

Socio-Economic Significance of New Town Development

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Abstract: New town development is an urban planning concept that is designed to move people or population away from crowded or merger cities by grouping homes or houses, recreational and industrial, culture and shopping centres to form entirely new communities. The study aimed at determining the social-economic significance of new town development in an island community Finima, Bonny local government, Rivers State. The target population of 766 was drawn from heads of households between 45years and above (those who were 18years at the time of the development in 1991, plus 27years after resettlement, 1991-2018). A mixed method research was adopted for this study. A Simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents. A pilot survey was carried out to check and determine the reliability of the questionnaire before administering to the respondents. A total of 366 copies of questionnaires were administered. Data collected from primary sources included: personal observations, focus group discussions (men and women), and oral interviews. The key informant interview (Elders and Finima development committee members) was also employed. Secondary sources of data collection included the maps, books, journals, articles, photographs and other published materials that are related to this study. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and mean were used to summarize the data on socio-economic variables. Charts and graphs were used to further illustrate findings. The findings of the research showed that the new town development brought about improvement in the standard of living in the area in terms of: improved housing, and infrastructural development, employment generation and educational development. The new town project has made more innovative positive socio-economic contributions to the community than what it was.

1. Introduction

New town development is an urban planning concept that is designed to move people or population away from crowded or merger cities by grouping homes or houses, recreational and industrial, culture and shopping centres to form entirely new communities, Thinley, K.B., (2014).

Literature shows that new towns were first proposed in Great Britain in the New Towns Act of 1946 and this idea was duplicated in other European and United States Countries. The concepts of new towns are to have admixture of population in relatively under developed sites so as to have a balanced social life. Most of the new towns were built for defense purposes. New towns are built according to Master Plans in areas where there was no city and they are highly political, United Nations (2016).

The first new town in Nigeria was proposed by the Alhaji Shehu Shagari administration in 1980's with the aim of relocating the Finima people to make way for the Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas Complex. The proposed town initial plan was to accommodate 20,000 people. The new town is in close proximity to the old Finima, it's a reflection of an exquisite present day planning design.

The Finima new town design concept is a self-supporting model with available space planned into complementary land uses. This is in view of the fact that project of this nature should be viable and feasible socially and economically as a means of raising balanced spatial development and environment for the people of the community, Braidarch Team (1990).

The residential area and plot size are of three types these includes; low, medium and high densities areas. A total of 500 housing units were built by the NNPC and handed over to the community. The design provided open spaces in all the zones as parks, green spaces, and open areas for relaxation, play and social gatherings and for further future development. The only commercial facility provided by the NNPC was the daily market built in zone 5 opposite the field.

This case study of an island community in Rivers State aimed to determine the socio-economic significance of new town development.

2. The Study Area

Finima is a community in the Bonny Kingdom with her political boundary situated within the Bonny Local Government Area of Rivers State (see Fig. 1.1). The community was relocated from her original habitat to her present location in 1991. The population at that time was 4,510 people (NPC, 1991), and the present population is projected to about 12,186 people at 3.75% growth rate. It is the southernmost town of Nigeria sharing boundary with the Atlantic Ocean, 3km from it (4° 25' 0" North, 7° 9' 0" East). It is 1.5km away from Bonny

town. The distance from Port Harcourt is about 15minutes and 45minutes by helicopter flight and speed boat respectively. It is approximately 41 sea miles down Bonny River from Port Harcourt. It also, has approximately 7km link road to Bonny town and lies about 20km as the crow flies from the old Finima.

The community is made up of three ruling houses; the Browns, the Tobins, the Atonis and a parchment of the Harts. The people have rich traditional culture which embraces forms of activities such as dancing, drumming, swimming, masquerade worships etc. The chieftaincy stool according to history was gotten from the ‘‘Amanayabo’’ of Bonny, which is in turn controlled by the ruling houses- the Atoni, Brown and Tobin families. They hold the belief in deities and ancestral worship, notable among them is Simigi. They also, believe in masquerade and the spirit world as replicated in the ‘‘Watam’’ and other festivals and activities. The main occupation of the people is fishing. They also, trade, engage in little farming activities, and salt mining, they engage also in cottage industrial activities such as garri and oil processing in the old site. The community hosts various multinational oil companies including the NLNG, Shell, Mobil, Chevron, Elf and Agip (Tobin, 2018).

