confrontations with them. Youth in Baylesa expressed this in stark terms. A student leader suggested that it was the oil companies who were responsible for the conditions in the Delta. As such, he explained, it was the oil companies that bore the greatest responsibility in addressing these development problems. He said

**Examples of corruption were varied. Many young people spoke of “godfatherism”, meaning that a young person must have an older benefactor or supporter within the local government. To obtain a “godfather” however, required the young person to provide some sort of payment to him, as well as allegiance to their political ambitions. This could translate into the young person being required to pay for the godfather’s support in finding a job in a local company, or to act as “muscle” in any up-coming political campaigns.**

**Youth were aware of the relationship between lack of resources and the lure of criminal activity, noting that militancy was a common way to both earn money while obtain some level of power and respect within a community.**

that while young people had made many efforts to gain employment at the oil companies, most were unsuccessful. This leader, and as echoed by many other young people during focus groups, was very vocal in his demand for compensation from the oil companies, be that a stipend or direct employment in their factories. While some young people, such as those interviewed in Omuku were adamant in their preference for non-violent engagement with the oil companies, others, such as those in Ekeremor stated that militancy was logical if oil companies and the government continued to deny them, as one youth stated, “their rights”. When pressed to define these rights, their primary interest was some form of compensation. This compensation could be in the form of a job, but also a stipend such as those offered repentant militants.

**“When you see another youth sitting down and that youth is wearing new jeans, looking fresh and spraying one of the most expensive perfumes, you begin to wonder ‘what does that person do every day?’ You find out that person is doing nothing but thugging for a politician and you end up wanting to be like that person.”**

In other cases, militancy and violence were seen a means to secure employment. Another youth from rural Bayelsa, when asked what means there are of earning money in his area, offered three examples, “Stealing, oil bunkering and prostitution.” While these were not necessarily expressed as aspirations, they nevertheless point to the belief among Delta youth that they had limited options as it concerned securing a stable future.

### **RQ3: What opportunities exist for sustainable and equitable youth-focused economic development in the Niger Delta?**

There is an inextricable link between the unrealized hopes for employment among Niger Delta youth and the economic environment in which they operate. For example, in Bayelsa, the assessment found no evidence of opportunities for job creation, as there was literally no evidence of industries in the state capital Yenogoa. The only employment options were banks or government-related activities. A recent recruitment exercise conducted by the Bayelsa state government had to be halted due to the sheer size of the youth population that came to the venue for the interviews. In Imo, young people indicated that the government had promised to create 10,000 new civic service jobs and had concluded its recruitment exercises some time ago, but that selected candidates were yet to actually be placed in jobs. One of the youth said that some of the people he knew were recently offered teaching positions, but that most candidates remain unemployed.

According [DFID](#)<sup>4</sup>, and [USAID](#)<sup>5</sup>, the strong presence of the oil industry in the Delta has resulted in the relative shrinkage of other local industries, such as manufacturing. That is, the lure of high salaries perceived to be associated with oil sector jobs, makes all other forms of employment less desirable. Unstable markets and wide-scale importation have likewise worked to stifle other economic sectors, including agriculture, aquaculture and construction. With poor linkages between the market and vocational training (i.e., matching demand for labor with appropriately trained supply of labor) the result is a large, youthful population that is unable to find decent work.

According to USAID, in order for the high unemployment levels to drop, economic growth efforts need to focus on import substitution, export development, and access to finance (for entrepreneurs and businesses). Education and skills training must also be more relevant to the economic environment. This section includes youth views of their economic situation, private sector views on youth employment, and considers sector specific needs and opportunities.

## Youth Views

As documented by the focus groups, youth survey, and literature review, the assessment confirmed that there is a large population of youth involved in the informal sector. A large percentage of the youth who participated in the assessment, particularly in Warri, Delta, Asaba, and Port Harcourt, listed informal sector occupations, including street hawking, commercial motor cycling (courier services), construction, carpentry, photography, tailoring, venue decoration, and shoemaking. According to the Ministry of Youth Development and the National Youth Employment Action Plan, at least 90% of the youth are engaged in informal employment.

The Pastor of the Redeemed Church in Bori, who is also a youth worker, told us that the only form of employment in Bori is commercial motor cycling and that he estimates there are at least 4,000 commercial bikers in Bori. He indicated that most were also students in the Polytechnic.



