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STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between strategic human resource management and sustainable economic growth. It identified some drivers of economic growth as consumers' spending, business investment and human capital development which should be undertaken by the government and the corporate sector. The study was based on the available literature and two major theories were adopted which became the backdrop of SHRM and sustainable economic growth, which are the human capital theory and resource based theory. The finding reveals that economic growth is dependent and directly proportional to effective SHRM practice. It therefore recommends that the Niger Delta region that produces the golden egg should not be neglected or relegated rather a massive manpower development plan be implemented to enhance economic growth and turnaround of the area.

INTRODUCTION

The role of strategic human resource management on sustainable economic growth in the Niger Delta cannot be overemphasized. This is because; the way human resource of any nation is managed will determine how other resources will be harnessed. In other words, if the human resources of any nation are not strategically managed, it will have negative effect on economic development of such nation. Therefore, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria which is the cash cow of Nigeria has been locked in agitation with the Federal government over resource control, environmental degradation, and sharp prices by oil companies operating in the region among others. The region has over the years witnessed the emergence of different kinds of militant groups such Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) who threatened to shut down oil infrastructures in the region. The situation becomes worse where instead of the Federal government employing strategic human resource development to resolve the crisis, would rather engage in the deployment of kinetic methods to resolving the crisis which usually ends in the loss of lives and property. Arising from the above, this study examines strategic human resource management as the key to sustainable economic growth in the Niger Delta.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Researches have shown that strategic human resource management and economic growth have a strong correlation. Human capital affects economic growth and for an economy to be developed and sustained there must be a deliberate attempt to expand the knowledge and skills of its people. Since human capital refers to the knowledge, skill sets and experience that workers have in a given economy, it thus means that skills provide economic values as knowledgeable workforce can lead to increased productivity. Internal organizational characteristics are important to SHRM, but environmental characteristics also significantly influence economic growth. The Niger Delta has become the mainstay of Nigeria's economy over the years with little or nothing to show for it. This study advocate strongly the training and development of Niger Delta inhabitants to man or be strategically placed in management positions in the company's operating in their land in order to enhance economic growth of the area.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of strategic human resource management
Walker (1992) defines strategic HRM as the means of aligning the management of human

resource with the strategic content of the business and human resource strategy so that the latter supports the accomplishment of the former and, indeed, helps to define it. Strategic HRM is also about horizontal integration, which aims to ensure that the different elements of the HR strategy fit together and are mutually supportive.

Brewster and Larson (1992) defined SHRM as the extent to which HRM is considered during the formulation and implementation of corporate /business strategies. Strategic HRM has also been defined as the pattern of planned human resource deployments and activities intended to enable an organization to achieve its goals (Wright and McMahan, 1999). Implicit in this definition, is that the ultimate goal of strategic HRM is to contribute to organizational performance (i.e. the achievement of the organization's goals), however that performance is defined. HR deployments as captured in the above definition reflect the central assumptions behind the (positive) conceptualization of what HRM is and does: namely, that it responds accurately and effectively to the organization's environment and complements other organizational systems and contingencies. Budhwar (2000) defines strategic HRM as a concept that views human resources as assets for investment, and the management of human resources as strategic rather than reactive, prescriptive and administrative. Strategic HRM involves designing and implementing a set of proactive HR policies/practices that ensures that an organization's human capital contributes to the achievements of its corporate objectives.
Strategic Human Resource Management also implies a managerial orientation that ensures that human resources are employed in a manner conducive to the attainment of organizational goals and mission. Strategic HRM is essentially an integrated process that aims to achieve 'strategic fit'. A strategic HRM approach produces HR strategies that are integrated vertically with the business strategy and are ideally an integral part of that strategy, contributing to the business planning process as it happens. Strategic HRM, therefore, focuses on several issues including the fit between human resource management practices and organizational strategic goals, the integration of human resource management in the organizational strategic management, the involvement of human resource function in senior management teams, the devolvement of human resource practices to line managers and taking of strategic approach to employee selection, compensation, performance appraisal and the value that is added to the organizational performance by HRM.

THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH
Sustainable economic growth implies that the growth rate can be maintained over the long term and sustainable growth involves both; environmentally sustainable growth, e.g. not exploiting scarce resources and sustainable growth in terms of low inflation and a balanced economy.
The long-run trend rate of economic growth is the rate of economic growth that can be averaged over a sustained period of time – without excess inflationary pressures. If economic growth is above the long-run trend rate of growth then the economy will tend to experience inflationary pressures. This is because aggregate demand is rising faster than aggregate supply. It will also lead to deterioration in the current account balance of payments. Domestic firms cannot meet domestic demand, so consumers switch to imports. This kind of inflationary growth tends to be unsustainable. If long run productive capacity is increasing at 2.5%, but demand is growing at 5%, there is excess demand in the economy. In the short-term, firms can pay workers to do overtime, but the boom in demand cannot be maintained in the long term and after a 'boom' the economy often falls into recession (Nickolas, 2021).
In the late 1980s, the UK economy experienced an economic boom with a growth rate of over 4% a year. However, this led to inflation and a large current account deficit. With inflation creeping up to 10%, the government increased interest rates and the boom turned into a deep recession but in Sustainable growth, like from 1993 to 2007, the UK enjoyed a long period of uninterrupted economic growth with 15 years of positive economic growth. During this period inflation remained

low and the growth rate was close to the long-run trend rate. This period could be seen to be sustainable. Though there was also a boom in bank lending and house prices which caused problems during credit crunch.

Environmentally sustainable growth needs to be maintained for not just the long run (several years) but the very long run (several decades/centuries). Environmentally sustainable growth will require:

1. **Limiting the creation of pollution that could harm living standards over time**.

For example, nuclear power may give cheap energy for the next 50 years, but radioactive waste could harm future generations. It must be a kind of growth that doesn't causes damaging climate change because excess production of Carbon dioxide emissions is contributing to global warming. If global temperatures rise 2 or 3 degrees, it could make large parts of the world uninhabitable. For example, sea levels will rise causing a loss of many low lying areas. Also, it could cause increased desertification of farming land and reducing the ability to feed future generations. Sustainable growth would prioritize limiting carbon dioxide emissions and preventing global warming.

2. **Protecting non-renewable resources.**

Growth based on the consumption of non-renewable resources means that the growth cannot be maintained when the non-renewable resources run out. This can include the burning of fossil fuels or loss of bio-diversity which may lead to future vaccines. Also, of critical importance is the quality of topsoil. Modern farming methods have increased productivity and efficiency but at the cost of damage to the topsoil. This could lead to lower agricultural yields over time.

3. **Policies for sustainable growth**

If economic growth is becoming too fast, the government/Central Bank can slow the growth rate through Monetary/fiscal policy. For example at the start of a boom, the Central Bank could increase interest rates to slow down the rate of consumer spending – in theory – this helps to slow down the economic boom.

4. **Target environmental indicators.**

For environmentally sustainable growth, the government can target a measure like GPI (Genuine Progress indicator) rather than GDP (Gross Domestic Product). GPI looks at the positive side of increasing output but subtracts any environmental or social cost. Being aware of the limitation of GDP can help promote policies which are more environmentally sustainable.

5. **Tax external costs.**

The consumption of fossil fuel creates external costs such as carbon dioxide emissions and global warming. Taxing carbon emissions creates an incentive for firms to switch to more renewable sources of energy.

6. **Regulations.**

Rather than leave it to market forces, or even tax/subsidy, a government could ban practices that damage environmental sustainability. For example, banning pesticides that harm bees and banning chemicals which damage the water supply.

