

AN APPRAISAL OF THE RESOURCE CURSE, MDGS AND SDGS ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF ESAN IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

There are a plethora of studies on the phenomenon of resource curse in Nigeria, but none of them has problematised it in the context of the MDGs, SDGs and rural development. This paper, therefore, expands the narrative of the resource curse hypothesis by appraising resource curse, MDGs, SDGs and rural development in Esan, Edo State, Nigeria. Its objectives are to examine oil and gas as a misused rural economic development opportunity in Nigeria, explore the achievability or otherwise of the MDGs and SDGs in Esan, and assess the state of Esan contemporary infrastructure and industrial development. Using the historical or descriptive research methodology, this paper employs the qualitative data analysis technique to achieve its objectives. It discovers that the discovery of crude oil in Nigeria has significantly improved her wealth. But it has equally paradoxically spelt doom for rural economies whose neglect has become the opportunity cost of oil production in Nigeria. It also finds that government's poor investments in Esan infrastructure and industrial potentials are obstacles to its MDGs and SDGs attainment. Therefore,

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the paper concludes that the reversal of rural economic misfortunes is central to reversing Nigeria's economic downturn. It recommends purposeful investment in rural development as a strategy for salvaging Nigeria's resource curse.

Keywords: Resource curse, MGDs, SDGs, Esanland, Rural development

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's persistent economic underdevelopment predicament and current labelling as the poverty capital of the world despite her oil wealth is worrisome. Since the transition of the Nigerian economy from agriculture to crude oil production, the oil curse hypothesis has been extensively used as a model in academic literature to explain Nigeria's development misfortune. The National Resource Governance Institute (NRGI) (2015) defines the resource curse, also known as "the paradox of plenty," as the failure of resource-rich countries to benefit fully from their resource wealth by responding effectively to public welfare needs. When a nation discovers natural resources, better development outcomes are generally expected from it, but in Africa, the resource richest continent in the world, low rates of economic development when compared with their non-resource-rich neighbours have trailed the discovery of natural resources (NRGI, 2015, p. 1). Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian (2003) in their study observed that Nigeria's example of underdevelopment provides a telling confirmation of how natural resources exert a negative and nonlinear impact on economic growth and development. They contend that waste and poor institutional quality stemming from oil was primarily responsible for Nigeria's economic downturn (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2003, p. 6).

Agbaeze and Ukoha (2018) in their study explain that natural resources become a blessing when they lead to an increase in national revenue, but a curse when they lead to weak economic development. This implies that natural resources become a curse when they cause a shift in the factors of production from non-booming sectors of the Nigerian economy, such as

agriculture and solid minerals that previously sustained Nigeria's pre-oil economy to the booming oil and gas sector (Agbaeze & Ukoha, 2018, p. 264). Nigeria's "Economic Growth and Recovery Plan, 2017-2020" revealed that since the country shifted from agriculture to crude oil, her other vast economic potentials have been largely untapped (The Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2017, p. 10). Consequently, Duruji and Dibia (2017) maintained that the resource curse was the reason why the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) has continued to classify the Nigerian economy as underdeveloped despite Nigeria's huge oil revenue. Regarding the political impact of resource curse in Nigeria, Ko (2014) in her study argued that Nigeria is a prime example of a situation where plentiful oil resources caused the dismantling and failure of true federalism and increased the likelihood of civil conflict (Ko, 2014, p. 1). Oil wealth informed Nigeria's redistributive top-bottom fiscal federalism that had been the bane of the derivative principle that allowed the regions to retain the bulk of their resource income prior to 1956 (Ko, 2014, p. 2).

Resource curse as a threat to economic development has been generally explained from three main perspectives. First, natural resources generate rent which leads to rapacious rent-seeking that has adverse an effect on the political economy in form of corruption. Secondly, natural resource ownership has the capacity to expose a nation to the volatility (fluctuation) of commodity prices which can adversely affect economic growth through price-induced inflations. Thirdly, natural resources have been argued to make a country susceptible to what economists call the "Dutch Disease". This is the tendency for exchange rates to be overly appreciated because of positive price shocks, and this could ultimately lead to a contraction in trade (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2003, p. 7). In the Nigerian context, Agbaeze and Ukoha explain that the Dutch Disease applies to the decline experienced in the non-oil sector of the Nigerian economy because of the oil boom or global increase in the price of oil (Agbaeze & Ukoha, 2018, p. 263). However, to the best of the knowledge of the researcher, there is no literature examining the resource curse in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and rural development in Nigeria. Therefore, this paper seeks to expand the frontiers of knowledge on the resource curse

hypothesis by interrogating how Nigeria's misused oil wealth constitutes a wasted rural development opportunity in Esanland.