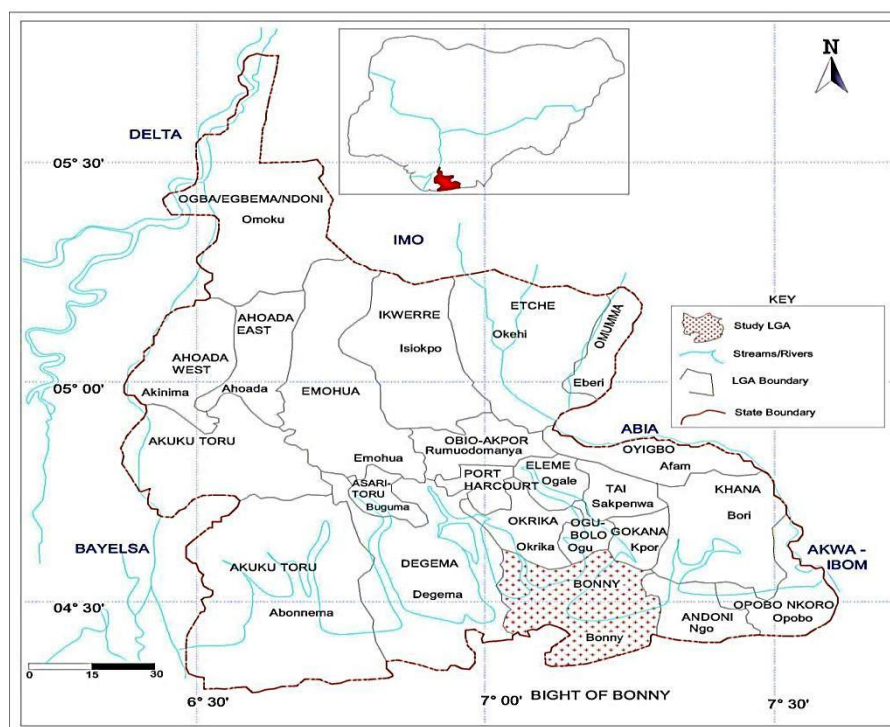


Fig. 1: Map of Rivers State showing the study area

Source: Author's Field work, 2018

Finima is predominantly an area of deposition underlain by clay and mud and impregnated with brackish water from which salt is evaporated. The under layer of the soil not too far, is also impregnated with crude oil deposits. The soil is very much exposed to tidal erosion and also erodible by rivulets of rain water as a result of the loose sand nature of the area. The soil is not very stable to support heavy construction jobs. The area is characterized by mangrove trees (Creary, 2003).

The climate of the area is typical of the Bonny Coastal region. It is characterized by two seasons; the rainy and the dry seasons. The rainy season extends from March to November. Rainfall reaches a peak in July, after which there is a short dry period in late August. Heavy rainfall usually resumes in September and tapers off during October and November. The rainy season winds (the South-west Monsoon) blow from the Atlantic Ocean, bringing in much of the rainfall. During the dry season (from November to February) a desert wind from the north known as the Harmattan prevails. It is characterised by thick haze and reduced visibility.

The relative humidity is high throughout the year with a minimum of about 80 per cent and a maximum of 90 per cent. The relative humidity decreases during the course of the dry season and fluctuates more

irregularly during the rainy season. The average maximum temperatures range from 29°C during the rainy season to 32°C during the drier months. Minimum temperatures reach about 20°C during the moderate mild periods.

Finima people right from the first founder and generation, settled in clusters which are typical of a village setting. This settlement is also known as the nucleated settlement pattern. In this pattern homesteads are concentrated in an area which normally has a centre in form of cul-de-sac for community activities. Families live closely together especially in kindred.

3. Socio-Economic Significance

3.1 Employment

The research revealed that some of the people of Finima community suffered temporary joblessness as a result of the new town development project, particularly the fishermen and the farmers due to the destruction and sand filling of the mangrove where the project is sited. This is because they were mainly into fishing and farming at that time (before the commencement of the project) but the situation changed afterwards. From the time of construction of the project proper jobs were available both for skilled and unskilled labours. Some persons were engaged by NLNG after construction, while some others were engaged by contractors that are on retainer ship with NLNG. This means that more people got paid jobs in the new Finima after the construction than before the construction (See Table 1.1).

Table 3.1: Cross Tabulation of Employment Status of Respondents in 1990 and 2018

Employment Status	1990	%	2018	%
Employed	28	7.6	164	44.8
Unemployed	48	13.1	24	6.6
Self Employed	290	79.3	160	43.7
Others	-	-	18	4.9
Total	366	100	366	100

Source: Field Survey, 2018

3.2 Social Disarticulation/Segregation

The study revealed that the people were not resettled within the traditional settlement pattern. There is a threat to family cohesion because of the way houses were allocated which did not follow the original settlement pattern of the community where the people settled in clusters of families and kindred.

3.3 Food Insecurity

The research revealed that the community suffered food insecurity from the time the mangrove was destroyed till the end of construction phase of the project. From the time the mangrove was destroyed they could not catch enough fish for both consumption and commercial purposes. “It is better now that people from Andoni and other neighbouring communities bring food stuff to them” as stated by a key informant.

