

WEALTH CAPITALISM AND SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

Gold, Sunday Chukwuemeka, PhD

Department of History, Strategic and International Studies, Dennis Osadebay State
University, Asaba, Nigeria

Abstract

Niger Delta is one of the most natural resources endowed region in Nigeria. However, due to the fact that this region is the heartland of Nigeria's oil economy and therefore the bedrock of national revenue it represents at once a locus of social unrest and environmental degradation and a pressing need for social services. The paper analytically and historically explores the welfare capitalism in the Niger Delta, and the duality of such a model that can provide social welfare through economic development. The existing social services, the issues that challenges implementation of welfare policies and the oil wealth impact on the Niger Delta people, were analysed. Social service provision in the Niger Delta has frequently been inadequate, highlighting the shortcomings of welfare capitalism in the region. The Nigerian government and multinational oil corporations have instituted a range of development initiatives since the early 2000s, with mixed results. The paper notes and observes that education remains an essential component of social development, that mirrors the complexities of welfare capitalism in the Niger Delta. Schools tend to be overcrowded, under resourced, and badly maintained, and the dropout rates of students, especially girls, are high. The paper proffers a solution regarding the improvement of schools in the region just to ensure reliable development of social services in the region.

Key word: Capitalism, Social Services, Economy, Provision, Environment, Region

Introduction

Welfare capitalism is the combination of a capitalist economy with extensive social welfare in a state. In theory, this model increases social welfare with wealth created by capitalism. It often places emphasis on policies directed at the well-being of workers, social insurance, and redistributive policies designed to reduce disparities in wealth and opportunities (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Welfare capitalism also means a socio-economic system that includes capitalist economy alongside extensive social welfare policies (Soskice, 2002). Within the context of the Niger Delta, however, this definition requires some elaboration as the dynamic between oil wealth, the state and the people are complex and differences are at play on the ground. In Nigeria's Niger Delta, one would expect welfare capitalism in the form of large-scale investment into education, healthcare, infrastructure and employment for local citizens. However, the reality for many communities of the Niger Delta is a tragedy of the commons. Environmental degradation from oil extraction has poisoned farmlands and waterways; local

farmers and fishers, who depend on their subsistence livelihoods, have suffered from both direct and indirect oil-related atrocities. The phenomenon of the “resource curse” is creating a perverse paradox where naturally-rich areas are comparably underdeveloped. According to Ibeanu (2000), poverty rates have continued to rise with oil extraction, and oil companies' social responsibility strategies have failed to meet the needs of local people's lives, leading to the local people losing faith in government policies and oil companies' social responsibility policies. Regrettably, region's oil wealth has lured both local and foreign firms; as a consequence, some regions have experienced rapid economic growth, while the basic needs of the citizens were overlooked (Ugochukwu, 2019). What this demonstrates is the stark difference between how much wealth exists in terms of natural resources in the area versus the socio-economic realities of the local communities, and as such the idea that the brand of welfare capitalism being practiced here is materially not delivering for local communities. Social service provision in the Niger Delta has frequently been inadequate, highlighting the shortcomings of welfare capitalism in the region. The Nigerian government and multinational oil corporations have instituted a range of development initiatives since the early 2000s, with mixed results. Major examples include the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000, created with the aim of developing social amenities, health, education, and infrastructure development in the region (NDDC, 2021). However, these efforts have been severely undermined by widespread corruption, a lack of accountability, and political instability.

Education, is essential component of social development, which mirrors the complexities of welfare capitalism in the Niger Delta. Schools tend to be overcrowded, under resourced, and badly maintained, and the dropout rates of students, especially girls, are high. According to a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world, with the Niger Delta as one of the worst hits (UNICEF, 2021). This neglect of human capital investment is a systemic failure to invest in the region's future. Alongside welfare capitalism in the Niger Delta is the question of environmental destruction. Oil spills, the flaring of natural gas and industrial waste have transformed once-prosperous ecosystems into wastelands. This devastation not only destroys the means of living of many but also ignites dormant tensions that lead to aggravation in local communities that protest for environmental justice (Adetola, 2014). Indeed, this unrest has manifested itself in open clashes between government forces and militant groups that only adds more complications in the way of governance and service delivery. For example, protests led by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in the 1990s drew attention to the negative effects of oil exploration and extraction on the livelihoods of local people. The leader of the movement, Ken Saro-Wiwa, was executed in 1995, prompting global outrage and condemnation (Williams, 1999). More criticisms are level against the multinational oil firms that operate in the Niger Delta, some of the oil companies have embarked on a number of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities. These initiatives were designed to increase local standards of living and promote good relations with local communities, but there is widespread criticism of their effectiveness. Many people contend that CSR is just a tool of public relations, not a response to underlying socio-economic problems (Frynas, 2005). As an

