

The Interface between Guinea-Worm Disease Eradication Intervention and Farming Challenges among the Ibarapa People of Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This Study investigated the interface between the poverty condition of the farmers of Ibarapa and the acclaimed success of external intervention for the eradication of guinea-worm disease to improve the welfare of the local people and to promote economic development. The general objective of the study is to determine the lacuna between the activities of the external agents, the local operators of the programme and the welfare of the recipients. To execute the study a qualitative research approach was adopted with Focus group discussions administered on a total of 6 groups of palace chiefs and hamlet farmers, with an average of 5 of the participants purposively selected to represent both the Chiefs and Farmers categories respectively from the three local government areas that make up the Ibarapa. The findings reveal a massive intervention in the provision of potable water that is not culturally situated and hence a potential lag for guinea-worm disease. It also reveals that the seeming elimination of the disease is related to the absence of full farming activities.

Keywords: Guinea worm eradication, Farm desertion, Non-culture specific intervention, Compradors

Introduction

Most countries and societies in sub-Saharan Africa have had the unfortunate experience of the area wide intervention that is not community based, and apart from concerns over environmental and natural resources conservation, an economic crisis has affected most of the people. An example of this scenario is that of the Ibarapa people of Oyo state. Ibarapa land is made up of seven relatively small towns known as Ibarapa meje. These towns include Igangan, Tapa, Aiyete, Idere, Igboora, Eruwa and Lanlate. Igangan, Tapa and Aiyete are in Ibarapa North Local Government Area with Aiyete as the headquarter; Idere and Igboora are under Ibarapa Central Local Government Area with Igboora as the headquarter, while Eruwa and Lanlate are located in Ibarapa East Local Government Area with Eruwa as the headquarter [Ogunlesi, Oyediran and Briegar, 1989].

The three Local Government Areas were created by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1996. The population size is estimated to be about 322,295 [National Population Census, 2006]. The land mass of the area is approximately 1,600 square kilometers, and the district borders with the rain forest belt to the South but consists of rolling savannah with residual patches of forest growing near water courses. Most of the land lies between 400 to 600 feet above sea level, but rocky outcrops rising to 1,000 feet occur here and there adding to the natural beauty of the landscape [Ogunlesi, Oyediran and Briegar, 1989]. The area is located approximately 100 kilometers north of the coast of Lagos, and about 95 kilometers west of the Oyo state capital and neighboring city, Ibadan [Duze, 1984]. However, the seven towns in the district have thirty [30] communities all together, viz a viz; Igangan [Asuranran, Akoya, Idiyan and Omidigbo]; Tapa [Tapa, Iki, Ago, and Kogba]; Aiyete [Imofin, Iwafin, Igbodoko, Orile-Odode and Oba]; Idere [koso, Onigbio, Oke-Oba and Apa]; Igboora [Igboile, Pako, Saganun, Idofin, Iberekodo and Igboora]; Eruwa [Olaribikusi and Akalako]; Lanlate [Adeta, Allala, Ikana, Iwena and Agasa]. The people who form these communities that make up the Ibarapa migrated to the Ibarapa area either having been dissidents of the Oyo empire where they have been affected by either the kiriji Yoruba communal war or the trans-atlantic and trans Saharan slave trade [Ogunlesi, Oyediran and Briegar, 1989]. However, in the case of Tapa they were refugees from the jihad ridden Nupe of Northern Nigeria. The name of the community at large 'Ibarapa' was derived from a common plant known as 'Ibara,' otherwise known as melon.

The Ibarapa people are of the Yoruba ethnic stock, and are originally involved in subsistence farming. The farmers usually travel to their farmlands or hamlets for five days where they maintain a second home, only to come back to their township home on weekends.

Review of literature

The farming practice is that of shifting cultivation that involves the farmers moving occasionally from one farm area to another in order to optimize cultivation (Briegar and Kendall, 1992). However, the locality is beset with scarcity of potable water which results in people using water from sources infested with guinea worm causing agents (Edungbola and Watts, 1985). The Ibarapa landscape was acknowledged by elite cities like Ibadan, Abeokuta and Lagos for immense production of melon known as 'egusi' and 'Gbaguda' or 'Ege' otherwise known as cassava, and thus attracted lots of patronage (Ogunlesi, Oyediran and Briegar 1989). Expectedly, the subsistence measure of farm production became overstretched as there was growing pressure to increase production. However, growth in the occupation carried with it several limitations including uninformed exchange system or market failure and diseases like dracunculiasis (guinea- worm disease). Thus, the socio economic status of the area is that of poverty. Briegar and Kendall (1992) noted that further interventions were initiated from both local and foreign donor agencies especially in the area of public health and eradication of guinea worm disease in the bid to encourage these traditional farmers to achieve optimum production. However, in spite of the health development campaign, production has remained low and the welfare of the people is on the decline (Guyer, 1997).

