

Bomu Development Trajectory: Bomu Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

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<p>Corresponding Author Zaagha Alexander Sulaiman</p> <p>Department of Banking and Finance Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria</p> <p>Article History</p> <p>Received: 19/11/2024 Accepted: 03/12/2024 Published: 06/12/2024</p>	<p>Abstract: Community development is a sine qua non for the promotion of economic growth, improvement in the general living standards, promote educational advancement, enhancement of infrastructural development, conservation of the environment and ensuring good community base leadership. This study examined Bomu development trajectory: Bomu yesterday, Today and Tomorrow. Vivid expository analysis of Bomu community development in the past is elucidated and compared with the present as a basis for future development of the community. The paper identifies prevalence of environmental pollution and degradation and gas flaring as major hindrance of the community’s major source of livelihood (fishing and farming). Also, the advent of Kpor-fire, illegal bunkering and cases of communal crisis have had a devastating impact on the environment, education, health and overall socio-economic development of Bomu. However, to put Bomu on the path of development trajectory, a pragmatic and transformational leadership approach to governance is key for the development of the community tomorrow. The Bomu Governing Council and Community Development Committee (CDC) should consider setting up a Bomu Community Socio-Economic Development Master Plan through an inclusive community-led participatory approach that will foster sustainable development and place Bomu community on a development trajectory that can be measured and monitored.</p> <p>Keywords: Bomu, Community, Kpor-fire, Development, Trajectory, Oil Pollution, Environmental Degradation</p>
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1.0 Introduction

Following life sequence design, we expect that the pains of yesterday will resonate the gains of today and the aspiration for tomorrow. Yesterday might be historic, today discuss the present as a basis for the gains of tomorrow. According to Albert Einstein, learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow, the important thing is not stop questioning. The development trajectory of a rural community like ours typically involves a progression from basic survival needs to more advanced economic, social, and environmental development. Bomu like any other rural community over the years have witness development but there is no end in sight to development.

Bomu is a community in Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. It has a rich cultural heritage and a complex history shaped by its location in the Niger Delta region. The Bomu people speaks the Gokana language, which is part of the Ogoni language family. The community retains many traditional practices, including fishing, farming, and cultural festivals like Amanikpo, Ndubalolo etc. Bomu has over 2000 residential Houses with an estimated population of 31,000 people. Bomu is delineated in to two political ward namely ward 7 and 8 with 12units in ward 7 and 15units in ward 8.

Community development is about empowering people by providing them with the skills and resources they need to effect change within their communities. It’s a grassroots approach that values the input and participation of community members in decision-making processes. The process of rural development may be compared with a trend in which each coach pushes the one ahead of it and is in turn pushed by the one behind, but it takes a powerful engine to make the whole train move. The secret of success in development lies in identifying and, if needed, developing a suitable engine to attach to the train. There are no universally valid guidelines to identify appropriate engines of development, if at all they exist. It is a choice which is influenced by time, space and culture.

Defining the term development is somewhat problematic and nebulous. In the context of a nation’s development, the conceptualization of development becomes difficult if not impossible unless discussed in tandem with the concept of underdevelopment. Many scholars have argued that the understanding of these concepts is enhanced when it is hinged on a theory. The concept of development has been variously discussed in the literature, especially in the social sciences such that its definition has negated a single generally accepted definition. The perspective in which development is seen or defined is what social

theorists tagged as the “geography of development” (Peet & Hartwick, 2009). Development in human society is a many-sided process. To the “Dependistas”, it is easier to understand what development is to the Modernization scholars by tracing the history and the underdevelopment of the third world countries. And underdevelopment is not an absence of development, because, every people have developed in one way or another (Rodney, 1986). This is probably why Todaro (as cited in Jiffry, 2013) defined development as: A multi-dimensional process involving the reorganization and re-orientation of the entire economic and social system. This involves in addition to improvement of income, and output, radical changes in institutional, social, and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes, customs and beliefs. Todaro’s definition indicates that if development is conceived in the aspect of the state of the national economy as seen by the Modernization scholars, it is referred to as the economic development but when it is mixed with another like socio-economic, it means the well-being of a man, hence the social or societal progression of human beings alongside their economic wellbeing lead to human development. Thus, United Nations Council on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) stated that: Our first concern is to redefine the whole purpose of development. This should not be to develop things but to develop man. Human beings have basic needs: food, shelter, clothing, health, and education. Any process of growth that does not lead to their fulfillment-or even worse, disrupt them is a travesty of the idea of development.

Development is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various aspects of growth, improvement, and progress. Development is a deliberate and sustainable effort aimed at improving the quality of life, economic well-being, and social welfare of individuals, communities, or societies. It defines the creation of conditions that enable people to attain their full potential, exercise their choices, and live a life they value. It has various dimensions: Economic Development, Social Development, Human Development, Environmental Development, and Institutional Development. Bomu (Community) development is a complex, dynamic process that involves the collective efforts of individuals within the community to bring about positive social, economic, and environmental changes.

