Analysis of Development Models in the Niger Delta

CASE STUDY TWO: THE RIVERS SONGHAI INITIATIVE
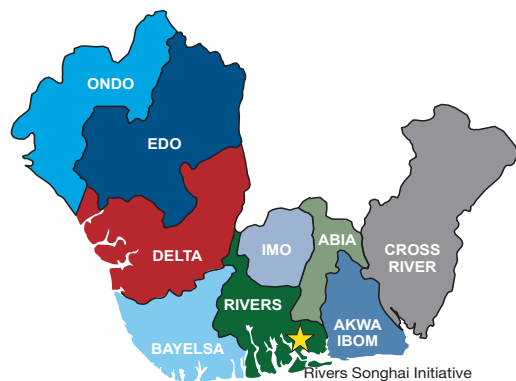
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Introduction

Rivers state in the Niger Delta region is one of the largest state economies in Nigeria. However, the state's economic growth has not translated into commensurate local employment opportunities. The 2011 unemployment rate for Rivers state was about 26 percent, compared with a national unemployment rate of around 24 percent. Youth and female unemployment in Nigeria are especially high, and the Niger Delta is no exception. In addition, poverty is a problem in Rivers state: In 2008, 56 percent of households fell in the lowest reported income bracket, making between ₦1,000 and ₦20,000 per month, equivalent to between just $.20 and $4 per day.

NIGER DELTA STATES

Rivers Songhai Initiative

The state produces 50 percent of Nigeria's crude oil exports and 95 percent of the country's natural gas exports. It also has large potential for agricultural production, with 39 percent of land suitable for cultivation. However, agricultural productivity is low due to multiple factors, including low soil quality from oil spillage and leakage; a high emphasis by federal and state governments on the oil sector; and a perception among youth that agriculture is an unattractive means of employment. In order to create an economic shift towards agriculture, in 2008 the governor of Rivers state implemented a replica of the Songhai International agricultural training center model fi st pioneered in Porto Novo, Benin.

What is the Songhai International Model?

The Rivers Songhai Initiative (RSI) is based on the Songhai International model. The model consists of a centrally located agricultural training center with a working farm that provides opportunities for practical learning and agricultural tourism. Similar initiatives have been set up in Liberia, the Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone and elsewhere in Nigeria. The Songhai International model incorporates three main components to train farmers. First, it provides instruction on the concept of zero waste, whereby farming by-products are used in other activities (e.g., manure is used to fertilize crops). Second, the model teaches farmers entrepreneurial skills and how to get more value from their primary products. Thi d, it provides participants with access to a network of satellite farms started by graduates of the program.

The RSI's specific goals are to diversify production in Rivers state beyond the oil industry, improve agriculture productivity, and reduce youth unrest by giving them better access to employment and entrepreneurship

opportunities. The project promotes inclusiveness by encouraging the community to select trainees for the initiative. The Songhai International staff currently oversees the RSI, and the Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency plans to take over administration of the project in 2015. However, the implementation of the full model is not yet complete: The RSI has not established the network of satellite farms proposed in the original model.