Statement of the problem

The rural landscape of the Ibarapa has witnessed intervention in the form of commercial activities from neighboring towns on the one hand, and health programmes from international donors on the other hand. For instance, Brieger and Kendall (1992) observe that it is with lorries that Ibarapa's bulk produce is being carried to neighboring towns such as Ibadan, Abeokuta and Lagos. Again, Guyer (1997) observe that Idere which is also an Ibarapa community actually became an African niche economy of farms that feed Ibadan hinterland. Also along this line, Alawode (2011) observed that there had been farmers' outcry of foul against middlemen who are mainly from the cities that cart away the benefit in farm business. Thus, it is a source of concern to note that this farming occupation of the Ibarapa is being incessantly plagued with the dreaded guinea worm disease (dracunculiasis). On the other hand, it is even more of concern to note that an Atlanta based organization celebrated the eradication of guinea-worm disease in Nigeria because reports of insignificant number of incidence were being recorded (Isapka, 2011). This concern comes to the fore when the reduction in the incidence of the disease is considered in the light of the view of Awosiyan (1990) who observe that the youths have left the farm. In other words, the bulk of the farming populations who are the youths and able bodied men (Barbers, 1966) have deserted the farmlands and hamlets, hence there remain only the middle aged and elderly in the occupation who farm around town areas. It follows that there is a contestation in the cause of the eradication of the guinea worm disease which is between the event of the mass withdrawal from the farming occupation and by extension from the farmland area, and the claim of intervention through donor provision of potable water which is mainly around town areas. Thus, the following constitute the research questions for this paper;

1. How have intervention attempts by external agents impacted on the farming occupation of the people of the Ibarapa?
2. What relationship exists between the mass exit from farmland and eradication of guinea- worm disease?

Objectives of this paper

Generally, this paper aims to uncover the cause of under- development among the communities in Ibarapa, and the specific objectives include;

1. To determine the challenges facing the farming occupation in Ibarapa.
2. To investigate the cause of mass withdrawal from the farming occupation

Research Method

The method employed for the study was the qualitative method. This qualitative method included focus group discussions (FGDs).

Focus group discussions were administered on a total of 6 groups of palace chiefs and hamlet farmers, with an average of 5 of the respondents purposively selected to represent both the Chiefs and Farmers categories respectively from the three local government areas. The focus group discussion was conducted with the aid of audio recorder which enabled the capturing of the open-ended discussions.

Research Analysis: This is done with the content analysis technique where the recorded texts were first transcribed and read. Later, the texts were organized into categories against the themes that were identified. Then the themes were coded along the line of similarities and differences in the texts. This enables us to conclude on the frequency of reference on all the themes. Moreover, the outcome of the frequency of reference is also juxtaposed with the visual clips of site observation on the field.

Findings

Some of the worldviews generated from farmers' group responses and interview reveal two major themes which include, 1) the unprofitability of farm occupation in the area, 2) the mass withdrawal from farm occupation in the area.

Unprofitability of farm occupation

The unprofitability of farm occupation is identified to be connected with 3 sub-themes which includes,

- 1) Declining fertility of the land. This is noted in the consensus words of the participants 'eso o gbo o ro mo', meaning that the yields are no more bountiful.
- 2) Lack of sufficient bargaining power and inferiority complex. Here the market is regulated by balanced reciprocity among the 'omo Ibarapa' or 'omo ile yi' meaning local people, and between 'omo Ibarapa' and 'ara ilu oke'. However, this reciprocity turns negative when it comes between the 'omo Ibarapa' and 'ara idale' the elite or urban stranger. This is because the 'ara idale' refers to a people with urban influence such that is domineering over the 'omo ile yi' and 'Omo Ibarapa'. The 'ara idale' also connote a people of respectable social group who should be attended to with good sense of hospitality. Thus, this culture of hospitality does dispose the Ibarapa as subservient in the arena of political economy with the elite 'ara idale'. Moreover, the superiority posture accorded the 'ara idale' was expected to allow for a balanced reciprocity or circular development as conceived in the idea of aids and protection for all.
- 3) The problem of storage or alternative application reveal a difficulty in the market situation whereby most of the farm produce including cassava, melon and yam are noted as 'ti ta danu' or sold at give away price for lack of storage facilities which put them at the mercy of the elite 'ara idale'. Although, the farming system among the Ibarapa is essentially subsistent, the factor of hospitality often occasions a regressive turn-out in their commercial activity, especially in view of their pertinent challenge against storage. However, apart from the domineering exchange dimension from the 'a ra idale' that is, urban strangers, there is also the dimension of ineptitude from other 'a ra idale' which refers to the 'donor agencies' who nevertheless are not sufficiently vast in the cultural ecology of the Ibarapa. These agencies, including United Nation Children Fund (UNICEF), United Nation Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), CARTER FOUNDATION, among others have though opened aids relation between themselves and the Ibarapa especially in the area of public health care and development; they are yet to accomplish any meaningful development among the Ibarapa. The reason for this is put by the Ibarapa as 'Onwu a fun ni le tan, onwu a ni la a je pe' meaning that, 'aids are temporary, but earnings last longer'. Further, this implies that it is the area of earnings for their products that should be improved for more capability to effectively respond to prevailing needs. Thus, the claim that there were intervention efforts from foreign donors for the eradication of dracunculiasis to ensure optimal human capital usage is true only in quantitative terms since 1980 at the prevalence of guinea-worm disease in Ibarapa. It is quantitative because, it has been observed that the youths have continually left the farming occupation since then, and the gross domestic product of the area has drastically reduced with little or no quality development around the landscape of the area.