It is germane to enunciate unequivocally that the crux of community development is about empowering people by providing them with the requisite skills and resources they need to effect change within their communities. It’s a grassroots approach that values the input and participation of community members in decision-making processes. This implies that every member of the community is a stakeholder and their opinion on the governance (leadership) and policy making is paramount.

The term "**trajectory**" refers to the path or course that an object, a person, or a project follows through space or time. The progression or path a community follows overtime to achieve development of its infrastructure and people. Thus, Bomu development trajectory defines the path taking yesterday to maintain a deliberate and sustainable improvement in the social-economic welfare of its individuals and community today, for a better living condition tomorrow.

Historically, can we say that Bomu has any development trajectory? Has such trajectory over the years improve the education, health and living condition of the people? Has Bomu

development over the years improve the economic and social welfare of its people and help them to reach their goals? Is there sustainable improvement in Bomu environmental development? To what extent have we developed our institutions, policies and governance? Is there the Bomu dream of becoming an autonomous community in the near future? Is there any indices use in measuring/monitoring community development?

1.1 Bomu Community

Bomu community was founded by King Gbereleveh 1 who first settled at a place called *kumadum*. The name Bomu was coin from the natural ambience of Kumadum (founding place) which was a waterlogged concentrated settlement. Worried by this and the persistent disturbance during rainy seasons, King Gbereleveh 1 and his people relocated to a place called *koro* where he builds the Ancestral Shrine. The ancient ancestral shrine is still there in *koro*. They later move to a more fertile dry land where they settled and later to present day Bomu. Bomu means “ON WATER”. Like a rock in the middle of a lake forever will be cooling by flowing waters, Bomu enjoy great sense of serenity and calmness. This implies that water is essential for human survival, and its purity is crucial in the maintenance of good health. Bomu is a community in Gokana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. It has a rich cultural heritage and a complex history shaped by its location. Its geographical settlement along the creek provided them access to fishing, trade and other economic activities.

The head of Bomu community is referred to as MENE BON BOMU which is currently lead by Chief Benedict Vurasi Tenalo, the 13th Paramount Ruler. The community has a Governing Council comprising representatives of all the clan/kindred of the community. Bomu people are known for fishing and farming. The crops planted include but not limited to Yams, Cassava, Okro, Maize, Pepper, Garden egg, Coco yam, Sugar cane, Banana and plantain etc.

1.2 The Needs for the Development of Bomu Community

The essence for the development of Bomu community cannot be overemphasized. Such development can only be made by the good people of Bomu. The development of Bomu is quite essential for the promotion of economic growth, improve the general living standards, enhance infrastructural development, conservation of the environment and ensure good governance. Development of Bomu have serious potential outcomes at both individual and community levels. Children and families directly involved in community development initiatives may benefit from an increase in skills, knowledge, empowerment and self-efficacy and experience enhanced social inclusion and community connectedness (Kenny & Connors, 2017). Such empowerment will attract investment, stimulate our local economy and create new opportunities. Rural development involvement will significantly lead to poverty reduction through employment opportunities that increase the income levels of the populace. As community members are empowered and develop as leaders, they can begin to challenge and improve conditions that are resulting in their disempowerment or negatively impacting their wellbeing (Ife, 2016).

At a community level, community development initiatives are likely to achieve long-term outcomes such as stronger and more cohesive communities, evidenced by changes in social capital, civic engagement, social cohesion, community safety and

improved health (Haldane et al., 2019; Ife, 2016; Kenny & Connors, 2017). It will help in the preservation of our traditional culture and ways of life, promoting cultural values, cultural diversity and heritage.

It is expected that Bomu development will lead to improvement in governance, encourage transparency, accountability, good leadership and reduction in corruption and mismanagement. It will also encourage the sustainability and conservation of Bomu natural resources (e.g. forest, water and soil).

2.0 Bomu Yesterday – An Historical Review

2.1 Economic Development

a. Bomu as a Center of Trade and Commerce.

Bomu yesterday remains a beacon of hope and dreams of its founding fathers most of whom were promising business gurus and philanthropists. This was seen as Bomu was a center of businesses and markets. The Kibani central market where neighboring communities of Andoni, Opobo, Okrikas and other adjoining Gokana communities showcase their merchandise was known for its impact in improving trade, transportation and economic relations. The Obolo who are predominantly fishing people exchanged their fish and other marine resources for the Ogoni agricultural produce, this gave rise to the establishment of markets at various locations in Ogoni territory. Such markets include Kibani (Ogoni name), Ogokan (Obolo name) at Bomu coastal area (Adaye, & Benson, 2016). The Ogokan and Iyanaba markets were used by both ethnic groups till the 1972/1973 Ogoni and Andoni war which caused its collapse. As a youngster, Terry was seriously touched by his mother's life account of how, as a teenage girl, she was able to raise three pennies with which she started the local trade in fish at 'Ki-bani', a market at the water front of Bomu village (Terry, 2009). Besides, the Kibani market is the station market which makes the community a commercial hub.

b. Agricultural Produce

Bomu is an agrarian community with over 70 percent dwellers predominantly engage in subsistent agriculture mainly as major source of livelihood. Bomu use to be superb in crop production growing various crops like cassava, yams, plantains, and vegetables. The major challenge was the absence of proper irrigation system, modern farming techniques, fertilizers for crop yields and access to fund to invest in farming activities.

c. Fishing

Bomu's proximity to rivers and streams provides opportunities for fishing and aquaculture, which contribute immensely to the economic development of the local economy. Bomu yesterday became a tourist attraction as neighboring communities will come in droves to get fish and farm produce.