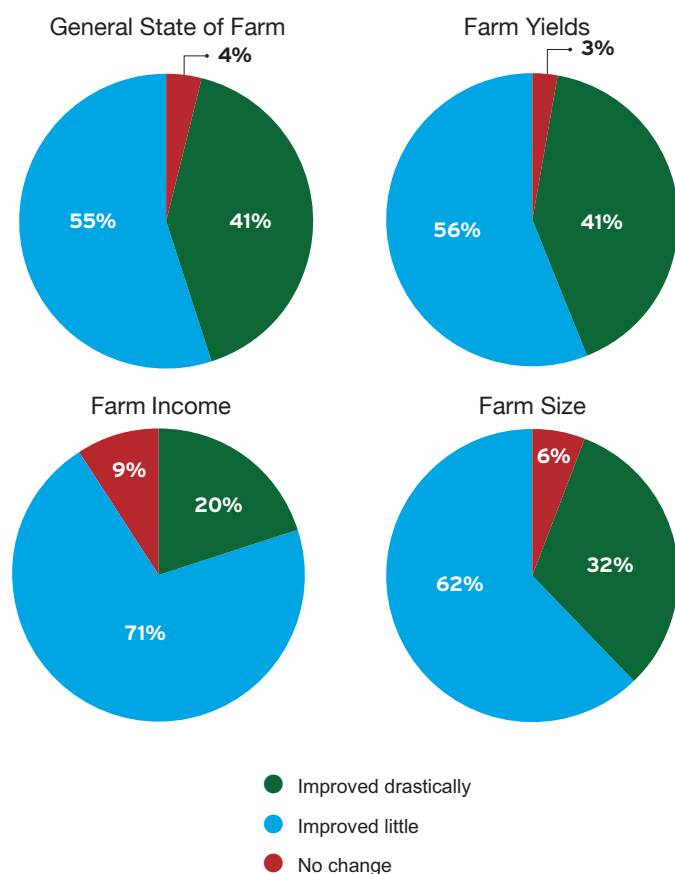## About the Models of Development and Experiential Learning (MODEL) Study:

The Models of Development and Experiential Learning study is a collaborative effort between the Brookings Africa Growth Initiative (AGI), Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND) and Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER). The goal of MODEL is to identify, understand, document and share development models that address a broad range of constraints to economic growth and community well-being in the Niger Delta. As a part of the MODEL study, AGI, PIND and NISER researchers surveyed staff and trainees of the Rivers Songhai Initiative in the Niger Delta. The data for this study were obtained from a survey conducted in August and September of 2013. The survey targeted a representative, random sample of 10 percent of the total population of RSI trainees from five communities (1,000 individuals). The qualitative data were obtained from nine in-depth interviews with individuals in various paid positions within the RSI and from focus groups of men, women and youth in some of the communities.

Important Trends in Beneficiary Demographics, Reported Outcomes and Satisfaction

The majority of RSI trainees reported that participation in RSI training has generally improved the performance of their farms: Most trainees reported improvements in the general state of their farms as well as increases in farm yields, income and size. These results show the potential for the RSI to achieve positive outcomes for agricultural productivity and economic development.

The selection process appears consultative and fair: Nearly 63 percent of the trainees were selected by their communities to participate in the RSI training, suggesting that the selection process is consultative. Trainee satisfaction with the selection method was not signifi antly related to the trainees' demographic characteristics, e.g., the trainees' age, gender, household size and income. These results provide some preliminary evidence that the selection process is indeed fair.

Reported Outcomes for Respondents Since Participation in the Rivers Songhai Training

General State of Farm: 4%, 55%, 41%

Farm Yields: 3%, 56%, 41%

Farm Income: 9%, 20%, 71%

Farm Size: 6%, 62%, 32%

● Improved drastically
● Improved little
● No change

Women are well represented among trainees: More than half (56 percent) of program beneficiaries are female, indicating that this program encourages female members of the community to be entrepreneurs in agriculture—despite the fact that training opportunities for women in most rural African communities are typically very low. In addition, women were more likely than men on average to report a *drastic change* in farm size due to the RSI training. In the survey sample, men typically reported higher incomes than women, but interestingly did not report higher farm incomes than women on average as a result of the training.

Youth participation in the program is low and led to fewer reported improvements: Only 25 percent of the trainees surveyed are between the ages of 23 and 35 years old. In addition, older beneficiaries reported more improvements in the general state of their farm, farm yields and farm size. In fact, the respondents who reported *no change* in the general state of their farm or in farm yields after the RSI training were below age 35. For farm size, the respondents to report *no change* were below age 45.

