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AN EVALUATION OF THE DELTA STATE 'MORE' AGENDA AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract
The Delta State MORE Agenda is a strategic policy framework designed to foster socio-economic development through infrastructural expansion, human capital development, and economic diversification. This paper examined the components of the MORE Agenda and its role in promoting socio-economic development in Delta State, Nigeria. The study anchored on the Development state theory and adopted a descriptive survey design with data obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Findings revealed that the MORE agenda policy of the state has contributed reasonably to employment generation and infrastructural development in the state but with little impact in the area of power generation and curbing of criminal activities. This paper therefore suggested among other things that the government partners with the private electricity companies to improve power generation in the state. It further recommended more collaboration with law enforcement agencies and further consultations with traditional institutions in order to address security challenges in the state which is essential for promoting business and economic activities.
Keywords: Socio-economic development, MORE Agenda, insecurity, infrastructure.

Introduction

Delta State, located in the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria, has long faced socio-economic challenges which includes poverty, unemployment, infrastructural deficiencies and environmental degradation. The need for improved living standards and availability of basic amenities such as portable water supply, good health and educational facilities, access roads, improved power supply and housing facilities have been the desire of the people of Delta State. Socio-economic development involves the process of enhancing socio-economic conditions in a society and therefore facilitates the need for governments to institute mechanisms that attract socio-economic development. This is mainly achieved through infrastructural investment, human capital development, policies and programmes that promote a conducive and developed society. Administrations in the past have made efforts in finding lasting solutions towards the achievement of growth and development for their economies through the institution and adoption of well-articulated programs for development such as Agricultural Advancement Programs, Economic Empowerment programs, Infrastructural development strategies etc. The output from these programs, have been the core of our problems in Nigeria. Delta State in particular, since 1999, had successive governments coming up with strategies and manifestoes for development. It is however unfortunate that in the past decade, Delta State has received trillions of Naira in Federal allocations but has little to show for it with persons still living in deplorable living conditions. (Ebiri, 2019). The MORE Agenda, initiated by the current Sheriff Oborevwori led administration in Delta State, aims to address these issues by focusing on four core areas:

M - Meaningful Development
O - Opportunities for All
R - Realistic Reforms
E - Enhanced Peace and Security

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The key objective of this agenda is to provide a strategic framework designed to foster comprehensive development across the state. This study therefore explores how this agenda contributes to the state's socio-economic transformation and development.

Statement of the Problem

The Niger Delta contributes to more than 90% of Nigeria's income generated from the sale of crude oil and also amount to 90% of total exports, but this does not reflect in the quality of life of the people who are impoverished by poverty, marginalization and lack of basic infrastructure (Akpan & Akpabio, 2009). Delta State still faces serious socioeconomic problems in spite of several government programs and policies. Social discontent and a rise in crime (kidnappings, cyber-crime, armed robbery etc.) are caused by the high unemployment rates that persist, especially among young people. Due to its over-reliance on oil earnings, the state is more susceptible to changes in the price of oil globally and has been unable to diversify its economy. Inadequate infrastructure, bad governance, and ongoing security issues have also hindered economic growth and private sector investment. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) report for 2024 reveals that Delta State is among states with relatively high unemployment rate in Nigeria at the rate of 8.2% which is attributed to poor economic conditions and lack of skills. Infrastructural challenges especially in the coastal communities characterized by poor housing, poor sanitation facilities, lack of pipe borne water and poor road networks pose serious threats to socio-economic and sustainable development (Deinee, 2021). Meaningful economic growth and development can be achieved in a conducive environment which is advantageous for the success of developmental objectives. Such environments can attract both local and foreign investments and also lead to successful implementation of development plans. There are many urban locations in Delta State such as Agbor, Warri, Ughelli, Sapele, Asaba amongst others. These towns are characterized by poor town planning for road and housing layouts, poor drainages, bad roads and poor waste management. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Delta State Assessment Report, 2013, less than 40% of urban dwellers have access to good sanitary facilities and this calls for urgent attention to facilitate actualization of socio-economic advancement.