In Bomu, agriculture and fishing are critical to the community's livelihood. Residents primarily engage in farming, cultivating various crops such as plantain, oil palm, cassava, okra, melon, and banana. Additionally, fishing plays a vital role in their daily sustenance and economic activities, as the inhabitants largely depend on the aquatic environment for their needs.

2.2 Social Development (Improvements in education, health and social welfare)

a. Improvement in Education

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Education plays a pivotal role in community development and remains the bedrock for civilization. No doubt education equips an individual with pristine knowledge and critical thinking skills necessary for identifying problems and devising solutions. Educational programs tailored to community needs can foster innovation and drive sustainable development. Bomu has 4 primary schools and 1 secondary school that provide the springboard for most of our prominent Sons/daughters education in the past. Regrettably, these schools lack of learning infrastructure, dilapidated class rooms, insufficient educational materials, absence of qualify teachers, poor student enrollment and learning aids etc. The primary schools mark the beginning of early learning but grossly inadequate to match the growing population of school enrollees. Parents, teachers and mostly students depend heavily on agriculture which lead to seasonal fluctuations and limited access to education during peak agricultural seasons. Traditional values and social norms have influence attitudes towards educational attainment, particularly for our girl child and women. It will suffice to say that the community do not have policy framework that is tailored to the specific needs of these schools as there still remain gross percentage of out-of-school children, illiterate and school dropouts in Bomu. This is the mistake of yesterday that if not remedied today will have devastating impact on the community's development tomorrow.

b. Health Situation

Health is wealth they say but having access to primary health care yesterday in Bomu was a mirage. Though there was no modern medical facility in Bomu in the past which limit access to healthcare, Bomu have Traditional Medical Practitioners (TMPs) that provide healthcare services that meet the medical needs of the dwellers. TMPs combine traditional knowledge and skills passed down through generations, use herbal remedies/natural products and the embodiment of their revered cultural and spiritual significance in the treatment of various health challenges. They serve as primary healthcare providers promoting health awareness/education and provide basic medical care and treatment of common illnesses. Despite the presence of SPDC and discovery of oil in Bomu, the locals do not have access to primary healthcare services like basic medical care for common illnesses and injuries not to mention of preventive (health education and screening to prevent diseases), treatment services (surgeries) and maternity services. There were also Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) with specialized skills to manage Oblique or Transverse presentation using Massage, manipulation, External Cephalic Version (ECV) or manual rotation to correct the baby's position. Infant and maternal mortality was prevalent with cases attributed to witchcraft. It was believed that there is no natural death. Environmental degradation, oil spillage, gas flaring, water pollution, and other environmental hazards etc have had debilitating effects on the health, environment and economy of the people. The absence of clean and safe drinking water, poor sanitation and open defecation possess serious health challenges. However, our forefathers were brave, strong, healthier and live far longer, a case I will love the community handlers to study.

c. Social Welfare

Social welfare refers to the holistic development of human being. It encompasses the process where members of a community come together to take collective action geared towards finding solutions to their common problems. This may stem from little

initiatives driven by a group (like BLOP) to that of a broader and all-encompassing initiatives involving the entire community. Such collective action at the grassroots level transcend various aspects of well-being, including physical, mental, emotional, economic, spiritual and social connections. There was collective communal responsibility in family care, child upbringing, community engagements with utmost sense of belongings in the past. There was a local arrangement where if you were absent in class or social functions members of the class will come to fetch you using all available means. This breeds a sense of shared responsibility and mutual support among the villagers that enhance development in the past. Social welfare system stem development by collective actions taking by the community to overcome economic, social and environmental difficulties.

2.3 Human Development

Human development is crucial in improving the overall economic wellbeing, productivity and quality of life of individuals and communities. Access to quality education and vocational training can help in the acquisition of skills and capabilities that will create development and positive change. Vocational training and entrepreneurship support programme can help individuals develop practical skills that can stimulate local economic growth. Bomu yesterday skills sets and training was basically seen in the training of youth in fishing expedition to Cameron, Kura and Abasekoro etc. Others was through farming activities.

2.4 Environmental Development (Conservation and sustainable use of natural resources)

Bomu suffers environmental degradation with debilitating economy sequel to the prevalence of oil spills which have spread the length and breadth of almost every creek in Bomu. While oil was first struck in commercial quantity in 1956 at Oloibiri town in the present day Bayelsa State, the second discovery of oil in commercial volume was at Bomu in 1958 – the Bomu oil field contributed major supply to the first shipment of oil from Nigeria in 1958 (Mezie-Okoye, 2018). There are three oil well heads located at Koro, Boo-or and Teban, the Koro Oil Well Head is located within 150 meters from people's homes and people's farmland (Mezie-Okoye, 2018). The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region in the 1950s transformed the local economy. Bomu, like other communities in the region, experienced the impact of oil exploration and production. The oil industry's activities have led to environmental concerns such as environmental degradation, pollution, and health issues in Bomu and surrounding communities. The negative environmental impact of oil exploration on Bomu community has been more devastatingly far-reaching as the Oil spillage has overtly affect water, aquatic and marine life, soil and health condition of the community dwellers in various ways.