Oil Revenue, MDGs and SDGs: The Development Prospecion for Esan

Esanland is located northeast of Benin City, the capital of Edo State, Nigeria. Before the creation of Edo state, in 1991, the Esan people who speak the Esan language were one of the minorities in the defunct Bendel state and the Midwestern region created in 1976 and 1963 respectively. In 1946, the Esan people were divided into the Western region. Esanland is made up of thirty-five (35) communities, namely *Amahor, Emu, Ewu, Ebelle, Ewatto, Egoro, Ewohimi, Ekpoma, Ewosa, Ido, Irrua, Iyenlen, Ifeku, Ilushi, Igueben, Iruekpen, Orowa, Ohordua, Ogwa, Okalo, Okhuesan, Oria, Onogholo, Opoji, Udo, Ugun, Urohi, Uromi, Ugbegun, Ugboha, Ujiogba, Ubiaja, Uzea, Uroh, and Ukhun* (*Esanland.org*, 2022). They collectively constitute one rural economy in the modern Nigerian economy. This economic unit is politically federated into Nigeria under five local governments, namely Esan North-East, Esan South-East, Esan Central, Esan West and Igueben (Okoduwa, 2018, p. 1); and one Senatorial district, Edo Central Senatorial district. The study area is one of Nigeria's rural economic development prospecion.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Nigeria's development planning was based on the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In September 2000, Nigeria and other 188 members of the United Nation met in New York to adopt the Millennium Declaration that birthed the MDGs. The MDGs were eight (8) sets of development goals that members of the United Nations resolved to achieve by 2015. They were eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; universal primary education; promotion of gender equality and women empowerment; reduction of child mortality; improved maternal health; containment of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; environmental sustainability and development of a global partnership for development (United Nations, 2000). The MDGs as a path to development expand economic development beyond GDP figures. It focused development more on the attainment of an improved standard of living, human happiness and safety. Retrospectively, attaining the

MDGs goals 1-7 in Esan and elsewhere in Nigeria were tied to oil and gas revenue.

This was especially so because of the new oil boom that was experienced during the period. The 2000s oil boom also known as the commodity super circle was triggered by rising demand for oil and gas in emerging markets. It caused a price increase that brought rich financial rewards to oil-producing countries. The Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) responded to the 2000s demand-push-induced oil boom by increasing the production quota of its members. This resulted in the increase in Nigeria's daily crude oil and gas production to 2.46 million barrels and 165 million cubic metres respectively as of 2004. Thus, from 2000 to 2004, Nigeria's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at an annual average rate of 4.8% (Romanova, 2021). This increase in national income placed Nigeria in good stead to pursue her Vision 2010 and 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Under these national economic development frameworks, Nigeria sought to be one of the best economies in the world and to completely eradicate poverty in the country. In real development terms, this implied the closure of the wide development gap between rural and urban areas with Nigeria's excess crude oil revenue. Furthermore, it implied that policy-directed investment of oil revenue in providing industries and social amenities was key to realising the MDGs in Esanland.

Thus, the increased National Income, GDP and foreign exchange earnings of Nigeria during the 2000s oil boom held out bright rural development prospects to the country. Furthermore, Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 accidentally provided the ideal political framework for her to attract Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and exploit the new oil boom for rural development. Democracy guaranteed the investment security of multinational companies and other foreign investors in Nigeria (Nwakonye, Osho & Anucha, 2006, p. 64). Therefore, between 2000 and 2011, Nigeria was able to maximise the global oil production boom that caused global oil and gas prices to triple and outpace the expected global growth rate. The boom increased the rate of oil and gas turnover and per capita incomes in Nigeria and other underdeveloped countries (Economist.com,

2021). For example, Nigeria's per capita GDP rose from 56,968.0 in 2000 to 170,122 in 2008 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010, p. xv). In underdeveloped oil-producing societies, leadership was expected to exploit the financial gains harvested from the 2000s oil boom to pilot the MDGs to fruition.