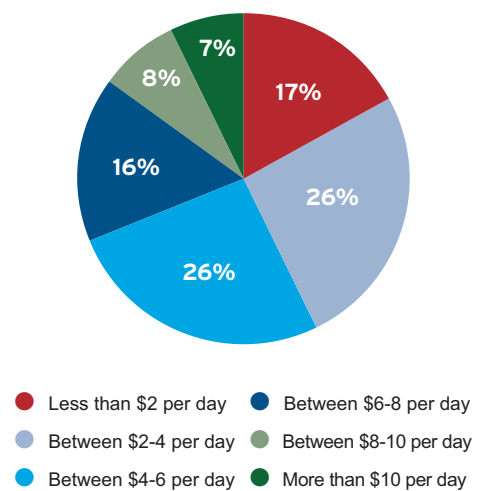| What has been the state of your farm since your participation in the Rivers Songhai training?				
Age Group	Improved Drastically	Improved Little	No Change	Total
23-35	5	7	4	16
36-45	11	16	0	27
46-55	2	11	0	13
56-65	5	3	0	8
Total	**23**	**37**	**4**	**64**

The less educated and poor are not major beneficiaries: About 69 percent of the trainees surveyed have completed primary school, and only 43 percent earn below $4 per day. This means that the trainee sample is not representative of the Rivers state population: RSI participants are relatively better educated and wealthier than the average citizen in Rivers state. This finding raises questions about the ability of the program to target the poor. In addition, less educated beneficiaries were more likely to report *no change* in farm income from the RSI training.

Reported Benefits and Challenges of the Rivers Songhai Initiative

Job creation in the overall community was the most frequently mentioned **benefit** of the RSI in interviews with individuals in various RSI paid positions. Respondents also cited skills and capacity building as important components of the RSI program. They specifically noted that

Respondents by Income Bracket (Current U.S. Dollars)*

- ● Less than $2 per day — 17%
- ● Between $2-4 per day — 26%
- ● Between $4-6 per day — 26%
- ● Between $6-8 per day — 16%
- ● Between $8-10 per day — 8%
- ● More than $10 per day — 7%

*₦1= $0.0060

the initiative promotes entrepreneurship, creates a disciplined work culture and improves the perception of agriculture as a viable occupation. Spillover effects to the local community were also noted as benefits by interviewees. For example, some members of the local community have become landlords to the trainees, and others have purchased RSI agricultural products from the farm to sell at markets.

Th **main challenges** reported during the in-depth interviews include issues with farming methods, as well as general concerns with the Songhai International management (staff from the original Songhai model in Benin). In particular, interviewees mentioned that the Songhai International staff does not take the Nigerian staff's suggestions into consideration. Several interviewees also expressed worries about long-term funding and management once Songhai International completely hands over the RSI to the local community.

Recommendations

The following policy options are suggested to help meet the multiple objectives of the RSI and sustain this encouraging development intervention that has the potential to improve agricultural productivity and economic opportunities in Rivers state:

A review of policies for target groups: The Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency specifi ally lists "a reduction in youth restiveness" as a goal for the RSI program. The board of the RSI should consider policy designs that encourage and integrate youth into the agriculture sector. In addition, if the RSI training program were to implement policies that target and integrate the poor, then the RSI program could complement Nigeria's current poverty reduction strategy. In a case study of a Liberian replication of Songhai, the program was found to be successful at reaching its target groups—women and children—and this success was attributed to a high level of government involvement, the creation of a steering committee that brought together government and external partners, and follow-up monitoring with trainee farmers from the establishment of their own farms and beyond. The RSI may want to review some of these techniques and consider if these are appropriate ways for the initiative to better support the poorer, younger and less educated trainees.

Consider local conditions in project design: Before scaling up or further replication of the Songhai model, it is advisable to adjust to local conditions rather than utilizing the exact design with no modifi ations, even if the program is of African origin. If the RSI is able to fi d farming methods and crop selections that are better suited to the local environment and demand, it might have the potential to further impact trainee incomes and yields. Additionally, interview respondents reported cultural differences with the Songhai International management that could potentially be resolved by adjustment to, or increased awareness of, the local work culture and labor practices.

Consider a clearer, more inclusive administrative strategy: Before Songhai International hands over the RSI to Nigerian staff it may benefit from addressing some of its reported management issues. A clearer administrative process that includes suggestions from the Nigerian staff and a strategic plan for consistent funding will help the RSI make improvements to agricultural production long after the exit of the Songhai International staff.