*A female participant at an FGD session in Port Harcourt, Rivers state*

The bloating informal sector is both a response to the absence of formal employment opportunities, and also an indication that youth are willing to take initiative to find employment and support themselves in creative ways. Youth regularly spoke about their motivation to find employment to create opportunities for themselves, be they formal or informal. As stated earlier, young people often mentioned that “poverty is the greatest motivator”. Numerous examples were provided about opportunities that they hoped to one day be able to explore, ranging from welding and carpentry, to medicine, law and cinematography. Many, however, stated that there were numerous impediments to their obtaining these goals. Primary among them were corruption or a lack of government support. A young man from Bayelsa State said, “They say Bayelsa youths don't want to work, but it's a lie. The truth is that Bayelsa youths are willing to work to make ends meet, but right now government in Bayelsa refuses to let them do so. You may have an opportunity to work in a company like one that may come to Bayelsa, but if you don't have a political connection, you won't get the opportunity.” Others offered different obstacles concerning the lack of government support for youth employment and entrepreneurship.

In the vast majority of cases, young people revealed that they had not been successful and needed some sort of remediation to ensure future successes.

**Youth suggested that there were few opportunities to gain knowledge and skills associated with employment and entrepreneurship. Numerous examples were provided of “government schemes” that were alleged to have provide some young people with skills; however, few young people in the sample had participated in such programs. Those who suggested the courses (e.g., aquaculture, carpentry, car repair) were useful, added, however, that there was no follow-up to determine if they had been successful in securing employment. In the vast majority of cases, young people revealed that they had not been successful...**

## Private Sector Views

**According to a manager of an outsourcing/recruitment agency that places staff in banks across Nigeria, most banking positions in the Delta tend to be filled by candidates that are not from the area. In four years of providing contract staff to major banks, she has had difficulties filling positions with candidates from the Delta. In most cases, she noted, this was an issue of young people not performing well on the various aptitude tests that were required for further consideration for employment.**

**...youth in the Niger Delta need training not only in technical skills, but in those “soft skills” that allow one to be successful in any number of workplaces, such as conflict resolution, teamwork and creative problem solving...apart from technical knowledge, employers are also looking for employees that demonstrate leadership, personal accountability, creativity, innovative ability, and entrepreneurialism... young people from the Delta often fail to exhibit these traits.**

According to the Ministry of Youth Development’s Action Plan, economic growth in Nigeria has been propelled by developments in the oil and gas sector, which is highly capital intensive with limited labor absorption capacity. When coupled with high population growth (i.e., the UN ranks Nigeria as the 39<sup>th</sup> fastest growing population, a growth rate of 2.27% per year), high levels of youth unemployment are inevitable. However the causes of youth unemployment go beyond the oil and gas industry’s lack of capacity to absorb labor.

Another other cause of unemployment is the poor match between youth assets, particularly employability skills, and the vocational-technical skills required by the private sector. To further explore this topic, the assessment team conducted interviews with community relations managers and recruitment staff in oil, telecommunications and financial sectors based in the Niger Delta. In her experience, the candidates from the Southeast region tended to dominate the application process and end up being better candidates for jobs in Port Harcourt and Yenogoa.

A community relations manager at Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) corroborates this view. He stated that due to the low standard of education in the Delta, young people cannot compete with their peers from other parts of Nigeria, particularly the Eastern region. He further noted the “entitlement mentality”, which, he believes, renders Niger Delta youth less employable. He cited examples of young people from the Bonny community who demanded employment, yet were barely literate. He added that his company has worked hard to employ “agitated” youth from the region in a variety of roles, but that job performance was often a problem. Namely, he stated, young people from the Delta were often unwilling or unable to follow standard operating procedures or corporate guidelines.

A recruiter from Exxon Mobil echoed this sentiment, explaining that apart from technical knowledge, employers are also looking for employees that demonstrate leadership, personal accountability, creativity, innovative ability, and entrepreneurialism. She explained that most oil companies use aptitude tests to capture candidates for graduate position. In a recently concluded recruitment exercise, the company was looking for young people under 26 years old possessing a high aptitude and drive for excellence. She indicated that Nigerian graduates exhibiting these traits were “few and far between”. In her experience, the ratio was between 5 in 50 and 2 in 100, depending on what where in Nigeria the recruitment exercise was held.