However, in 2015 when the MDGs planning period elapsed, the development goals were expanded and rolled over as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The United Nations SDGs were a set of seventeen (17) development targets the UN set for its members to achieve by 2030. The SDGs are to end poverty in all its forms everywhere; end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture; promote healthy lives and well-being for everyone; promote inclusive and equitable quality education; achieve gender quality and empower all women and girls; ensure the availability and sustainability of water for all; ensure access to energy (electricity) for all; promote sustainable economic growth and productive employment for all; build resilient infrastructure and promote inclusive sustainable industrialisation; reduce inequality within and among countries; make human settlement (rural or urban) safe and sustainable; ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns; combat climate change and its impact; ensure sustainable use of marine resources for development; promote sustainable use of the terrestrial ecosystem; provide access to justice (social and economic) for all; and improve global partnership for development (United Nations, 2021, pp. 26-60). Without a doubt, the SDGs under this planning period embodied Nigeria's Vision 20:2020 and rural development agenda. Having failed to reach her goal of being one of the world's top 20 economies at the end of 2020 because of resource curse, the imperative of attaining the SDGs in Esanland and elsewhere in Nigeria is still tied to oil and gas revenue.

Development planning, whether a short fixed-term, prospective or rolling, is anchored on national resources and national revenue. Common sense in this regard demands that a man who wants to build a house first of all counts the cost to see if he has the resources to complete the project. Therefore, it is safe to contend that when Nigeria keyed into the SDGs

like the MDGs before it, oil revenue was the major consideration that fired the hope of successfully driving them to fruition. Hence, with eight (8) years remaining to reach the 2030 SDGs deadline, it is instructive to note that the SDGs are not idealistic and overambitious global development targets. Nigeria is naturally endowed with the means of realising them. Consequently, the Natural Resource Charter states:

Countries with non-renewable resource wealth face both an opportunity and a challenge. When used well, resources can create greater prosperity for current and future generations; used poorly or squandered, they can cause economic instability, social conflict and lasting environmental damage (NRGI, 2014, p. 4).

But the resource curse phenomenon has so far been undermining the realisation of the SDGs in Esan and other rural areas in Nigeria. Resource diffusionism (Dibua, 2000, p. 216) has also ensured that the prospect of rural development grows slimmer by the day in both oil-producing and non-oil producing communities. Therefore, seven years after the take-off of the SDGs (2015-2022), oil revenue has continued to be a misused rural development opportunity because of corruption. Nigeria's excess crude oil account has almost been depleted by the Federal government to bail out state governments which are unable to pay salaries and fight insecurity, instead of developing rural economies. The governors of Nigeria's 36 states have also been parties to it. For instance, on December 14, 2017, they approved the withdrawal of \$1 billion out of the \$2.317 billion balance as of December 13, 2017 to fight Boko Haram alone (Tukur, 2017).

Understandably, in his "*Oil, Gas and Life in Nigeria*," Steve Azaiki (2007) argued that *despite Nigeria's rich natural resources, poverty is widespread...The wealth from oil has not fed through to the wider population but has often been squandered or lost through corruption* (Azaiki, 2007, pp. 163-164). This paper leverages on this assertion to interrogate the burden of Nigeria's resource curse on Esan agriculture, industrial and infrastructural development. Resource curse, for now, best explains the dashed prospect of economic development the SDGs offer the people of Esanland. The failure to prioritise rural development in Ni-

geria is a costly economic mistake that is hampering the overall economic growth and development of the country. Oil and Gas are mostly responsible for the neglect of the non-oil economic potentials of Esanland, which when fully harnessed can be critical for driving Esan's modern economy to maturity by expanding its production and national income base.

Resource Curse: Economic and Social Infrastructure Underdevelopment

The failure of the Federal government, Edo State government and Local governments in Esan to prioritise rural development is evidence of the resource curse. This is because their heavy reliance on oil wealth that is shared every month has prevented governments at all levels from being entrepreneurial. State and Local government do not focus on developing rural productive capacities through the construction of critical economic and social infrastructures. In Esan, instead of promoting grassroots development, the five local governments have been reduced to political civil service. The Chairmen operate as civil servants who patiently wait for the monthly allocation from the federal government instead of being wealth creators. The federal allocation to Esan local governments in the year 2020 is shown in the table below.