THE NIGER DELTA REGION

Niger Delta is a major geomorphic feature in coastal zone of Nigeria. It stretches from the Benin river estuary for about 450km of twenty one estuaries open and discharges into Atlantic Ocean through the delta. It consists of major distinct ecological zones such as fresh water, swamp, mangrove, creeks, estuaries and barrier island (Ukpong, 2009). Niger Delta is situated on the Gulf of Guinea in Nigeria. It is typically considered to be located within nine coastal Southern Nigerian States, which include: all six States from the South-South geopolitical zone, one state (Ondo) from South West geopolitical zone and two states (Abia and Imo) from South East geopolitical zone.

Niger Delta is a very densely populated region sometimes called the Oil Rivers because it was once a major producer of palm oil. The area was the British Oil Rivers Protectorate from 1885 until 1893, when it was expanded and became the Niger Coast Protectorate. The delta is a petroleum-rich region, and has been the center of international controversy over pollution,

corruption, marginalization, flood and degradation (Wikipedia, 2017). The Niger Delta, as defined officially by the Nigerian government, extends over about 70,000 km2 and makes up 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass. Historically and cartographically, it consists of present-day Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers States. In 2000, however, Obasanjo's regime included Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River State, Edo, Imo and Ondo States in the region. Some 31 million people (www.wikipedia) of more than 40 ethnic groups including; Bini, Efik, Esan, Ibibio, Ikwerre, Ikpeye, Etche, Annang, Igbo, Yoruba, Oron, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Isoko, Urhobo, Ukwuani, Kalabari, Okrika and Ogoni, are among the inhabitants of the Niger Delta, speaking about 250 different dialects.
The resources available in the Niger Delta region are:

Vegetation Resources
Vegetation resources are vital things derived from the forest or farmland which are of immense value to man. These includes plants and animals (flora and fauna) and soil, their values can be enhanced in form of game reserve, fruits, firewood, latex, fibres, pulps to mention but a few. Niger Delta is blessed with good climate and fertile soil; these give rise to robust forest and thick vegetation. Forest resources abound in the area, and with fresh and salt water within the region, the air (Oxygen) supply is of best quality and the forest absolves carbon dioxide. Economic trees like Iroko, Obeche, Mahogany, Africa Walnut, Iron wood and other hard wood abound. Niger Delta provides lot of exports and income for Nigeria. The forest also serves as habitat for wildlife and protects the virgin soil. It is home of rich bio-diversity and rich source of African traditional medicines. It provide job to thousands of people and serves as research point for researchers. It contribution for quality clean air cannot be underestimated. To say that it provides food is a fact that cannot be denied (Alexander, 2017).

Water Resources
Water Resources are essential things derived from water bodies and its shores. Water is vital in regulation and modification of weather and climate, as well as enhancement of seed germination and formation of new soil (land) by sedimentation process. Niger Delta is also home to many Rivers and creeks which are habitat for many aquatic lives. The rivers also serve as means of transportation, job, recreation, food, medicine, and research. Important seaports and wharfs are located in the region, among which includes Port Harcourt and Onne free zone port. (Alexander, 2012). Nigeria makes billions of Naira from import and export duties from this region. The massive body of water produced quality oxygen which is vital for life all over the globe. The rivers also host naval bases and research institutions. Rivers provide water for industries and domestic uses, the importance of water in Nigeria and in Niger Delta in particular can never be over emphasized. Most of the salt waters in Niger Delta have large reserve of spring and most are untapped.

Mineral Resources
Mineral resources are in abundant in Niger Delta region, and there exploitation is already on the high side. Among these minerals are Crude oil, Natural gas, Bitumen, Lignite, Coal, Tin and Columbite, Iron ore, Limestone, Marble, Clay, and Kaolin. The mining of these resources create revenue for government, create jobs, and develop the areas of production. The exploitation of the mineral resources encourages research, education, training, and tourism. Servicing companies and hospitable firm grows within the region as a result of mineral explorations from the region.