example, a few oil companies have funded initiatives in schools and healthcare, but those efforts rarely incorporate local voices, resulting in a lack of ownership and sustainability. We need CSR which means real partnership with local communities that has become so relevant in our time and responding to real needs of those communities. Collaboration should go back to the planning phase, allowing communities to say what they prioritize and facilitating their participation in the course of development (Khanna & Palepu, 2010).

The governance of the Niger Delta has, historically, had some ebb and flow as well, with specific reference to the processes before and after oil was "discovered" in the 1950s. Most of its communities depended on subsistence farming and fishing, as it was mostly agrarian (Ekekwe, 2020). These traditional livelihoods enabled a type of welfare, in which social services were culturally built-in. Families assisted each other in farming, children were raised communally, and community health was often addressed through indigenous knowledge and practices. But the oil discovery meant moving from so much agriculture to the more financially lucrative oil field, a move that brought both prosperity and upheaval.

Despite these efforts, the government's social services were frequently inadequate and poorly executed. The National Youth Service Corps launched as a means of promoting national unity and development was one such attempt to weave youth into the national fabric. However, many graduates ended up without jobs or were only able to get jobs that did not address their skillsets leading to disillusionment (Okwudishu, 2022). Many of the CSR initiatives (Corporate Social Responsibility) established by oil companies in the region were also stymied by lack of funds. Today, the Niger Delta stands as a paradox – a region abundant in potential but steeped in poverty and desolation. However, despite Nigeria being one of Africa's largest oil producers, while bounty this wealth is rarely felt by the local people. While oil wealth flows into the national coffers, it has been reported that much of the residents in the Delta still live in squalor (Soku, 2021). Such juxtaposition underlines the failure of welfare capitalism to convert oil revenues into quality social services. Environmental degradation, an unfortunate negative of crude oil prospecting, has aggravated socio-economic crisis in the region. Oil spills have severely impacted local agriculture and fishing, destroying livelihoods that were sustainable (Idemudia, 2009). Some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have come to fill the gap in some of the welfare losses in the Niger Delta. Education, health care, and capacity building initiatives have emerged, aimed at empowering communities to take ultimate responsibility for their own development (Jibunoh, 2018). These bottom-up approaches understand that a sustainable welfare system must depend on the community it serves.

Oil spills have poisoned land and waterways to the point that the main source of livelihood in many regions, agriculture and fishing, cannot be sustained, leading to severe economic dislocation (Akhakpe, 2020). Many families are now food insecure, making informal welfare systems more essential than ever. Despite their exclusion from formal political structures, traditional leaders are usually the ones who interface with oil companies and the government in obtaining resources for development in many of the communities (Oladipo, 2015). But local governments can often give to corruption and lack of transparency, which disables effectiveness.

Access to these networks provide individuals with resources that range from funding for academics to calls to collective action against corporate wrongdoing (Nwankwo et al., 2019). In this sense, this social capital is a kind of welfare capitalism, though it bears little resemblance to conventional capitalist welfare.