Table 1: Federal Allocation to Esan Local Governments, January-June 2020

LGA	January ₦	February ₦	March ₦	April ₦	May ₦	June ₦
Esan West	143,922,153.79	132,968,150.17	119,754,379.93	135,615,777.61	125,193,273.70	113,880,087.44
Esan North East	141,515,628.49	130,739,935.90	117,761,645.72	133,353,506.70	123,087,068.35	111,985,156.56
Esan South East	166,420,582.38	153,825,620.42	138,309,202.01	156,558,650.81	144,984,612.02	131,369,753.24
Igueben	131,820,758.31	121,795,625.54	109,639,715.64	123,981,101.25	114,727,337.08	104,068,972.77
Esan Central	137,334,343.70	126,872,667.42	114,288,716.17	129,393,077.67	119,442,638.44	108,660,138.19

Source: Esanland.org, Federal Allocation to Esan Local Government, January-December 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.esanland.org/2020/10/federal-allocation-to-esan-local-government-january-december-2020> Accessed February 17, 2022

Table 2: Federal Allocation to Esan Local Governments, July-December 2020

LGA	July ₦	August ₦	September ₦	October ₦	November ₦	December ₦
Esan West	138,401,221.90	142,824,233.96	139,499,268.51	131,333,239.58	117,307,354.81	119,030,073.72
Esan NorthEast	136,095,952.57	140,456,490.18	137,070,728.88	129,053,557.73	115,252,217.65	116,975,684.19
Esan SouthEast	159,636,912.53	164,630,361.36	161,626,944.82	152,090,555.87	136,043,978.73	137,250,302.76
Igubeben	126,414,016.73	130,505,842.42	126,566,985.62	119,176,114.34	106,377,483.39	107,467,964.14
Esan Central	132,044,893.99	136,294,905.91	132,767,511.22	125,012,058.13	111,612,280.97	113,262,722.41

Source: Esanland.org, Federal Allocation to Esan Local Government, January-December 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.esanland.org/2020/10/federal-allocation-to-esan-local-government-january-december-2020> Accessed February 17, 2022.

From tables 1 and 2 above, it is seen that Esan local governments basically survive on federal allocation derived from oil wealth. The steady flow of monthly oil revenue from the top to the bottom has rendered Esan local governments parasitic. This “feeding bottle federal system” engendered by Nigeria’s overdependence on oil revenue has undermined the local government’s ability to function independently. Dependence on federal allocation to pay salaries and run local governments has made money scarcely available for infrastructural development in Esan. Furthermore, Amedu (2019) explained that the scarcity of the Federal government’s direct investment in Esan infrastructural development was partly because Esan is not an oil-producing area. He also opined that the cardinal focus of the federal government was mainly on satisfying and pacifying the core oil-rich Niger Delta people (E. Amedu, personal interview, August 23, 2019). Onolemen (2019) and Esekhaigbe (2019) contended that, as far as the construction of roads was concerned, Esanland has under-benefited from Nigeria’s oil wealth. Instead, the existing roads experienced wear and tear. This was also partly responsible for some of the incidents of road accidents experienced in Esan despite its low vehicular movements. The negative effect of Esan dilapidated road on-road transportation as of 2011 is shown in the table below.

Table 3: Road Accidents in Esanland as at 2011

LGA	Saloon/Wagon	Mini Buses	Trailer	Pick up Van	Lorry/Tanker
Esan Central	8	7	2	-	-
Esan North East	-	-	-	-	-
Esan South East	22	30	3	3	4
Esan West	-	-	-	-	-
Igubeben	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Adapted from Federal Road Safety Corps cited in Edo State Government, *Edo Statistical Year Book (4th ed.)*, Benin City: State Central Office of Research and Statistics, 2013, p. 39.