Atmospheric Resources
Atmospheric resources are useful materials from the atmosphere that benefits man and enhance his life and environment. It includes several layers of wind, rainfall, gases, cloud and solar energy. Equally important to man is heat (temperature) which controls many chemical, physical and biological processes on earth (Alexander, et al., 2015). It reduces the rate of ultra violet rays and increases the sources of power generation, it enables satellites to maintain its position in the space, it also provides vitamin D. Atmosphere is a medium of transport, and the only exit route from the Earth. The atmospheric resources within the region enable and attract people to the region. For instance abundant rainfall supports thick forest and bio-diversity, moderate

temperature guarantee germination of crops. Thunderstorm assures that important nitrogen is fixed in the soil. The atmospheric pressure in Niger Delta is always bearable and need to be sustained.

Based on geographical location of Niger Delta, the atmospheric condition is friendly; the effect of tropical maritime air-mass (South West Trade Wind) assures moisture presence in the air. The presence of thick forest and ocean are on its own natural air purifiers. Despite her closeness to the equator Niger Delta is an inhabitable place (Alexander, 2017).

THE IMPACT OF STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ON SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE NIGER DELTA

Strategic human resource management has a critical role to play on sustainable economic growth in the Niger Delta region in several ways. Sustainable human resource management (SHRM) refers to the concept which combines the idea of sustainability with the soft approach to human resources. This approach promotes basing an HRM strategy on fostering a culture of trust and cooperation. The soft approach to SHRM aims to achieve adequate financial results, but through the policy of building a good "employer–employee relationship." A soft strategy is effective in retaining an employee for a longer period of time in an organization and encouraging them to share knowledge, work more productively, act with passion and commitment, and generate creative ideas in order to achieve the business goals. Therefore, sustainable economic growth can be achieved in the Niger Delta region using SHRM if the people of the Niger Delta trust the government. The issue of trust is deficit where government promises to deal with environmental pollution and other issues but fails to do so affect and is a serious setback in stabilizing the region.

SHRM thrives on feedback mechanism. This is a situation where the employers get feelers from the employees; therefore, sustainable economic growth can be recorded in the Niger Delta region if the government listens to the people and their agitations. Government through SHRM is expected to engage the people strategically to understand their demands then work on providing solutions to their problems.

SHRM ensures the integrated use of training and development, career paths, and organizational development to improve individual and organizational effectiveness. This is also very critically in the Niger Delta because the training of youths in the region in different kinds of skills acquisition such those in the Amnesty programmes and others is key to sustainable economic growth in the region. Training of the youths will take them out of the creeks to engage in meaningful economic activity that will contribute to the positive development of the region.

SHRM seeks to increase employees' environmental awareness by taking into account recent developments in rapidly growing body of environmental knowledge. In the literature on the subject, SHRM development in the form of training is considered the basis for building a pro-environmental attitude and a green organizational culture. The issue of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta is critical to the development of the region. Using this strategy, government at the national and sub-national levels and the NDDC must be able to address the environmental issues in the region and also train and educate the people to develop a positive attitude towards the environment.

Many organizations face a volatile market situation. In order to create and sustain competitive advantage in this type of environment, organizations must continually improve their business performance. Therefore, this principle can be used in the Niger Delta where the activities of various social movements have threatened government infrastructures. This can be achieved by improving government performance in the region by providing basic social services such as provision of water, electricity, roads, schools, employments and empowerments programmes in the region.

WHAT DRIVES ECONOMIC GROWTH

Economic growth is an increase in an economy's ability, compared to past periods, to produce goods and services. Economic growth is measured by the change in the gross domestic product (GDP) of a country. GDP is a representation of the total output of goods and services for an

economy. For example, if a country has a GDP rate of 2.5% for the year, it means the economic growth of the country rose by 2.5% from a year earlier. In order to determine how human capital impacts growth, we must first look at two key drivers of economic growth in an economy.