The Nature of Welfare Capitalism in the Niger Delta

Welfare capitalism as stated earlier refers to a political-economic system that combines a mostly capitalistic economic system with extensive social welfare programs. These models are typically more common in advanced economies, in which the role of the state is to provide basic needs (Esping-Andersen, 1990). But welfare capitalism plays out differently in the Niger Delta. The Niger Delta has long been an oil-producing region that has been a major driver of economic growth in Nigeria. It is the involvement of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that figures most prominently in welfare capitalism in the Niger Delta. Big oil companies, including Shell and Chevron, have implemented multiple CSR initiatives to help alleviate some social and economic challenges within the fed-empire. These programs may involve health care, education and infrastructure development. Nevertheless, CRS is said to be a strategy to mask company images to reduce damage at different levels, including social and environment due to the operation of companies for which CSR initiatives became mere window dressing (Otim, 2018). A prime example would be Shell, which has long faced criticism for worsening environmental degradation via oil spills and gas flaring that have catastrophic repercussions for communities. Although the company's investment in local development projects is seen as helpful in lessening the suffering wrought by these activities, it might also be seen as enabling a determination to be left unencumbered by the social licenses to operate (Ibeanu, 2016). So

The link between the environmental geography of the Niger Delta and its welfare capitalism is crucial. The oil extraction process has been a significant cause of an expansive degradation of the environment with thence, air and water pollution, diamond, habitat loss, and loss of livelihoods of fishers and farmers (Watts, 2008). This degradation has negative impacts on the well-being of local communities. However, 57 Multinational oil companies have exacerbated the welfare issues in Niger Delta. Shell, Chevron, ExxonMobil and others have had a dual role, while they bring economic activity to the region, their practices have caused environmental degradation and social upheaval. Critics, however, have persisted that these efforts were more optics than reality in the context of the systemic disadvantages experienced by peoples of the Niger Delta (Nwajiuba, 2021). Such measures are rarely enough to offset the environmental and social damage wrought by oil extraction, leaving many communities feeling disappointed and resentful.

Local Responses and Grassroots Movements and Welfare Capitalism

Grassroots movements respond to government negligence and corporate exploitation. These movements aimed to protect the rights of the people, drawing attention to environmental concerns while holding both the government and oil companies accountable. Prominent activists like Ken Saro-Wiwa, for example, engaged international society in the struggles of the Ogoni people, resulting in widespread condemnation of the abuses taking place in the Niger Delta (Saro-Wiwa, 1995). We have also seen the emergence of community-led initiatives

emphasizing sustainable development and the necessity of participatory governance. Instead, local organisations are pushing for a model of welfare capitalism that puts the needs of affected communities first when it comes to providing care. They argue not only for the participation of local people in decisions about their resources, but have also made a strong case for a fairer allocation of oil wealth (Anele, 2022).

A Historical Investigation into Welfare Capitalism and Social Services Provision in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

This nexus between welfare capitalism and the provision of social services provides a unique perspective for examining socio-economic developments in different parts of the globe, especially Nigeria's Niger Delta. The phenomenon of welfare capitalism the joint efforts of government action and private enterprise to advance social welfare is part of the historical evolution of complex issues in the Niger Delta, both positive and negative. The structure and modalities of welfare capitalism in Nigeria remain deeply influenced by its colonial legacy and post-colonial evolution after independence in 1960. While the British colonial administration's primary focus was on enabling British vested interests, it also created the first institutions of governance and social welfare in the subcontinent that would form the basis of post-colonial structures. But these systems were generally unfair and denied the rights and access to much-needed social services to several local communities, especially in the Niger Delta (Adelekan, 2019). Terry H. Anderson in relation to the "Resource Curse" has stated that nature resource wealth can lead to conflict and social fissure, especially where the host communities do not partake in the amenities with the wealthy elite in the existing social order (Anderson, 2020)

Non-Governmental Organisations in Supporting Peacebuilding

In response to government and corporate neglect, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) emerged as key players in the provision of social services in the Niger Delta. These organisations attempted to assume some of the responsibilities of the state and to hold both government and corporations accountable to their social contracts with local communities. Similarly, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), an agency set up in 2000 to promote the region's development, has often been accused of mismanagement and corruption, undermining its mandate (Ewhrudjakpor, 2019). A tragic but intricate view of the failures and the possibilities of welfare capitalism can be derived from watching the plight of particular oil-producing communities such as Ogoniland in Rivers State. Local communities protested against the environmental degradation and economic inequality caused by years of exploitation by oil companies. The international attention towards protests of the 1990s are of particular note after the execution of activist Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995 (Obi, 2019). This unfortunate incident not only brought to light the problems of corporate carelessness, but it also ignited worldwide conversations surrounding corporate social responsibility. Big oil companies, facing pressure from the international community, adopted corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, even though they rarely led to systemic change. It was using CSR as public relations rather an honest commitment to welfare capitalism principles (Frynas, 2018).