Table 3 below shows that despite the low traffic situation in Esan, as car ownership in the region is not widespread, the weak road infrastructure of Esan partly endangered the commercial vehicles plying on Esan roads. The table shows that saloon cars and mini-buses in Esan were involved in more accidents than any other vehicle. This demonstrates that these vehicles were commonly used by Esan people engaged in the road transport business. Therefore, the weak state of Esan road infrastructure is a threat to sustainable livelihood and the lives of motorists and commuters. Onolemen (2019) decrying the missed development opportunity the twenty-first-century boom offered Nigeria averred that: “There are bad roads, no water, and poor electricity supply in Esanland” (O. Onoleme, personal interview, June 25, 2019). While this did not translate into a total absence of infrastructure in Esan, Ojie (2019) explained that the paucity of basic social amenities in the region was symptomatic of the government’s negative attitude towards rural development (E. Ojie, personal interview, June 26, 2019).

In fact, from 2010 to 2015, within Nigeria's Vision 2010 and MDG national development planning period, Esanland experienced stagnated development of infrastructure and social amenities. The Vision 2010 sought to make Nigeria economically prosperous, politically and socially harmonious. It was developed as an instrument of development and means of improving the quality of life of Nigerians (Okojie, 2003, p. 367). While the MDGs were targeted at eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, reduction of infant mortality by two-thirds (T!) and reduction of maternal mortality rate by three quarters (3/4) by 2015 (United Nations, 2000, p. 1). Despite the heavy financial commitment of the Nigerian government towards their realisation, these policies were massively derailed in terms of implementation. Consequently, in Esan electricity, hospitals, schools and pipe-borne water and other social amenities needed to guarantee the social security of the people were grossly underprovided. Health care development in the period of study in Esan was one of the misused opportunities of the new oil boom. This was evident in the low establishment of general hospitals and poor staffing of the existing ones as demonstrated in the table below.

Table 4: Provision of Health and Medical Infrastructure in Esanland, 2006

LGA	Fed. Govt.	State Govt.	LGA	Mission	Private
Esan Central	2	2	10	-	13
Esan North East	1	1	10	1	16
Esan South East	-	2	10	-	12
Esan West	-	2	13	-	22
Igueben	-	1	8	-	5

Source: Federal Ministry of Health cited in Edo State Government, *Edo Statistical Year Book (4th ed.)*, Benin City: State Central Office of Research and Statistics, 2013, pp. 30-31.

Table 5: Categorised Health Infrastructure in Esanland as of 2009-2010

LGA	2009				2010			
	Fed.	State	LGA	Private	Fed.	State	LGA	Private
Esan Central	1	2	14	3	1	2	14	3
Esan North East	-	1	27	15	-	1	27	15
Esan South East	-	3	23	4	-	3	23	4
Esan West	-	2	24	18	-	2	24	18
Igubeben	-	1	15	1	-	1	15	1

Source: Federal Ministry of Health, cited in Edo State Government, *Edo Statistical Year Book (4th ed.)*, Benin City: State Central Office of Research and Statistics, 2013, pp. 30-31.

Table 6: Distribution of Doctors in Esan General Hospitals, 2003-2012

LGA	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Esan Central	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	-	2
Esan North East	2	2	2	2	2	5	5	8	8	8
Esan South East	2	1	1	1	1	6	4	5	1	5
Esan West	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	2
Igubeben	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2

Source: Federal Ministry of Health cited in Edo State Government, *Edo Statistical Year Book (4th ed.)*, Benin City: State Central Office of Research and Statistics, 2013, p. 33.

From tables 4 and 5 below, it can be seen that the Federal and Edo State governments made little effort to improve the number of health care facilities in Esan. Their poor investment in public health now places the burden of health care delivery on Local Government Authorities and private individuals in the region. More so, federal and state governments' underinvestment in the Esan health care sector was evident in the acute shortage of medical personnel in government general hospitals, as seen in table 6 below. This was, especially, alarming because the 2006 national population census placed the population of Esanland at 591, 534. Therefore, it is safe to assert that the health care system like other social amenities was not adequately expanded to meet Esan's demographic change. Under these circumstances, the attainment of the MDGs reduced infant mortality and the maternal death rate remains a teething problem in Esanland. This problem was compounded by the dearth of pipe-borne water. The lack of portable drinking water was felt more in Esan communities, such as Uromi, Ubiaja, Irrua, Ugboha, and Uzea located high up the hill, which made it extremely hard for the people to gain access to underground water. Understandably, Onoleme maintains that lack of social amenities in these areas has strongly destabilized their economies (O. Onoleme, personal interview, June 6, 2019). Commenting further on the negative social impact of water scarcity in Uromi, Amedu (2019) asserts that "it is easier for an Uromi man to give his daughter to a stranger to marry than for him to give him water to drink" (E. Amedu, personal interview, August 23, 2019).