Successive administrations in Delta State had introduced various empowerment programmes to address concerns bothering on unemployment, poverty and other socio-economic challenges. Unfortunately, Ijeoma (2022), rightly noted that these programmes have rich outlook but have not been able to tackle the challenges of the rural areas in the state. The MORE agenda was introduced by Governor Sheriff Oborevwori to solve these development problems and a thorough assessment of its efficacy is required to identify probable areas of adjustment and improve implementation strategies. It is on this premise that this study aims to assess the MORE Agenda and its impact on socio-economic development.

Objective of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are as stated below:

1. To identify the contribution of the Delta State MORE Agenda to employment generation in Delta State, Nigeria;
2. To examine the impact of Delta State MORE Agenda on infrastructural provision in Delta State, Nigeria;
3. To ascertain the effect of Delta State MORE Agenda on the improvement of security in Delta State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The researcher sought answers to the following questions:

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1. What is the contribution of the Delta State MORE Agenda to employment generation in Delta State, Nigeria?
2. What is the impact of Delta State MORE Agenda on infrastructural provision in Delta State, Nigeria?
3. What is the effect of Delta State MORE Agenda on the improvement of security in Delta State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The hypotheses formulated are based on the core of the problem and may be spelt out thus:

1. Ho: Delta State MORE Agenda does not significantly contribute to employment generation in Delta State, Nigeria.
   H1: Delta State MORE Agenda significantly contributes to employment generation in Delta State, Nigeria.
2. Ho: Delta State MORE Agenda does not have an impact on infrastructural provision in Delta State, Nigeria
   H1: Delta State MORE Agenda has an impact on infrastructural provision in Delta State, Nigeria
3. Ho: Delta State MORE Agenda does not have a positive effect on the improvement of security in Delta State, Nigeria.
   H1: Delta State MORE Agenda has a positive effect on the improvement of security in Delta State, Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Socio-Economic Development

Development can be referred to as a comprehensive course of improving the social, economic, political and technological well-being of people, societies and countries.

Economic dimension of development is seen as the quantitative expansion of goods and services or wealth of the society which is measurable by the Gross National Product (GNP) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country. Economic development similarly offers a structure where wealth and choice are valued as indicators of quality life in the studied populations. As wealth and consumer choice increases, regardless of how this affects a population in terms of life expectancy, illiteracy etc., a society is seen to be more economically developed. Justin (2017) perceives economic development as a process of structural transformation with continuous technological innovation and industrial upgrading, which increases labor productivity, accompanied improvements in infrastructure and institution as well as reduction in transaction costs. This therefore means that efficient allocation and utilization of resources constitutes economic improvement.

The Social dimension of development sees development as a process which deals with the issue of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and inequality of income. Scholars have highlighted other indicators of development to include decrease in human mortality, maternal mortality, high doctor-patient ratio, high life expectancy rate, low infant mortality and adult literacy among others.

In other words, Socio-economic development encompasses all aspects of the economic and social well-being of individuals from their health status to their economic and political freedom. It encompasses enhancement in access to basic amenities and services such as health, education, infrastructure, income, employment opportunities and overall quality of life of the people. Todaro and Smith (2020) view socio-economic development as a multi-dimensional concept that involves economic growth, improved living standards, education, healthcare, infrastructure and social equity. It is measured with indicators such as GDP, life expectancy, literacy and levels of employment. The emphasis is that a country is termed 'developed' not only when it records economic growth which is the increase in output of goods and services, but when the nation also records broader human progress and well-being of its citizens (Sen, 1999; Stiglitz et al, 2009). Kapur (2018) stated that socio-economic development and empowerment of disadvantaged groups is an imperative area

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that needs to be taken into consideration in order to lead to effective growth and development of the country. It is primarily concerned with bringing about improvement in the system of education, employment opportunities, income, skill development and cultural factors. Notable factors that have posed as threats to socio-economic development includes poverty, illiteracy and unemployment.