During the decades of oil exploration in the Niger Delta, a distant government has made several attempts to provide social services to various communities throughout the territory, mainly funded and subsidized by the oil companies that operate in that area. The government's role in the provision of welfare and social services, by contrast, has frequently been limited and erratic, characterized by corruption and inefficiency. Many residents receive worse healthcare services than what policies designed to improve health outcomes would suggest (Okonta, 2006).

Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility and Its Limitations in Niger Delta

Another angle that should play a role in the debate on welfare capitalism in the Niger Delta is the activity of foreign oil corporations through routine of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Many oil companies make formal commitments to develop communities through educational and health institutions, to give back to the people over whose land they extract large portions of profit (Ite, 2004). Yet, these CSR initiatives are often more about building an appearance of social responsibility than nurturing meaningful change. Niger Delta, with its vast mangroves, abundant biodiversity, and network of rivers and creeks, is one of Nigeria's richest regions, yet also one of its most troubled. It is an area that has birthed Nigeria's oil prosperity yet suffers the wounds of ecological devastation, wealth gaps, and a legacy of underdevelopment. As Nigeria's oil-producing heartland, the Niger Delta is vital to the global economy, but with the wealth its resources has little benefit for its people. Welfare capitalism helped shape the social services provided in this area, combining capitalist ideologies of economic practice with social welfare goals.

Oil has generated great wealth, but in the Niger Delta there is widespread poverty. Limited access to economic opportunities poverty rates in the Niger Delta are reported to be well above the national average, with both unemployment and underemployment being prevalent (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). This dissonance between the wealth creation and deprivation at the local level, reveals the impotence of CSR as merely a band-aid for social service provision. There are some peculiar cultural and social characteristics in Niger Delta that determine the way the welfare capitalism gets responded to. Often, the guardianship of traditional community structures, local leaders, or councils is crucial in marshaling resources and galvanizing the community for action. In many instances, these traditional leaders serve as middlemen, acting on behalf of the oil companies to negotiate for social services the community requires. However, this relationship is fraught with challenges; many traditional leaders are seen as co-conspirators in the underdeveloping of their communities, taking bribes from oil companies while failing to call for real community needs (Nduka, 2018). Specifically, through its advocacy for increased investment in education and healthcare by oil companies operating in the Ijaw region, the IYC encourages the oil companies to replace more tokenistic CSR projects with engagement (Idemudia, 2014).

Welfare capitalism and social services in the Niger Delta are further challenged by the lack of strong Government oversight and accountability. Corruption and mismanagement have often marred the Nigerian government's efforts to manage its resource wealth. The absence of strong regulatory frameworks means companies can operate with impunity, to the further

marginalisation of already vulnerable communities (ECOWAS 2020). When implemented within a thriving welfare capitalist model, where effective governance enables both corporate and governmental figures to pursue their social responsibilities.

Education is still one crucial platform that welfare capitalism is addressing particularly in the case of the Niger Delta. As a social service, education is crucial for equipping the upcoming generations to shatter the cycle of poverty. Although Teach for All welcomes investment from oil companies, the sustainability and efficacy of these programmes remain to be questioned. Educational initiatives are criticized as being incoherent and strategically unfocused, aimed more at temporary relief than at substantive structural change. Access to education, especially in rural regions, is crucial for young people to develop a sense of individual power and enhance critical thought, which are both important in claiming their rights and questioning the status quo. Civil society organisations have, however, affected a response to welfare capitalism in the Niger Delta. There are many NGOs which have come in to fill that gap between the community and service providers. These entities push the government and corporations to hold their social responsibility. Many focus on educating communities about their rights, strengthening organisational capacity and advocating for social, political and environmental justice. The Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria, for instance, has played a crucial role in articulating environmental degradation and fostering community awareness and empowerment (Environmental Rights Action, 2021). Thus, welfare capitalism issues both opportunities and challenges for the provision of social services in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Indeed, while oil companies' arrogation of corporate social responsibility initiatives can plug critical social gaps, these remain unmoored in a trajectory of governance and accountability. These challenges make the historical complexities of the region unique and highlight the importance of a whole-of-society effort involving government, corporations, civil society, and local communities. Looking at social service provision just as an obligation of corporate society that continues to grow, there must be a commitment to positive enrichment and transformation