In Esan communities, some people still depend heavily on rainfall as their primary source of water for drinking, cooking, washing clothes and plates and for carrying out other domestic activities. They usually dig a deep well at the corner of their house to collect and hold rainwater. Through a funnel system at one of the corners of the roof that is linked to the well rain, water is successfully harvested for immediate and future use. The effective maximisation of rainwater in Esan helped to keep many households afloat during the dry season. This is due to the fact that households that do not have a well usually buy water from those that have stored rainwater in their well. They sell in gallons (bits) to the final consumers at monopolistic prices. In Ekpoma, for instance, water is sold for a minimum of 50 per

20-litre gallon during the rainy season and higher during the dry season. Those who have the means drill boreholes and establish a sachet water business. These pure water entrepreneurs sell both sachet and bottled water and use water tankers to supply water directly to households and construction sites. However, the weak infrastructural development and general shortage of social amenities that plagued the rural economy of Esanland during the period of study was a misnomer. This is because domestic and international policies such as the Vision 2010 and the MDGs then favoured rural development, and oil and gas wealth provided the wherewithal to actualise them.

Resource Curse: Industrial Underdevelopment

Resource curse has significantly hindered industrial development in Esanland and elsewhere in Edo state. Despite the clear industrial potentials of Esanland to host modern textile, palm oil, weaving, and herbal pharmaceutical industries, among others, there has been little or no direct Federal and State governments' investment to exploit them. Hence, like in the 1970s, Nigeria's excess oil wealth made in the oil boom of the 2000s was arguably a missed rural development opportunity in Esan. Onolemen (2019) succinctly explained this as the consequence of the overprioritisation of oil and gas industrial production over non-oil and gas-based industrial production. Therefore, instead of deploying oil revenue towards promoting rural industrial and solid minerals development areas across Nigeria, the Nigerian federal government has deployed oil revenue more in the search of more crude oil in the north. Jeremiah (2019) reported that the Kolmani River II Well on the Upper Benue Trough, Gongola Basin, was one of such places where oil revenue has been spent on the search and discovery of more crude oil by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

In a time, when the world's biggest buyers of oil and gas are going "Green" to protect the climate and investing in electric vehicles, Nigeria's huge investment in search for more crude oil that would soon be out of global demand, in the long run, is a waste of time and revenue. This is the oil curse at its peak. Edo state, for example, is endowed with solid minerals, such as limestone, talc, dolomite, gypsum, feldspar, quartz, gold, gem-

stone, bentonite, bitumen, and kaolin, among others, in commercial quantities, but they have been untapped for development because of over-dependence on oil and gas. Uchechukwu Ogah, Nigeria's Minister of State, Mines and Steel Development, observed that,

Edo state's minerals can transform Nigeria's economy, develop its infrastructure and grow its Gross Domestic Product... If the minerals were properly harnessed, Edo state would achieve its "30-year Development Roadmap" in the area of human capital development, educational transformation, improved health services, economic transformation through modern agriculture and industrialisation (News Agency of Nigeria, 2022).

But this solid minerals industrial potential in Edo has been left to waste. In Esanland, rice production is another industrial potential of Edo state that is being left to waste. The region produces the Ekpoma rice and *Ozigono* (Ilushi) rice. These could be upgraded and standardised to meet the international standard for export. Yet, this potential has been eclipsed and undermined by increased importation of foreign rice. The import-dependent orientation of the Nigerian economy has killed more than the rice industrial prospect of Esan; it has also killed its textile and palm oil industrial prospects. Therefore, cheap second-hand foreign clothes (*okirika*) have displaced Esan clothes (*Ukpon Esan*) in Esan markets. For instance, within the period of the MDGs, Nigeria's importation of foreign rice grew phenomenally. This also partly hinders the attainment of its rural development and extreme poverty eradication objectives in Esan. The preference for foreign rice over local rice meant that at even expensive prices; the people still prefer to buy foreign rice rather than local rice.