The recruiter indicated that Exxon Mobil has an inclusion policy for Niger Delta citizens as part of their human resources strategy, but that most positions are filled by individuals from more affluent families or communities in the region who are more likely to have international exposure and world class education. She said that even with the inclusion policy, a majority of their jobs still go to expatriates, since most Nigerians (not to mention Niger Delta citizens) lack the specialized skills required for the jobs. She went on to say that “sometimes it is a case of expertise rather than experience” and that most Nigerian graduates are disadvantaged from the onset when they have to compete with international graduates, expatriates, or repatriates, because these graduates are more likely to have technical knowledge and experience.

**Throughout the region, private sector views confirmed that, in terms of skills and competencies, youth tend to fall below the required expectations of employers.**

## Available Training Programs and Other Resources for Youth

In the Niger Delta, there are many concerted efforts by government agencies, oil companies, and NGOs to quell youth unemployment.

According to assessment sources, government-led activities, such as the NDDC skill acquisition and ICT training programs, have had very little impact. Youth in the focus groups indicated that they no longer participate in NNDC programs, because most of them were “a waste of time” and money. Some of the youths who had participated in vocational training and skill acquisition programs run by NDDC communicated that it did not translate into employment. Research also showed that the NDDC had historically been fraught with institutional problems. There were incidences of infighting and leadership instability in the commission. With the recent creation of the Niger Delta Ministry, the NDDC as an agency was engaged in a struggle for survival. The commission was also focused on a range of projects, including community development, water, and road projects. As a result, there appeared to be little commitment to youth development issues specifically.

With the current scourge of youth unemployment, some organizations were working to address the challenge of equipping youths for the job market. The After Graduate Development Centre (AGDC) is a social enterprise that trains and equips university undergraduates and graduates in employability and job readiness skills. Fate Foundation is another social enterprise that offers entrepreneurship training. Another social enterprise, SIFE also delivers skills workshops across Nigeria. Fate Foundation and AGDC run programs in the Niger Delta. NIPRODEV, an NGO based in Warri, also runs life skills training programs and skill development workshops for youths.

To address youth discontentment and unemployment in the community in which NLNG is located, the NLNG representative interviewed indicated that the NLNG had established a vocational training center in Bonny that was accredited by the City and Guilds certification body in the UK. The assessment team was unable to visit the center, but the center curriculum appeared to be very strongly focused on improving both technical and workforce readiness skills of youth in Bonny. NLNG has no plans to extend the services of the centre outside Bonny.

The Ministry of Youth Development is also rolling out vocational skill centers in all the regions of Nigeria, including the Niger Delta. The project is in the initial stages of building and installing the infrastructure required to run the centers.

**Most of the training interventions in the region did not offer holistic training for youth, enabling them to both get and hold a job, gain control and mastery of their lives within the socio-economic and political context of Nigeria, and improve the quality of their lives both at present and as they make the transition into adulthood.**

**During the course of this assessment, we noted that most of the training options available to Delta youth did not offer life skills, such as personal accountability, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity.**

In addition, most of the vocational or skill training programs being offered to Niger Delta youths did not complete the training cycle by matching beneficiaries with existing business as apprentices. Existing programs also lacked provisions for business start up coaching and start up loans. In considering the needs of youth training and resources to improve the employment situation for youth, key informants suggested that future entrepreneurship or vocational training should incorporate a means of providing greater access to financial support and services to its program design for it to be attractive to youth and have a greater impact.

## Sector Focus – Agriculture

**Most policy makers and government officials suggest that agriculture is one of the most viable solutions for creating economic opportunities in the Niger Delta.**

Agriculture is an important sector in the Nigerian economy. Employing 60% of Nigerians, agriculture also contributes 35% to the national GDP. Unlike many other African countries, agriculture in Nigeria functions largely as an import-substitution industry, focused on food crops for domestic markets. According to the literature and interviews with key policy makers, the potential of the agriculture sector in Niger Delta is immense. Given the country's natural assets including arable land and water supplies, as well as its history as a fishing and agrarian

economy, there is a substantial base to build upon. In addition, the country's population – of 150M - the largest in West Africa, represents a large domestic market that could easily support local production and processing.