Impact of oil spills on water and marine economy

According to Mezie-Okoye (2018), with the expansion of oil production, the incidence of oil spillage has increased considerably in the region as well as Bomu community in Gokana, Ogoniland. He states further that, it is not only oil spills that are affecting Bomu, but also gas flares. There is evidence that gas flares also occur in parts of the Niger Delta and Bomu. Bubbling has been observed in certain swamps; and this means that an unknown amount of hydrocarbons may be affecting the water. With rivers clogged with oil, sources of drinking water poisoned with hydrocarbons, farms ravaged by hydrocarbons and rains almost turning acidic from the non-stop gas flaring in the area, a

generation of unhealthy people abound. Traditionally, Bomu takes to fishing as their predominant income source but the increasing environmental degradation and pollution hindered their major source of livelihood. Bomu fishermen who once get fishes in larger quantity from near house creeks and mangrove now hire canoes for distance deep water fishing expeditions due to the contamination of the marine economy. The ecology is changing fast. The mangrove tree, the aerial roots of which normally provide a natural and welcome habitat for many sea food - crabs, periwinkles, mudskippers, cockles, mussels, shrimps and all - is now being gradually replaced by unknown and otherwise useless types of fishes. This is a clear impediment towards Bomu's economic development.

Impact on farm lands

Farmlands have been devastated and the yield from the crops in these farmlands cannot do much and the people are worst for it. Because of oil spills, oil flaring, and waste discharge, the alluvial soil of the Niger Delta is no longer viable for agriculture. Furthermore, in many areas that seemed to be unaffected, groundwater was found to have high levels of hydrocarbons or was contaminated with benzene, a carcinogen, at 900 levels above WHO guidelines (UNEP). Yesterday, Bomu use to be the food basket of Gokana and Rivers State but have record steady decline in agricultural productivity due to vast environmental degradation. It has also impacted heavily on farming activities and crop yields as farm produce record stunted growth. Most of the wildlife have been exterminated and the locals can't get food even when they can afford it. As a little Boy I use follow my Grandfather Late Zaachheus Zaagha Kaakie to harvest cassava that was as big as big tubers of yam even without the application of fertilizers. Mezie-Okoye, (2018) opine that the impact of gas flaring on agriculture showed a direct relationship between gas flaring and productivity decline in agriculture.

- **Impact on health and Natural Resources**

The life expectancy of Bomu people has been a good one historically because the people enjoy fine air, drink water from streams and wells, drink fresh palm wines, easy access to protein (fish and meat) and maintain healthy leaving from fruits and veges that was home grown in abundance. Our fathers live over a century due to the natural splendor. Environmental degradation has leads to the loss of ecosystems, species and genetic diversity, loss of habitat through deforestation and climate change, soil salinization and nutrient depletion, causes infertility, food insecurity, exacerbate social inequality etc. Loss of biodiversity which constitute different kinds of life readily find in the area – variety of animals, plants, fungi, and even microorganisms like bacteria that constitute the natural environment. Each of these species and organisms work together like a web in an ecosystem to support and maintain balance in life.

- **The kpor fire Syndrome**

Bomu community like other communities in the Niger Delta have been in the eye of the news in the Kpo-fire artisanal refineries. Kpo-fire which is a new lexicon in the petroleum sector in Nigeria is typically small-scale makeshift operations that refine crude oil. Kpor Fire is illegal and unlicensed refineries that operate without any environmental regulations and safety measures. Its operations lead to the release of toxic chemicals and pollutants in to the atmosphere, soil and water, causing evenly widespread

environmental damages. The operational inefficiencies of SPDC's incessant oil spills, gas flaring and attendant unconventional operation of the Kpo-fire business have over the years possess greater environmental degradation, health risk, economic loss, social conflicts and death. Onuh et al., (2021), opine that the environmental consequences arising from illegal artisanal refining are considered very high both on the humans and the ecosystem". As such, the locals are now coping with multitude of environmental problems, such as poor health conditions, polluted drinking water sources, unusable grounds for agriculture, and Stagnant rivers (Ozogu et al., 2023, Boris, 2015).