Socio-economic empowerment is indeed critical to meeting governments' development goals and will help to establish shared vision partnerships in the communities. When there are social and economic transformations, the masses are given the opportunity to partner with their government and take part in nation building.

Federal, State and Local governments have as part of their objectives, the promotion or pursuit of the welfare and well-being of their citizens. For this reason, policies and programs have been initiated by various governments to tackle the issues militating against socio-economic development.

Delta State 'MORE' Agenda

Delta State is one of the key producers of oil and gas in Nigeria and is located in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The state occupies a total land area of 17,108km^2 with a population of over 6 million persons. Upon assumption of office by the State Governor, Rt. Hon. (Chief) Sheriff F.O. Oborevwori, policies and programmes were introduced for the purpose of attracting development and improved quality of life for Deltans. The MORE agenda is a strategic framework designed to foster wide-ranging development across the state. It is the acronym for the current administration's developmental programs in Delta State which covers the following:

M - Meaningful development which comprises policy strategies towards attaining economic development, human capital development, infrastructural development and environmental sustainability. The major aim is to introduce foremost and purposeful projects that guarantee infrastructure and services are provided to meet the genuine desires of the populace thereby enhancing their quality of life.

O – Opportunities for all through equity and fairness, inclusiveness and proper engagement with stakeholders. Key objective of this pillar is to ensure citizens have a sense of belonging with equal access to social and economic opportunities.

R – Realistic Reforms in key areas such as financial reforms, public sector reforms, investment sector reforms, agricultural reforms and accelerated industrialization. These reforms when adopted and implemented are expected to bring long term benefits to the state.

E – Enhanced Peace and Security through promotion of community policing, engagement of youth in gainful employment, partnership among all security agencies towards preserving law and order and robust engagement with traditional institutions. This pillar aims to create a safe and conducive environment to advance stability, growth and development. (Delta State Government, 2024).

These programmes when implemented are expected to promote job creation, increased Gross Domestic Product (GDP), enhanced standard of living, environmental rejuvenation and increased agricultural activities. In addition, the programmes are aimed towards attaining improved security, upgraded infrastructure and better educational and health systems. This study therefore looks at the performance of the MORE agenda since its inception and its impact on social and economic development in Delta State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Development State Theory which advances that government-led policies can drive economic growth through strategic interventions. This theory postulates that a strong interventionist state is crucial for achieving sustained economic development especially in industrialization by actively guiding and coordinating economic activities. Johnson (1982, 1999) first conceptualized the developmental state theory in his analysis of Japan's economic development which he described that the primary essence of the state is to overcome under development and aspire for economic development. In his book, MITI and the Japanese

Miracle, Johnson stated that developmental State is a shorthand for the seamless web of political, bureaucratic and moneyed influences that structures economic life in capitalist Northeast Asia. States therefore seek strategies and mechanisms for executing their developmental projects with the aim of attaining socio-economic development. Bressa-Pereira (2019) in his investigation on the Brazillian system in the 1950s, noted that political researchers and economists recognized "developmentalism" as a set of political ideas and economic strategies that propelled Brazil's swift industrialization and strengthened the coalition of social classes identified with national development. Other countries such as Argentina, Mexico, South Korea and Singapore attained economic growth by adopting the development state strategy through the combination of state intervention with a dynamic private sector following the footprint of Japan. Wade (1990), perceives Developmental state as a central economic mechanism set up by the state for the following purposes:

i. To expand production in sectors and products with increasing returns and external economies.
ii. To keep a large measure of the productive sector in national hands;
iii. To look for opportunities to enhance domestic production and reduce imports.