**Based on focus group discussions, however, there is limited interest among young people in agriculture careers.**

One young man from Imo State and another from Port Harcourt were involved in subsistence farming, where as others from Bayelsa State noted that they had received training in aquaculture in Warri. These youth were aware that there was a favorable environment for and employment and economic potential with agriculture. However, they indicated that they had been unable to benefit from the training, because the program was not

accompanied with seed money (in some cases, literally to buy seeds) or loan options to start an agribusiness. Another young person, who also attended the NDDC program, said he started a small business selling fish and seafood in Yenogoa. However, he complained that the high cost of transportation, police harassment, and extortion leaves him "literally out of pocket". He said that he was on the verge on "packing it in".

According to a managing partner in AACE Foods, a leading agribusiness consulting firm in Africa, “the Nigerian agricultural sector needs significant attention and investment. In addition to the policy and enabling environment issues, at the smallholder level, there is an urgent need for improvements in productivity via access to improved seeds, fertilizers, water management techniques, equipment, financing, and markets.”

She indicated that “agribusiness is the only sustainable way of increasing and developing agriculture in the Niger Delta.” She explained, “This view is based on the conviction that African farmers have lived and worked as subsistence farmers for far too long. At the subsistence level, shrinking and depleted farms, an aging population with limited interest from the youth to engage in agriculture, there is an urgent need to explore the potential profitability of every agriculture investment and to determine that it makes financial sense to proceed in the short, medium and long-term”. She recommended that programs adopted for Niger Delta youths include a range of services to promote agribusiness and address the gaps that currently exist in the sector. She also indicated that the NDDC and RSSDA are not delivering the level of support required for youth to engage in agribusiness. The RSSDA’s Songhai project provides high quality training, but with the absence of technical support for business development, it restricts youth to sustenance farming.

The assessment team also spoke to the president of the Harambee Incubator for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (HISARD) based in Obafemi Awolowo University in Osun State. HISARD is a program designed to promote agribusiness and increase opportunities for youth to lead and become agro-entrepreneurs. It focuses on improving production in rural communities and stimulates youth organization and entrepreneurial training. Although it was not possible for the assessment team to visit the facility, HISARD has apparently documented successes in its programs.

In summary, engagement in agribusiness may be an alternative to direct employment in farming, and there may also be sector related employment opportunities in small towns in service areas such as mechanical repair shops and other services, which are now largely only available in larger cities.

### **Sector Focus – Information and Communications Technology**

For example, Youth Now and C-Spin were both conducting extensive programs with Shell Petroleum Development Company and European Union. However, neither had websites and both relied on public business centers to send/receive emails.

Focus group youth were aware that ICT skills and knowledge could be necessary for employment in many areas. Youth in Port Harcourt, Warri, and Edo exhibited relatively good levels of ICT skills and knowledge. (As noted above, these were the areas where some youth admitted to using these skills for Internet fraud). Several youth noted that they were using their

**Ultimately, while agriculture and aquaculture have potential for engaging many Niger Delta youths, the sector is often seen as unglamorous, lacking the attraction of other sectors, such as the oil industry. The lack of an enabling environment for agriculture, including poor infrastructure and cooperative extension services, limited access to financing and high transaction costs, and vocational training in agribusiness, further make such jobs unattractive or even inaccessible to young people.**

**As a developing country, Nigeria is considered a “late comer” in its awareness of and investment in technology and the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector. The government is undertaking a number of activities to improve the country’s access to technology, but these have yet to impact youth in the Niger Delta. Most of the youth surveyed did not have email addresses. Lack of access to technology was even more evident in the ways youth-serving NGOs in the Delta were conducting business.**

ICT skills to “produce publicity materials and design leaflets” in exchange for cash. Several interviewed indicated that the Edo state government was rolling out a robust ICT program. According to the Executive Assistant to the Governor, ICT development - particularly in schools - is top on the agenda of the state government. She informed us that the government has recently set up a vocational center to offer ICT training to youths.

Rivers State was undergoing a large education reform, of which ICT was an integral part. Rivers State was also providing ICT training via its vocational training in conjunction with NDDC. Several focus group youth also mentioned an organization called Soltech that had been providing free ICT training in Port Harcourt.