Mass withdrawal from farming occupation

This theme was also generated from the group discussions and in-depth interviews. It reveals the poor state of the agricultural economy as noted in two sub- themes which include,

- 1) Desertion of farm occupation: thus, it is said that, ‘ko sa agbe mo’loko’, meaning , there are no more farmers on the farmland; and
- 2) Farm abandonment for comfort life: ‘ara oko ti dari wale’, meaning, farmers have retreated back home. Another is ‘ara oko ti de’ro idale’, meaning, farmers have now sojourn abroad. Thus, the situation is seen not to favor the continuance with farm job. Hence, the farmers prefer to quit. Thus, generally speaking, the unfolding theme is that of desertion of farm work, and this is further explained by other concepts about the reason for deserting the farm work. In this respect, we have two complementary notions; the first is that of the problem of guinea worm disease and the other, that of uninformed or unequal market exchange rate. The guinea worm disease is attributed to the punishment of the gods for extracting so much from the land without replenishing it. ‘Sobia’ as the guinea –worm disease is known as a disease that incapacitates the farmer such that he or she cannot afford to continue to till the land. Although, medical science has attributed the infection of this disease to drinking from unsafe water sources that contain water flea known as Cyclops, the effect of the disease has actually been known to have seriously retarded the farm activities of its victims. Guinea-worm disease otherwise known as dracunculiasis is shrouded in the farming system that is operated along the techniques of shifting cultivation and fallowing. In this farming system, the farmer is taken away from sites of portable water that is in the living areas. When this happens, a fatigued farmer is therefore disposed to drinking from nearer surface water which may contain Cyclops (water flea) that does engender guinea-worm disease. Thus, the reaction is conceptually put as ‘bi sobia ba da ni, Oluganbi lan’ke si’ meaning, the way out of guinea worm rage is to retreat’. Moreover, to retreat in this concept has metaphorical dimension which includes a retreat into seclusion, and a resort to a herbal care from a lone plant that is usually not found in vegetation environment but isolated around residential areas.

Even the intervention efforts by UNICEF, UNESCO, USAID, and CARTER FOUNDATION among others especially in the area of provision of potable water could not contain the spread of dracunculiasis. For instance, in Ibarapa central local government area which comprises of Igboora and Idere at the heart of the whole landscape, borehole water was sunk mainly in the town areas that include Government Secretariat, Tebelu, Onilado, Afekiti, Bansa, Adedigba, Oja Igboora, Ajiro, Baba mogba (Nigeria Guineaworm Disease Eradication Programme(NIGEP)Igboora Office, June 1999). Others are Idofin, Saganun, Oke-Agogo, Alawiye, Abolonko, Oke-oyinbo, Olorunda, Pako, Olorunsogo, African church, Obasanjo, New garage, High school, Iyalese, Agbonsusu, Abukele, Aborikura, etc.(NIGEP Igboora Office, January 2002). The few hamlets that have boreholes includes Abdulahi, Akeroro, Sekere, Alabi, Araromi,etc.(NIGEP Igboora Office, January 2002). However, such Hamlets as Balogun, Onigbio, Apata, Obatade, Kannaju among others, do not have boreholes, and thus, guinea-worm infection were high in these areas.

Conclusion

The Ibarapa people originally lived on a subsistent farming which enables the integration of the people and landscape development, and foster’s hospitality. This hospitality was abused by the intervention of neighboring interest in the economic landscape of the area such that bred commercial activity. This commercial activity over- stretched the farming landscape, and was compounded with such a disease as sobia and with slanting earnings. The disease generated further interest from foreign establishments in the name of aids. However, the non- culture specific intervention from participating agencies in concert with local compradors proved ineffective on the development drive of the people. Hence, there is labour flight from the landscape and the farming occupation. This explains the low incident rate of guinea-worm disease in recent times not the intervention efforts alone.

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