Advantages of Welfare Capitalism in the Niger Delta

Notably, this system has driven some socio-economic advancements in the Niger Delta despite its drawbacks. Multinational oil firms have implemented various Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives that seek to develop communities. Many focus on schools, health facilities and fostering local entrepreneurs. For example, ExxonMobil Nigeria has invested in a range of community health initiatives such as the construction of health centres and donation of medical materials (Vanguard, 2021.). In addition, community CSR initiatives can yield considerable short-term benefits for local communities. Where the state has fallen short, oil companies have had to pick up the tab for education and healthcare, trying to hire or keep employees.

However, oil companies' efforts at welfare capitalism are often not aligned with government policies and do not alleviate structural conditions that affect these communities. Sometimes they pop up as fragmented and uncoordinated responses instead of a holistic development strategy. The virtuous growth of the welfare capitalism in the Niger Delta is plagued with

shocking disaster of its implementation. CSR projects, while beneficiary in the short term, do not provide solutions to the root problems of poverty, inequality and social unrest. Smith & Nwankwo (2017) note that “welfare capitalism is neither a panacea nor does it guarantee development; in many instances, it merely relies on the inability of the state to deliver welfare services to its citizens and creates dependency on privately funded or privatised projects that often lack transparency.” A major problem is the environmental degradation linked to oil extraction processes. Oil spills, gas flaring, and deforestation are rampant in the Niger Delta, devastating agriculture and fishing, which are essential to the regional economy. These environmental challenges pose ethical questions with regard to the role of corporations in welfare capitalism. In contrast, while companies may be able to offer some social amenities, they also have the potential to disrupt the basis of local economies, perpetuating poverty and dependency (Eweje, 2006). Moreover, the dependence on welfare capitalism exerts pressure on oil corporations to perform roles that the state is usually responsible for such corporate actions raise questions about the authenticity of such corporate interventions. In the words of Ovat (2019), the state “has failed to offer effective policies or even share the oil wealth equitably, making the oil companies to act more like a quasi-government, thus breeding discontent and resentment amongst the local population.” In those communities that continue to be plagued by the legacy of corruption and mismanagement, the welfare capitalism will only deepen the sentiments of alienation and frustration. The narrative that outsiders capture oil revenues at the expense of the local population underlies persisting fights, from militancy to sabotage against oil assets (Isaac, 2013). The lack of community representation in decision-making processes disenfranchises local populations. Reform of policy is critical to solving Niger Delta problems. The above measure, among other, include strict laws and regulations, that govern oil and gas companies operating in or a part of the territory, local content legislation designed to favour hiring and training local workers, as well as robust social investment policies that truly respond to the needs of the people. Another option to consider is the utilization of a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, which would provide a formalized pathway for the government, private sector, and local communities to work together with strong incentives and accountability between partners (Adaawolo, 2020).

Conclusion

Overall, welfare capitalism in the Niger Delta is a study in contradiction: at once an engine for social progress and a perpetuator of inequality. Despite the region's vast oil wealth, the social services, environmental degradation, and marginalisation of local communities continue to rupture the legitimacy of this economic-gathering model. A successful welfare capitalism approach in the Niger Delta must include reforms that drives inclusive governance, genuine stakeholder engagement, and ongoing provisioning of essential social services. As I conclude this historical exploration of welfare capitalism and social services provision in the Niger Delta, it is evident that the journey has been riddled with challenges. The overarching grip of multinational corporations and systemic government failures have driven this cycle of neglect and protest. Although welfare capitalism has at times enabled some progress around local social services, such developments have invariably been piecemeal and inadequate. Realizing sustainability in the future within the Niger Delta will need a rethinking of the priorities of corporations and governments, rather than box-ticking consultations with the communities.

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