NLNG and Shell, as part of its CSR initiatives, had also implemented several ICT programs. The assessment was unable to get feedback from SHELL on the impact of its program. The community relations manager for NLNG indicated that they had been forced to stop their ICT programs because there was a very high attrition rate and most of the participants sold program-provided laptops immediately after completion of the program, indicating a lack of interest in pursuing a career in ICT among other things.

Focus group respondents in Bayelsa, Bori, and Omuku indicated that they could not afford ICT services or equipment. In Bayelsa, we were also told that, due to infrastructural difficulties such as lack of electricity, Internet services were nonexistent.

According to feedback from youth and key informants, ICT remains an important skill development area for Niger Delta youth. Regional governments had begin to try to make ICT available at all levels of education. However, there was considerable opportunity for Delta youth to gain access to ICT training and facilities via on the job or job training programs to enhance their employability skills. Regional cost, in addition to availability and infrastructure issues, was noted as an obstacle for access, and it was suggested that the government needed to work with manufacturers to reduce the cost of ICT in the Delta.

**RQ4: What skills, resources, or capacity building do governmental, non-governmental, and community-based organizations have or need in order to effectively support youth development in the region most effectively?**

**... the Assessment team found numerous programs that had reduced impact due to poor design, and an absence of effective monitoring and evaluation tools. There is a dire need to grow the research base and case studies to better understand the development challenges in the Niger Delta...**

Following an in-depth review of youth programs in the Niger Delta, there is a clear need to enhance the quality of youth programming. During the course of this evaluation, we observed a lack of awareness of and negative attitude towards the collection of statistical data. We also found that most of the data required for decision making was either unavailable or of very quality.



*FDS Session in Bayelsa state*

It was observed during the assessment process that there is a lack of cooperation, coordination and information sharing amongst NGOs, government agencies and other key stakeholders. It is crucial for youth-related workers to develop a culture of raising internal capacities and resources. As noted above, technology access and abilities could be increased to improve the productivity of effective youth NGOs and programs.

**Going forward, youth focused organizations could be supported in the area of research methodologies, impact assessment, and participatory/reflective action learning.**

## Support to Youth-Serving Organizations

During the course of this assessment, the team interacted with community-based organizations, including youth leaders and activists. Most of these groups were “grassroots” or “youth coalitions” that have organized themselves into advocacy groups, but lack the legal status as an NGO. All of these groups expressed the need both of building their capacity around positive youth development, and also of supporting their role as youth advocates. They indicated that their youth development workers would benefit from training in contemporary youth development approaches.

Due to many groups’ informal legal status, and regardless of each groups’ motivation as a youth-serving organizations and contribution towards area youth, the limited legal capacity to effectively lobby for changes or interventions for Delta youth limited these groups’ impact and effectiveness. As one of youth leader stated, “We don’t have the resources to register with the government [as an official NGO].” The result is that they have limited access to policy makers and donors. As such, one of the growing areas of need is supporting youth servicing organizations to become legally registered in Nigeria. Doing so would provide them the ability to more effectively interact with national and local governments and to pursue a formal advocacy program that would be recognized as the work of a legal entity.

The National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN) is the apex body of all voluntary youth organizations in Nigeria. It serves as the link between the youth and government. During this assessment, we contacted the NYCN zonal representative for the southern region, but he was engaged in youth-related activities in Abuja. Two NYCN youth representatives from Bayelsa and Imo served as mobilizers for most youths that participated in the focus groups and surveys. They were very effective at mobilizing other youth leaders in a short timeframe. Most of the organized youth groups that participated in the focus groups either had no legal status or lacked the coordination and competencies required to conduct larger-scale and organized youth-related activities

The Bayelsa representative described his situation. He said the NYCN Bayelsa chapter had no funding and no office, whereas the Rivers representative was a recognized member of state officials with an office, from which he managed youth affairs in the state. He told us that he ran most of the council affairs for the State Ministry of Youth and Sports, even though he had no formal arrangement with the ministry. He complained that government officials regularly usurped opportunities that were meant for NYCN members. He cited a recent youth conference in Malaysia, for which NYCN members had been nominated to attend, but the NDDC officials were sent to represent the youths instead. He admitted that he had no formal leadership training and was not aware of any capacity building opportunities for youth leaders. Apart from running NYCN affairs in his state, the Imo State representative also runs his own organization, Positive Care Development Foundation. Like his counterparts in Bayelsa and Rivers State, this organization is also not registered as an NGO.