3.4 High Cost of Living/Rental increase

Cost of living is the amount of money needed to sustain a certain level of living, including basic expenses such as housing, food, taxes and health care. Cost of living is often used to compare how expensive it is to live in one city versus another locale, Oxford Dictionary(2010).

Using a common index to compare the cost of living in Finima and Port Harcourt City we discovered that, a plate of food (garri and soup) that cost N500 (five hundred naira) in Port Harcourt, the same quantity and quality goes for at least N1000 (one thousand naira) in Finima. Two bedrooms flat in Port Harcourt is between N300, 000-N400, 000 depending on the area as against N450, 000 in Finima per annum. A room made of wood in Finima is N60, 000 per annum against N24, 000-N36, 000 in Port Harcourt (See Fig 3.1).

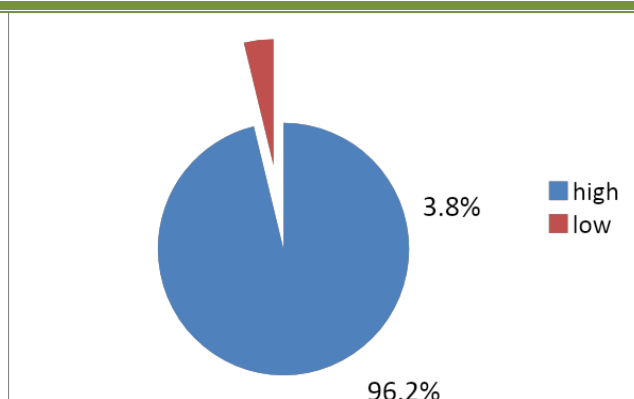


FIG. 3.1: Cost of Living Rating

Source: Field Survey, 2018

3.5 Pollution

Pollution occurs when pollutants contaminate the natural surroundings: which bring about changes that affect our normal lifestyle adversely, Merriam-Webster Dictionary(2010).

Traverse walks within the industrial facility (NLNG) shows that the heat from the plant is felt hundreds of metres away and the atmosphere there is cloudy because of the smog and particulate matters that goes up from the gas flaring, (See Plate 3.1).



Plate 3.1: NLNG Plant Showing Gas Flaring

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Livelihood

Livelihood is a set of activities, involving securing water, food, fodder, medicine, shelter, clothing and the capacity to acquire above necessities working either individually or as a group by using endowments (both human and material) for meeting the requirements of self and his/her household on a sustainable basis with dignity. The activities are usually carried out repeatedly, Oxford dictionary of English(2010). For instance a fisherman’s livelihood depends on the availability and accessibility of fish. In other words, loss of livelihood for a fisherman is when there is no availability and accessibility of fish. The main means of livelihood of the Finima community was fishing and that changed as a result of the destruction of the mangrove for the development of the new town project.

The research revealed that the community main source of livelihood changed from fishing and farming from the day, the federal government in 1986 awarded the contract for the clearing and sanding filling of the mangrove, which is two times the size of the old Finima, which is the present day new Finima for the new town and NLNG project to public servants after the construction (See Table 3.2).

Table 1.2: Sources of Livelihoods in Finima (1990 and 2018)

S/N	1990		2018	
	Activity	%	Activity	%
1	Fishing	28.4	Public Service	44.8
2	Farming	25.7	Business	26.2
3	Trading	25.1	Private Service	16.4
4	Business	10.4	Trading	6.6
5	Public Service	7.7	Fishing	1.1
6	Others	-	Others	4.9
7	Total	100		100

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The research focused on determining the social and economic significance of new town development project in Finima community. The outcome of this study includes the identification of positive and negative effects of the new town development. The Finima people were resettled into improved housing units. The houses were constructed of brick aluminium roofing sheets. They have access to regular electricity and improved water supply. The siting of the NLNG in the new town changed the employment status of the people as more people gained employment after the construction of the project. This has brought about increase of monthly income of household in the community.

The NLNG project has made more innovative positive socio-economic contributions to the New town Finima community than what it was in old Finima.

Recommendations

1. There is the need for Physical Development Plan that will accommodate the future growth and expansion of the community. It is necessary to do this to reduce congestion, pressure on the existing infrastructure and facilities, also to have a functional, beautiful and safe environment
2. The new plan should resettle people in cluster of kindred and families to restore the community cohesion and social network that existed in the old Finima. This will take care of the feeling of sense of loss of cultural heritage and social ties the individuals and family and having.
3. There is need also for deliberate provision of economic activities (e.g. institutional development) that will stimulate the economy of the community. This will enhance the socio-economic life of the community by creating direct employment for the people and this will spring up new businesses within the community.

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