- **Implication of War on development of Bomu.**

Communal crisis and wars have devastating impacts on Bomu development. It has led to wanton destruction of infrastructure (roads, schools, markets), loss of livelihoods, humanitarian crisis, social cohesion, social, economic and cultural disruptions. The Ogoni-Andoni War of 1993 affected the major source of livelihood of the people which was predominantly fishing and farming. The war differed from the previous wars involving Obolo and Ogoni, the approach, weapons, arms and ammunition, death toll and wanton destruction of communities in both territories was greater than the casualties recorded in the past wars (Benson, 2023). Historically, the two ethnic groups continued their wars from the 19th century to the late 20th. In the 20th century, they did fight wars at interval of twenty years, 1933, 1953, 1973 and 1993. The war was senseless as no substantial reason was adjudged as the cause of the war (Benson, 2023). The Ogoni-Andoni war gravely hinders the Central Kibani markets and affects fishing and farming activities – a major economic setback.

- **The Bomu and Lewe communal crisis**

The communal crisis between Bomu and Lewe of late serve as a significant blow to the development of Bomu community. The cause of the crises that resulted in the loss of lives and destruction of properties remain a mirage. The crisis which was sparked by youths from both communities started in 2016 and lingers till July 2021 with devastating impact on economic activities, educational prospects, caused humanitarian crisis, social cohesion and hinders development of Bomu. Similar crisis has erupted in December 1987 to August 2021. Regrettably, while the crisis last, our children could not have access to schools, teachers scam for safety, decrease access to farming and fishing which were the mainstay of the people triggered food shortages, deter investment and limit access to healthcare and perpetuate poverty.

- **Cult clashes**

Cult clashes have hindered socio-economic development of Bomu. It will be recalled that Bomu at some point was divided along two major cult group (Deebam and Deywel). The pains and fears from these cases of wars and communal crisis resonate with the community's development woes. The community have been deserted due to cult violence and dwellers driven away from their homes and not been able to continue with their basic sources of livelihood such as fishing and farming. The proliferation of cult activities in Bomu and its environs have leads to violence, disruption of businesses, create division among community members and an atmosphere of fear. This in the long run creates less incentive for investment and business activities that promote economic development. Activities of cult groups which manifest as arm robbery, initiation rituals, rape, destruction of properties and

killings are inimical to investment which hampers overall development in Ogoniland (Kpae and Alade-Williams, 2021).

2.5 Institutional Development (Strengthening governance, institutions, and policies)

Institutional development refers to the process of strengthening governance, institutions, and policies to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of public administration. It involves reformations in various aspect, including financial, cultural regulatory, and supervisory frameworks, to improve coordination and implementation of development agendas. Such development aims to foster better governance structures, ensure accountability, and promote sustainable economic growth. Leadership in rural communities often depends on local actors who utilize their social positions, education, and community ties to influence and drive development initiatives. Bomu had a unique leadership structure that reflects its strong cultural heritage and traditional practices.

The administration and governance of Bomu comprise of the Menebon (King), who is the administrative head/paramount ruler and responsible for the maintenance of peace, order and custodian of the cultural heritage of Bomu, Council of chiefs who are respected elders that provide guidance, advise the king on community matters and help in decision making, Community Development Committee (CDC) that is charge with the responsibility of initiating and overseeing of community development projects, Youth Council that represents the interest of young people in the community and Clan heads and Leaders that plays vital role of maintaining social order and dispute resolutions. Bomu have strong men (leaders) and strong institutions with diverse governance structure that endeared the people to live in peace and harmony. Though unwritten, traditionally, Bomu yesterday has its traditional cultural laws and policies that regulate social norms, values, behaviors on customary land tenure that govern regulations on land ownership, usage and inheritance, marriage and family laws that depicts traditions on marriage, divorce, family relationships and inheritance and dispute resolution mechanisms which are traditional methods of resolving conflicts through mediation, arbitration and resolutions. From the above, there seems to be a robust all-inclusive local governance/leadership mechanism in the past that meets the needs of the people at that time, but can we vividly say if it has been improve upon as exemplified in today's leadership?

3.0 Bomu Today – A departure from the past and a plan for tomorrow

According to David Icke, today's mighty oak is just yesterday's nut, that held its ground. This lay credence to the importance of perseverance of today as a foundation for future development. Let's ignite and light tomorrow with today by learning from the mistake of yesterday to develop Bomu of our dreams. Greatness lies within persistence.

My King, Council of chiefs and great Patriots, the wall outside this building looks cruel and pale. Every one outside this building is looking forward to us here today to find lasting solutions to challenges of yesterday for tomorrow might not meet us. As torch bearers, they anticipate that we solve the problem of education, health issues, social conflicts, limited access to basic amenities, youth restiveness, economic strangulation and environmental degradation confronting them. Is Bomu of today developed than yesterday? What strengths and windows of

opportunity could our community build upon? Is there prospect today for a better tomorrow?

3.1 Social development – Education, Health, Social amenities

a. Education

A sound education remains the bedrock for the development of every society. It is the foundation upon which rural community development is built. Bomu today have public and few privately owned primary schools that is expected to cater for the growing population and meets its educational needs. Some of these schools record poor school attendance, no desk/chairs and no teachers. In particular, State School 11 was caught in the middle of the communal crisis and was relocated to CPS 3. A good number of the teachers have been transferred to other schools because of insecurity from the communal clash. Quite excruciating is that most of the pupil sit on the floor to learn and sometimes at the mercy of the teachers who abandon them for other businesses while the supervisors and community handlers looks away. Parents don't monitor the education of their children as they scarce for daily needs. Bomu as at today still have good number of out of school children and poor school enrollment which is a far-cry as education awareness should be the precursor for community development.