A development state is therefore characterized by a government with the capacity and will to actively intervene in the economy to promote industrialization and long-term development. The key objective of the developmental state is to promote industrialization and attain technological advancement for the purpose of increasing productivity. States are expected to guide economic activities through implementation of meaningful policies, creating strong institutions and bureaucratic expertise to attain relevant developmental goals. The development state theory best explains the Delta State MORE agenda which can be termed as a state government intervention instituted by the current administration in Delta State for the purpose of achieving long-term development goals. This agenda focuses on mobilizing resources, creating conducive environments for businesses to thrive and engaging private sector support to undertake investments targeted at developing key sectors of the economy. The Delta State government is a key driver of economic growth and social development, through infrastructure development, investment promotion and governance reforms. It is based on this premise that this study looks at the performance of the MORE agenda since its introduction as an interventionist approach in relation to the attainment of socio-economic development for the people of Delta State, Nigeria.

Methodology

This study was carried out using the survey research method. The primary and secondary sources of data collection formed the approach for generating data. Under the primary source, oral interview, observation and questionnaire methods were used. The researcher obtained information from government publications, official records, National newspapers, business documents, magazines and journals which were secondary sources.

Delta State is located in the South-South part of Nigeria and is known for its substantial oil and natural gas reserves. The area of study covered three major towns selected from the three senatorial districts of Delta State. Asaba, the state capital was selected from the Delta North senatorial district, Ughelli having the largest population in the Delta Central senatorial district was selected and Warri, the commercial nerve center of the state was selected from the Delta South senatorial district. The study population according to the 2006 population census figure was 150,032, 320,687 and 311,970 for Asaba, Ughelli and Warri respectively. Using the Taro yamani (1964) formular, a sample size of 300 respondents was drawn and a total of 100 samples was allocated to each senatorial zone with stratified random sampling technique used to ensure full representation of the sample size. The questionnaire was structured in two parts which are Part A which contains information on the personal data of respondents and Part B which contains relevant questions to assess the performance of the Delta State MORE agenda. The expected responses include Strongly Agreed (SA), Agree (A), Disagree

(D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The research questions were analyzed using Mean (X) while hypotheses was tested using the chi-square (X^2) method. A mean value of 3.0 was taken as a benchmark to judge the mean for the items and therefore, any item in the instrument which has a mean equal to or higher than 3.0 will be regarded as 'agreed' while items with less than 3.0 will be regarded as 'disagreed.'
Decision Rule: Reject null hypothesis if the calculated value exceeds the critical value, if not, null hypothesis is accepted. The null hypothesis will be rejected or accepted at 0.05 level of significance and degree of freedom (r-1) (c-1) where r = Number of rows and c = Number of columns.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Question 1: What is the contribution of the MORE agenda to employment generation?

Table 1: Mean rating on contribution of MORE agenda to employment generation

	Description	**(SA) 4**	**(A) 3**	**(D) 2**	**SD 1**	**Efx**	**X**	**Decision**
1	MORE agenda has increased business activities through attraction of more local and foreign investments.	84	135	30	53	854	2.84	Disagree
2	Skill acquisition and entrepreneurial development has been enhanced through the MORE agenda programme.	190	85	14	11	1054	3.51	Agree
3.	The sustainable agricultural reforms of the MORE agenda has increased means of livelihood.	106	148	30	16	944	3.14	Agree

Source: Field Survey, (2024)

Table 1 above represents data from responses on the contribution of the MORE agenda to employment generation. Responses with a mean rating above '3.0' reveals that the MORE agenda has greatly contributed to employment generation through provision of skill acquisition programmes, entrepreneurship development and agricultural reforms. On the enhancement of local and foreign investment through the MORE agenda, a mean rating of 2.84 was obtained which reveals that the MORE agenda is yet to have an impact on foreign and local investment in the state.