These NYCN representatives indicated clearly that youth leaders and representatives would benefit from training in leadership skills, the rudiments of civic engagement, nonprofit organization management, and ethics. They indicated that the NYCN also needs support to define its pivotal role as advocates for youths in Nigeria. The organization also need to better understand that its strength and relevance in the future lies in its ability to mobilize and galvanize youth towards positive community action, and not its ability to court relevance and favors from the government. Most of the youths that participated in the survey in Warri, Sapele, Edo, and Port Harcourt were not aware of the existence of the NYCN. The NYCN needs to be supported embark on a membership drive to grow its membership.

## Inclusive Governance

**Adults engaged in youth development work need a fundamental shift in assumptions about adult privileges and youth responsibility. Policymakers need to shift their conceptualisation and design of youth interventions from a containment approach to an empowerment approach. The extent and visibility of adult power, interest, and control within youth programmes is overwhelming. The Niger Delta youth need adult leaders that have competences to provide the much needed support and guidance throughout an incubation period but fade into the background when the activities demand public presentation.**

As regularly stated during focus groups discussions, young people have little faith in the Nigerian public sector. The belief is that the government is corrupt, which negatively impacts the lives of young people in the Delta. Numerous examples were cited where government officials manipulated young people in the Delta to serve as thugs in support of particular candidates or local power brokers. Parastatal organizations, formed to serve young people, were cited as unrepresentative of youth voices, particularly those of the Delta youth. Evidence of this lack of trust in the government was revealed through the assessment team's survey data. According to survey results, young people had little faith in the local leaders. Of the nearly 500 young people surveyed, 70% said that they did not believe the government listened to young people.

DFID<sup>6</sup> has identified 'weak governance structures' as a problem that continues to plague Nigeria in general, but the Delta in particular. High levels of corruption have been recorded at all levels of the government. As such, technical assistance to the relevant ministries and their line reports in the Delta are essential. Training would be most beneficial in the areas of procurement, financial management, program/project management, accountability, impact assessment and effective service delivery. It is useful to note that, during this assessment, we tried to meet with the Niger Delta Ministry. We were told that the ministry had conducted its own youth assessment and that there were "lots of relevant materials" available to enhance our effort. However, the ministry then failed to provide us with any actual information and was then unresponsive. According to key informants, future youth programs in the region should be established with the assumption that government agencies, although having

good intentions, have limited resources, capabilities, or ability to actually participate as partners.

**RQ5: What opportunities exist to foster youth stability and peace-building in vulnerable and conflict-impacted communities in the region?**

Data collected during the assessment clearly and closely linked peace building to development, noting that one is most likely not possible without the other. [Osalor<sup>7</sup>](#), a commentator on the region, emphasized that sustainable development in the Niger Delta is predicated on sustained conflict resolution. He noted, “Past [peace-building initiatives] like the Niger Delta Development Commission only accomplish limited success in the area of youth development and conflict resolution, largely due to bureaucratic inefficiency, inconsistent policies, and the absence of regulatory framework.” He identified a number of areas of focus for youth initiatives in the region, including education reform with a focus on skill development and vocational training, career support consistent with local realities, support for small business and entrepreneurship development, and local and national citizenship building activities, to name a few.



*FGD Session in Bori, Rivers state*

Youth marginalization, be it real or perceived, is at the root of youth militancy and violence in the Niger Delta.

Ultimately, however, conflict resolution will remain difficult without the reduction of poverty and support of livelihoods in the Delta. [Sofiri<sup>8</sup>](#) and [Mitee<sup>9</sup>](#) both observed that “a recurring [explanation] given for youth restiveness in the Niger Delta is unemployment”. The issue of unemployment continues to cause agitation on two levels:

1. Young people believe that they are denied employment as a deliberate act of marginalization on the part of oil companies who are, in some fashion, in collaboration with federal government;
2. Young people believe that jobs meant for them are given to people who are not from the Delta.

All parties must work towards dialogue with young people, to enable them understand the conditions that impact the employment process. Young people must be provided adequate career guidance, in order to steer them towards careers and sectors where they can find decent work. All parties (i.e., youth, the private sector, the public sector, donors and civil society) also need to work closely to improve the relationships between young people and the oil companies. Some private sector companies engaging in non-extractive businesses in the Niger Delta have emphasized the advantage of dialoging directly with the youth and addressing their needs directly rather than via community leaders.