Our only secondary school is not exempted from this menace. At the junior secondary session student sit on bare floor to learn. Community Secondary School Bomu is currently faced with the absence of basic health facilities making it difficult for students to receive medical attention, absence of computers, internet and other digital resources, shortage of teachers due to communal crisis, youth restiveness and transfers, poor infrastructure (electricity, sanitation, instructional materials). Learnt that the school use to house a computer lab in the recent past that was donated by government with computers but was all looted. I quest not by outsiders but Bomu indigenes. No physics, chemistry and biology lab, no specimen, no nothing, but we hope to breed scientist and medical doctors. Students enrollment at both the junior and secondary schools are low when compared to the demography and growing population of the youth with serious case of out of school children. Findings reveal that we have less than 300 students in the senior secondary session with less than 100 in SS3. It will shock you to note that the on-going HYPREP clean-up also affect student enrollment, most of whom want to work to earn a living. Though it was confirmed the students' performance in the WAEC have been on the average for past 2 exams but how many of them actually wrote the exams themselves. We rather prepare to sort out their exams rather than prepare them for the exam. This is like a time bomb waiting to explored. We read and watch this in the news in remote North while we live with it. Besides the above ugly picture of the sorry state of our educational sector, I want to particularly appreciate Chief Lette Akpe and Hon, Barisitum Dumle for the reconstruction and renovation of CSS Bomu. I most respectfully want to thank the President and leadership of BLOP and Hon, Confidence Deko for their timely corroboration, renovation and provision of desk to the war turn CPS 2. For the yet to be commissioned blocks of classrooms with water by SPDC through the able leadership of HRH Chief Benedict Vurasi Tenalo and council of chiefs, this is timely and a laudable intervention. While this is quite commendable, we need to create the needed awareness on the importance of education as a veritable tool towards development and an enabling and conducive atmosphere

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that makes learning fun. What I did not cover here is the number of our youth that are illiterate and am sure this would have spoil the merriment of the day.

Bomu have witness higher school enrollment and educational advancement, with significant PhD and university degree holders but there is a lack of practical application of learned skills and knowledge to proffer solutions to lingering community challenges. Education should be tailored in a way that engage the people to foster community development, improvements in local infrastructure, economy, and overall quality of life. Community base organization and NUBOS should be involve in mentoring and sensitization of the CPS students as there is insufficient involvement of educated individuals in local development initiatives.

“Plants are shaped by cultivation and men by education... We are born weak, we need strength; we are born totally unprovided, we need aid; we are born stupid, we need judgment. Everything we do not have at birth and which we need when we are grown is given by education” Jean Jacques Rousseau

b. Bomu – Medical Health Situation

Primary health care is essential in every community as it ensures individuals receive comprehensive and quality care, focusing on prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. According to WHO, all people, everywhere, have the right to achieve the highest attainable level of health which is the fundamental premise of primary health care. This is pertinent because it plays a crucial role in promoting overall health and well-being, which contributes significantly to the socio-economic development of the community. By providing accessible primary health services, it helps to reduce health disparities and enhances the quality of life for community members. Bomu today have a Model Primary Health Care Center that was meant to cater for the primary health needs of the people but face plethora of challenges. From the absence of Medical Doctor, to the shortage of manpower – nurses and lab attendance, not even volunteers and breakdown of gen set etc. The center house a Doctors quarters, a lab and pharmacy and Out Patience Department (OPD) but presently manned by a Matron who with her team ensure proper registration of patience, obtain vital signs, takes their complaints, refer them to the lab for test. They consult Medical Officer of Health (MOH) with the result, complaint and physical observation who advise them on the drugs to be administered from the pharmacy department. Surprisingly, drugs are free at the center.

Universal health coverage can only be achieved when everyone, everywhere can access the health services they need, hence there is need for community engagement and participation. Limited community participation in promoting awareness on the services offered by the MPHCC have led to the underutilization of the facility, further embellish cultural beliefs and social barriers where every health related challenges are attributed to witchcraft and have prevented the people (community) from accessing primary health services. Primary health care is widely regarded as the most inclusive, equitable and cost-effective way to achieve universal health coverage and Bomu community development can only be realized when health care is delivered in a way that is centred on people's needs and respects for their preferences.

c. Social and Political Development of Bomu

There have been growing social and political awareness amongst the people of Bomu. But can we say that such political consciousness has triggered political development and that a road map today for greater political advantage and achievement in the near future? Are there any succession political plans? Irrespective of political affinity, today, Bomu Sons and Daughters are raising to the front burner in terms of party politics, political consciousness and participation but much more is needed to accelerate political development. This epoch making occasion is put together to recognize and spur our political representatives and appointees to do more in putting Bomu on the pedestal of political development.