Question 2: ***What is the impact of Delta State MORE agenda on infrastructural provision?***

Table 2: Impact of Delta State MORE agenda on infrastructural provision

		(SA) 4	**(A) 3**	**(D) 2**	**SD 1**	**Efx**	**X**	**Decision**
1	The MORE agenda has improved the standard of educational facilities in Delta State.	200	60	15	25	1035	3.45	Agree
2	Access to quality healthcare has been improved through the MORE agenda.	90	158	30	22	916	3.05	Agree

3.	The MORE agenda has facilitated the construction of more access roads in Delta State.	213	70	5	12	1084	3.61	Agree
4.	Electricity supply, good housing and other basic amenities have been enhanced through the MORE agenda.	50	34	100	116	618	2.06	Disagree

Source: Field Survey, (2024)

Table 2 above discloses the impact of the MORE agenda on infrastructural development in Delta State. Responses with a mean rating above '3.0' confirm that Delta State through its MORE agenda has been able to improve the quality of educational services and healthcare of its citizens. Analysis above also reveals that this agenda has promoted the construction of more access roads for the people of Delta thereby increasing business activities. A mean rating of '2.06' however, showed disagreement to the claim that power supply and provision of affordable housing has been enhanced through the MORE agenda.

Question 3: What is the effect of Delta State MORE Agenda on the improvement of security in Delta State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Impact of Delta State MORE agenda on improvement of security

		(SA) 4	**(A) 3**	**(D) 2**	**SD 1**	**Efx**	**X**	**Decision**
1	The MORE agenda has promoted community policing in Delta State.	30	65	183	22	703	2.3	Disagree
2	The rate of kidnapping and armed robbery has been reduced as a result of the implementation of the MORE agenda policies	5	27	219	49	588	1.96	Disagree
3.	The government through its MORE agenda policy provides support to security agencies for maintenance of law and order.	48	96	89	12	1084	2.41	Disagree

Source: Field Survey, (2024)

Table 2 above reveals the effect of MORE agenda on the improvement of security in Delta State. The above responses with mean ratings below '3.0' confirm that the MORE agenda is yet to make a positive impact on the improvement of security in the state.

Test of Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1:

Table 4: Computation of Chi-Square (X^2)

X^2 (Calculated Value)	X^2 (Critical Value)	Alpha Level	Decision
1245.86	1.635	0.05	Reject Null hypothesis

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Decision: The calculated value (1245.86) is greater than the critical value (1.635), consequently, we reject the null hypothesis and therefore accept the alternate hypothesis that Delta State MORE Agenda significantly contributes to employment generation in Delta State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2.

Table 5: Computation of Chi-Square (X^2)

X^2 (Calculated Value)	X^2 (Critical Value)	Alpha Level	Decision
557.77	16.92	0.05	Reject Null hypothesis

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Decision: The calculated value (557.77) is greater than the critical value (16.92), consequently, we reject the null hypothesis and therefore accept the alternate hypothesis that Delta State MORE Agenda has an impact on infrastructural provision in Delta State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 3.

Table 5: Computation of Chi-Square (X^2)

X^2 (Calculated Value)	X^2 (Critical Value)	Alpha Level	Decision
12.59	152.20	0.05	Accept Null hypothesis

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Decision: The calculated value (12.59) is less than the critical value (16.92), consequently, we reject the alternate hypothesis and therefore accept the null hypothesis that Delta State MORE Agenda does not have a positive effect on the improvement of security in Delta State, Nigeria.

Discussion of Results

The result of the analysis above reveals the crucial role of Delta State MORE agenda in attaining socio-economic development in the state.