**Youth development goals are unachievable without the inclusion of youth voices. This means that the young people have to be involved in the planning and developing of youth development programs in partnership with the government and donors. They must be viewed as possessing inherent, or latent, capacities that can be developed for the continued improvement of the region.**

Some of the youths in Port Harcourt observed that they lacked positive mentorship from adults. Considering how closely linked militancy was with negative interactions with political leaders and conflict ridden communities, key informants stressed that strong mentorship would be important in future programs. In addition, the sociopolitical climate has eroded most of the confidence that the youths have in personal action and have become opportunistic and determinist in the way that they view life issues particularly as it related to job opportunities and financial success.

**RQ6: What information, resources, or networks can be leveraged or created to promote understanding and awareness of youth-related socio-economic needs in the Niger Delta?**

Based on the assessment findings and as mentioned throughout the above, while the youth-serving organizations and resources in the Delta are weak in many ways, nevertheless there are individuals and organizations that possess valuable experience, information, resources, and networks that can be leveraged to promote youth development in the region. These organizations are conducting meaningful training for youth in Nigeria or the Niger Delta that could be made more effective and efficient, scaled or expanded to reach new locations or youth groups, or enhanced to include additional training topics or best practice curriculum. Each organization would benefit from capacity building through existing international partnerships. AGDC and FATE are IYF partners receiving support and capacity building from IYF. However, all of these organizations could work separately and together if provided the platform, organization, and resources to champion youth awareness and program in the Delta region.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on our findings, our key recommendations are as follows:

- Capacity-building support for youth-focused NGOs can help them become models of transparency and accountability while they also serve as advocates and service providers.
- Leadership training for youth leaders
- Provision of life skills training with a special consideration for conflict management and resolution positive identity development
- Technical assistance for youth – focused NGOs to enhance program design and monitoring and reporting
- Programs that support creativity, innovation and other forms of engagement with youth
- Entrepreneurship and employability

As noted, youth in the Delta also need, want and aspire to decent work. While the situation is complicated by government programs that reward ex-militants and oil companies that have limited opportunities to hire entry-level workers, there are clearly assets in the Delta which are currently being dramatically under-utilized in terms of skills training for employment and entrepreneurship training for enterprise development. These programs need to be run in a very business-oriented way so that youth are not trained for jobs which do not exist, thereby only increasing their levels of frustration and cynicism. Similarly, entrepreneurship training needs to go hand in hand with a package of supports that includes mentoring, access to finance and ongoing technical assistance to enterprise development. Successful programs in these areas can build a track record of achievement for youth and lead to greater scale and sustainability

**Leadership and life skills: This area represents the single most important recommendation we can offer, but it must also be linked to the next area of employment and entrepreneurship. So many of the issues that frustrate youth in the Delta region come back to the entitlement mentality, lack of strong youth leaders, the ability to have realistic expectations for the future and hope in the future, and the array of soft skills that are necessary for employment. Life skills and leadership training also equips youth with the self-confidence to be effective advocates in the civic space, to develop strong communication skills and to work effectively in teams.**

- Holistic entrepreneurship development training with a special consideration for apprenticeship and access to finance
- Business incubators in various industries and sectors including agriculture/aqua- culture to boost innovation and entrepreneurship across the region
- Holistic employability training programs with an emphasis on career counseling/coaching, on the job coaching and job placement schemes
- There is also a need to provide technical assistance to public sector entities engaged in employability training to ensure that this training is demand-driven, responsive to the needs of private sectors employers and has adequate means to track youth after training, assess job placement and make appropriate programmatic adjustments.

## Education

The shortcomings in the educational system are large and require systematic improvements. The payoff, however, from such improvement, would be similarly dramatic. Some smaller measures that would also help include initiatives such as career counseling in schools and introduction of leadership and civic education:

- Early intervention and collaboration with formal educational bodies to raise the quality of education
- A transparent scholarship scheme to give opportunities to indigent youth particularly youths from rural communities with a view to creating social capital and regress cyclical poverty
- Leadership and civic education for secondary schools
- Career counseling at the secondary school level to create realistic expectations for employment and guide youth to further education and training

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