Table 7: Rice Imports in Nigeria, 2000-2015

Market Year(s)	Imports (Thousand Tons)	Units of Measure	Growth Rate (Percentage)
2000	1,250	(1000 MT)	31.58%
2001	1,906	(1000 MT)	52.48%
2002	1,897	(1000 MT)	-0.47%
2003	1,448	(1000 MT)	-23.67%
2004	1,369	(1000 MT)	-5.46%
2005	1,650	(1000 MT)	20.53%
2006	1,500	(1000 MT)	-9.09%
2007	1,800	(1000 MT)	20.00%
2008	1,750	(1000 MT)	-2.78%
2009	1,750	(1000 MT)	0.00%
2010	2,400	(1000 MT)	37.14%
2011	3,200	(1000 MT)	33.33%
2012	2,800	(1000 MT)	-12.50%
2013	2,800	(1000 MT)	0.00%
2014	2,600	(1000 MT)	-7.14%
2015	2,100	(1000 MT)	-19.23%

Source: Index Mundi, "Nigeria Milled Rice Imports by Year", <https://www.indexmundi.com/agriculture/?country=ng&commodity=milled-rice&graph=imports> Accessed June 27, 2021.

From table 7 below, it could be seen that although rice importation in Nigeria fluctuated between 2000 and 2015, in terms of percentage change, the quantity of rice imported leapt significantly from the 1,250 (thousand tons) imported in 2000 and never returned nor fell below it. This shows that as the taste for foreign rice increased in Esanland and elsewhere in Nigeria, its demand gained momentum. This dealt the Esan rice production industry a devastating economic blow. Consequently, Esekhaigbe (2019) observed that globalisation slowly grounded the wheels of indigenous industrialisation in Esanland in the twenty-first century to a halt. Therefore, rather than aid the upgrading and modernisation of indigenous traditional industries in Esan, oil and gas in Nigeria became the bane of their development (M. Esekhaigbe, personal interview, June 24, 2019). This was more so as Nigeria's excess crude oil revenue was misappropriated and banked instead of being funnelled into rural industrial development.

Hence, the misplaced investment priorities of the government are partly responsible for the wastage and underemployment of rural resources in Esan and elsewhere in the country. Thus, in Esanland, the de-industrialization of the region is a major contributory factor to the rising poverty among the people and economic underdevelopment of the rural area. Furthermore, the neglect of indigenous industries has made craftsmanship unrewarding in Esan and has forced many artisans into the already overcrowded labour market. The attendant effect of the loss of craftsmen in Esan is the loss of creativity, innovation and productivity in the region. The loss of industrial production has increased the cost of living in Esanland by making the people bear the burden of foreign exchange differentials. Therefore, in the post-oil boom Nigeria, the foreign exchange differences between the Naira and American Dollar have continued to ensure that the people of Esan pay more for the foreign goods they consume. The growing suffering of the Esan people is fuelling a crisis of confidence in the Nigerian state. Understandably, Gideon Sjoberg argues that the effective performance and development of any economic system determines the social stability of the country (Sjoberg, 1960, p. 31). This demonstrates the centrality of Nigeria's comprehensive rural development to the preservation of the unity and sovereignty of the nation.

Conclusion

The transition of the Nigerian economy to oil and gas presented new economic development opportunities to the country. But Nigeria paradoxically misused this opportunity by ignoring her agricultural potential and solid minerals. Over time, scholars have propounded the resource curse hypothesis to explain Nigeria's underdevelopment in the midst of plenty. Despite Nigeria being the sixth largest oil-producing and exporting nation in the globe, she sits poorly as the most underdeveloped and poverty capital of the world. Consequently, this paper argued that the problem of Nigeria's economic backwardness is not unconnected with the mismanagement of her oil wealth. It identified the failure of political leadership to deploy oil wealth into rural development as a national economic development crisis. Therefore, using Esanland as an example, this paper argued that the wastage of the rural development opportunities the oil boom of the 2000s offered derailed the realisation of the MDGs and SDGs. It found that Esan industrial and infrastructural developments are critical to attaining the SDGs in the region before 2030. Therefore, the paper concluded that rural economic development is the key to reversing Nigeria's economic downturn. It recommended purposeful investment in developing and harnessing rural economic potentials as a viable strategy for salvaging Nigeria's resource curse.

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