Right from the advent of democracy in Nigeria, no Bomu indigenes have become the chairman of Gokana LGA but have had brilliant representation at the state level serving as commissioners and advisers. The sad and early exit of Chief Samuel N. Orage (former commissioner) and Chief Theophilus B. Orage whose political influence put Bomu in limelight today have great effect on our political existence. Today, the doggedness and craze for political recognition and participation have resonate, with Bomu indigenes elected/appointed serving at various levels of government. The political narrative should be anchored on the need to use such appointment to attract projects and engagement of Bomu people for future development of the community.

3.2 Bomu Economic Development

There have been deliberate steps by the present leadership to reinforce the economic glory of kibani markets through inter-village and inter-ethnic trade and commerce with little achievement recorded. It is also believed that the clean-up of hydrocarbon-impacted sites, restoration of artisanal refining sites and the rehabilitation of mangrove swamps by HYPREP will reinvigorate fishing and farming that are the main source of the economy and promote sustainable livelihoods for the people. The Bomu HYPREP project have taken significant steps in the restoration of the environment and promoting economic growth. It is hope that the shoreline cleanup and mangrove restoration initiatives will revitalized the ecosystem, enable the return of aquatic life and promote sustainable fishing practices. It has open new vista of economic opportunities by directly or indirectly generating employment, increase trade and commerce and improved infrastructure. Small businesses have been revived with local entrepreneurs happing on the presently ever busy Bomu to promote their business.

However, it is important to note that though the HYPREP cleanup have made significant impact on the economic development of Bomu, it still grapples with the negative impact of oil pollution/degradation and an enhance community engagement/collaboration efforts are needed to ensure long-run sustainability of the environment and the economy.

3.3 Environmental Restoration Project

The UNEP report on oil pollution in Ogoni, that was released in 2011, reveals the devastating impact of oil operations on the environment and human health. Subsequent presence of HYPREP in Bomu is an attestation that the environment has been polluted due to the impact of oil exploration that have caused environmental degradation of the land, sea and atmosphere. The UNEP report findings reveals alarming rate of widespread contamination of oil pollution that has penetrate deep into soil, water and air, thereby posing serious health risk exposure to the community due to hydrocarbons that causes cancer, respiratory disorder and environmental damage to mangroves that are vital

ecosystem and fish habitat (UNEP Report). The HYPREP cleanup in Bomu Gokana was geared towards addressing hydrocarbon contamination and restoration of the environment which was severely degraded due to oil pollution. This initiative includes activities such as shoreline cleanup and the planting of mangroves, which are crucial for rehabilitating the ecosystem and promoting biodiversity. The project is expected to mitigate the immediate environmental impacts of oil spills, enhance local livelihoods, and foster community participation in environmental restoration efforts.

Today, it is hope that the ongoing remediation exercise by HYPREP will significantly lead to the removal of greater amounts of pollutants, including oil and hazardous waste from the Bomu environment and helped in the revitalization of the ecosystem (biodiversity) through mangrove restoration/remediation. If the implemented measures to clean up contaminated soil, water and restoration of the marine life is tenaciously followed in collaboration with community leadership and full participation of the people, the risk of further environmental damage will be reduced, fishing and farming activities will be revitalized, leading to the development of Bomu tomorrow.

- **Bomu Water project - Implication**

Today, the Bomu HYPREP water project that is geared towards the provision of potable safe water facility in the community is a milestone project and the best thing to have happen to this great community. The project which is part of Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project is part of an enlarge integrated approach to environmental remediation and sustainable development of the people. The provision of clean and safe water no doubt will improve the living conditions, health and enhance the quality of life of Bomu people. The water project is significantly important to the community as over the years, access to safe clean drinking water is essential in the maintenance of public health, overall wellbeing and economic development. The Bomu HYPREP Water Project has the potential to significantly enhance the quality of life for local communities' members, addressing both immediate needs and fostering long-term development goals. The water project is part of Lot 17 which cover the construction of 1 headwork, Staff quarter, treatment building, generator house, pressure filter house and gate house. According to HYPREP, Bomu water project is completed and was commissioned on the 26th of July 2024 and is supplying water to the community. The commissioning and the fanfares that greeted it, is most regrettable as till date the pipes remain empty without water, hence, community engagement is key and should not be compromised to ensure the sustainability of the water project. Why hurriedly commission empty pipes. This project features prominently in the annals of our quest for developmental strides and the community leadership, CDC, youth and community based organization can't afford to let it slide down the drain.

- **Integrated community base Participatory leadership and community engagements**

One of the key for the success of the development of rural communities is the presence of an effective leader (Freddie et al., 2013). Bomu today is blessed with a young and visionary King, that have command respect to the throne, a blended council of chiefs, and pragmatic CDC. An integrated and all-inclusive leadership structure that typically involves a mix of informal opinion leaders and formal structures, focusing on harnessing the

strengths of community members to provide leadership, manage resources, and foster sustainable practices that meet local needs will stem sustainable development of Bomu. If we must carve a road map towards placing Bomu amongst the comity of emerging developed communities, today, the King, Council of chiefs, CDC, Youth, Women wing and community based organizations/NGOs most come together to set strategic achievable plans that put the community on a development trajectory. Leadership among residents in rural communities involves creating an environment that encourages participation, builds skills, and empowers individuals, this is because effective leadership and community development is linked very closely.