Findings from the test of the first hypothesis reveals that the MORE agenda has significantly contributed to employment generation in the state. Thisday (2024) and Vanguard Newspapers (2025) revealed that over 250,000 Deltans have benefited from the D-CARES programme introduced through the MORE agenda policy which provides financial assistance to the elderly, people living with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. Over 6,000 farmers were empowered with agricultural inputs to boost agricultural production. In addition, the

government provided fertilizers and farm inputs which were distributed to farmers across the twenty-five local government areas of the state. Efforts have also been made by the government to revive the manufacturing and tourism sector to stimulate economic growth and development. The state government also through its MORE agenda has launched various poverty alleviation programmes such as the MORE scheme which is an initiative set up to uplift and support petty traders, artisans, female entrepreneurs and vulnerable households in the state. The introduction of the Women Empowerment Skill Acquisition Programme (WESAP) has so far empowered 311 beneficiaries (220 women and 91 persons with disabilities) in the state. Interactions with respondents on the extent to which foreign and local investors have been attracted to the state reveals that due to the level of insecurity in the state, investment has been very low with some companies even leaving the region for safety.

The findings from the test of the second hypothesis revealed that Delta State MORE agenda has contributed to infrastructural development in the state. Vanguard (March, 2025), revealed that the state government through the MORE agenda policy has improved education through the renovation of dilapidated schools, recruitment of qualified teachers, accreditation of programmes in higher institutions and provision of adequate learning materials. The MORE agenda has focused mainly on the primary health care system with the renovation and equipment of 150 primary health care centers across the twenty-five local government areas in the state. General hospitals and tertiary health institutions such as DELSUTH, Oghara underwent significant upgrade with the provision of modern equipment for improved quality health care in the state. ThisDay (2024) reports that a total of 513 road projects have been executed across the state which includes the 5.3km okpanam-Ibusa road, okogbe and Ogili street, Otovwodo junction Ughelli amongst so many others. In the area of housing, the government through its MORE agenda policy has constructed 8 duplexes at the commissioners' quarters, on-going 30 units of 1-bedroom flats at the181 Amphibious Batallion, Nigerian Army Agbor, on-going 50 units of three bedroom flats currently at 70% completion at Ozoro, Kwale and Owa-Oyibo. Respondents however explained that with the teeming increase in population, more needs to be done in the area of housing. Interactions also revealed that electricity supply has been extremely poor as the Benin Distribution Company has not performed up to expectation with no proper regulation by the government.

Test of the third hypothesis depicts that Delta State MORE Agenda does not have a positive effect on the improvement of security in Delta State, Nigeria. Investigations revealed that insecurity is a major issue in the state and this has been on the increase in recent times. The government through its MORE agenda was able to support with the donation of 66 operational vehicles to the police and other security agencies in the state (Vanguard, 2025). Unfortunately, the rate of kidnappings and killings in Delta state has been alarming and worrisome which is a source of concern as one begins to wonder if our security agencies are still in existence.

Conclusion

The issue of development has been a major focus and paramount priority of successive governments over the years. The Governor Sheriff Oborevwori administration of Delta State adopted the MORE agenda policy to facilitate socio-economic development through improved living standards, employment generation, infrastructural development, improved security and enhanced business activities. This study therefore assessed the performance of the MORE agenda and its impact on socio-economic development. Arising from the findings above, the paper concludes that the MORE agenda has facilitated employment generation and infrastructural development to a very large extent. However, poor electricity supply and insecurity are major challenges experienced in the state which has discouraged the attraction of both local and foreign investors. Arising from the findings above, the following recommendations are hereby proffered for enhanced performance of the MORE agenda:

Recommendation

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The government should attend to the issue of electricity supply and power generation in the state through partnership with electricity companies and utilization of solar energy for full implementation of the MORE agenda in all economic sectors.

Delta state government should complement the efforts of the Federal Government in combatting security challenges in the state which is currently in a state of emergency. Adequate collaboration with law enforcement agencies and meaningful consultation with traditional institutions should be adopted for successful implementation of security reforms in the state.

Due to increased population in the state, a more robust housing policy should be adopted to cater for both high and low income earners in order to promote access to more affordable housing.

The Delta State government should adopt measures for periodic performance assessment of the MORE agenda policy by independent institutions so as to identify areas that require change or modification of policy objectives and strategies.

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