Importantly, to accelerate the process of rural community development, government look at the roles of community leaders as an essential aspect of government as they are the catalysts in the process of developing rural communities in terms of quality of life and well-being of society. To ensure effective development, it's paramount for Bomu Governing Council to encourage communal participation, foster wider engagement and empower community members, this can lead to more impactful and sustainable development. Leadership must today, take full control and responsibility of all community activities, programs of the community and enshrine holistic local governance that is focus on advancing development goals.

4.0 The Bomu of our dreams - Tomorrow

Bomu of our dreams is possible but if we must develop her, we need to wake up from the slumber of yesterday and wear a thinking cap of today for a better tomorrow. Bomu development trajectory was a mirage until this gathering, because if we fail to chart a new course of action that engineer strategic decisions/planning through holistic leadership and communal engagement, Bomu development will be a hoax. For an effective and sustainable development of Bomu community, the below strategic plans should be put in place today:

1. Pragmatic and transformational leadership approach to governance is key for the development of the community. A credible and effective community leadership is needed to achieve the community's development aspiration. The crux is the ability to realize the vision to develop the village, as well as demonstrate practiced principles, relationships and trust, cooperation, networking and understanding of strategy, charisma, sharing and teamwork. Off-course, "uneasy lies the head that wears the crown".
2. HRH Chief Benedict Vurasi Tenalo should consider setting up a Bomu Community Socio-Economic Development Master Plan. Such development master plan if genuinely crafted and encompass all sectors of Bomu, will foster sustainable development. It will place the community on a development trajectory that can be measured and monitored.
3. **Inclusive Decision-Making:** Involvement of community members and other interest groups in planning and decision-making processes through an inclusive participatory approach that ensures everyone feels their voice is heard.
4. Education: A Bomu where every child is educated is possible. The challenge of education in local communities, particularly in Ogoni society, is that educational awareness does not translate into community development. To achieve this, there should be a comprehensive home grown approach towards enhancing and reviving the education sector in Bomu. A special committee should be set up to oversee and review the state of education in the community. CBOs/NGOs should give scholarship to the SS3 student, this will stem competition and enhance the development of education.
5. Health: The community leadership/CDC should seek wider consultation and collaboration with the Matron at the MPHIC and other medical practitioners from Bomu in effective management and creating the needed awareness on the importance of seeking modern health care. Promoting awareness and educating the community members on the scientific causes of sickness and the importance of seeking medical attention can help in dispelling the believe in witchcraft. Supporting improve access to quality healthcare services can help the local's reliance on evidence-based treatments rather than attributing sicknesses to witchcraft. Misattribution of causes of sickness may discourage people from seeking modern health, leading to poor health outcomes.
6. Economic advancement – CDC should ensure the revival and sustainability of the restructure Kibani market, Station market and create an enabling environment for fishing and farming activities to strive.
7. Environmental Sustainability. There should be a decisive action by all players by way of policy framework to sustain the cleanup and remediated land, restore mangrove and aquatic life in Bomu. This will accelerate the resuscitation and development of farming and fishing in the near future.
8. Kpor-Fire and Illegal Bunkering: sponsored community-led initiatives and regulation that prevents illegal artisanal refining, holds perpetrators accountable, and provide resources for community-driven solutions. With the remediation and restoration project on board, we cannot afford another level of contamination of our environment with toxic substances into our air, water and soil that threatens the health and livelihood of our community if we must develop.
9. Communal crises. The community should employ high level of diplomacy and engagements without compromising/conceding Bomu territorial concerns with our noisy neighbors in managing related cases of crises to forestall full blown war as this will amount to fighting with a pig. They have nothing to lose, we have everything to lose – development. The recent Gbe community debacle is a litmus test that should be effectively handle. Crisis is antithetical to development, which is what they seek to achieve.
10. **Boundary disputes and conflict resolutions:** Bomu Governing council/CDC should initiate a community-led initiatives to demarcate boundaries and resolve disputes with our bordering communities. Clear cut laws be issued to land owners from Bomu along Kpokpogoro and Bara-ol-

Zorgbe and Bara-ol-ooni, Luubara sharing boundaries with Gbe and Mogho communities not to sale land unless approve by Bomu Governing Council/CDC. This is to forestall future dispute and preserve the territorial integrity of the community. Bomu Coastal and waterfront communities like Kol-Faa (Bonfombor), Bon-Mondor, Bon-Maaka, Bon-Firima, Bon Viura, Kol-Kua, Gborogoi and Ta-Akpo should identify

11. CDC should consider setting up a Community Information Centres (CIC) that provides information on education, agriculture, health, legal and human rights, history and cultural values, technology awareness, disaster management and rural employment. CICs are public places where community people can gather information, create, learn and communicate with others while they develop essential skills.

In conclusion, community development is an ongoing journey towards a more equitable and sustainable future. It requires the dedication and collaboration of all community members, guided by informed leadership and innovative strategies.

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