1. **Consumers' Spending**

It's estimated that consumers are responsible for more than two-thirds of the economic growth in the U.S. economy. As consumers become employed or experience wage increases, they tend to increase their purchases of clothes, cars, technology, homes, and home goods such as appliances. All of that spending creates a positive ripple effect leading to improved employment in various industries such as retail, auto manufacturers, technology stores, and home builders, to name a few. The spending also leads to higher GDP growth throughout the economy.

2. **Business Investment**

The increased GDP growth from consumer spending leads to improvements in business conditions. As companies become more profitable, they tend to invest more money into their businesses to create future growth. Business investment can include new equipment and technology purchases. The investments businesses make are called capital investments. Capital investments, which require large outlays of capital or cash, are designed to boost a company's productivity and profits in the long term.

Human capital affects economic growth and can help to develop an economy by expanding the knowledge and skills of its people.

The level of economic growth driven by consumer spending and business investment determines the amount of skilled labour needed.

Investing in workers has had a track record of creating better employment conditions in economies throughout the world.

In a growing economy, companies also take on additional borrowing from banks to expand production due to higher consumer demand. The loan proceeds are usually used for large purchases of assets such as manufacturing plants and equipment. The added production also leads to higher wages and increased employment as more workers are needed for the increase in consumer demand for a company's products.

As companies look to hire workers to help with the increase in sales, it leads to new job openings in various types of employment. However, if the labour market becomes too tight, due to an expanding economy, companies are forced to train workers for the skill sets needed since there are not enough available skilled workers.

As a result of business investment, companies are more productive, while GDP growth rises since business investment is a key component of growth. Both consumers' spending and business investment not only lead to more economic growth but also play a prominent role in determining the level of training and development of workers.

HUMAN CAPITAL AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Human capital is positively correlated to economic growth since investment tends to boost productivity. The process of educating a workforce is a type of investment, but instead of capital investment such as equipment, the investment is in human capital.

The Government's Role

The role of governments is to key into expanding the skillsets and education levels of a country's population. Some governments are actively involved in improving human capital by offering higher education to people at no cost. These governments realize that the knowledge people gain through education helps to develop an economy and boost economic growth. Workers with more education or better skills tend to have higher earnings, which, in turn, increase economic growth through additional consumer spending.

The Corporate Sector's Role

Companies also invest in human capital to boost profits and productivity. For example, let's say an employee working at a technology company receives training to be a computer programmer through on-site training and in-house seminars. The company pays for a portion of the tuition for

higher education. If the worker remains at the company after the training has been completed, she may develop new ideas and new products for the company. The employee might also leave the company later in her career and use the knowledge she learned to start a new company. Whether the employee remains at the firm or starts a new company, the initial investment in human capital will ultimately lead to economic growth, human capital investments and employment growth. Investing in workers has had a track record of creating better employment conditions in economies throughout the world. If employment is improving, consumer spending rises, leading to increased revenue for companies and additional business investment. As a result, employment is a key indicator or metric for determining how GDP growth may perform. Although investment in human capital tends to produce more growth, it doesn't necessarily mean the jobs are available for the newly-educated workers. Also, geography plays a role when it comes to job openings and the movement of labour. If job openings are located in the northern part of a country, but the skilled labour is in the south, growth could be hindered due to the cost of moving or the lack of desire to move.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ulrich (2007) argued that early attempt to link human resource management with organizational performance and growth relied on the common sense belief that improving the way people were managed inevitably led to enhanced performance and growth, without seeking to justify this linkage in theoretical terms. Today, it was argued that the subject was no longer theoretical, that a variety of different theories, including general systems theory, role behavior theory, institutional theory, resource dependence theory, human capital theory, transaction cost theory, agency theory and resource based theory of the firm had been used to explain the HRM and organizational performance linkage (Jackson and Schuler, 2005; Wright and Mc Mahan, 2002).

This study would adopt two major theories that become the backdrop of the SHRM and economic growth research namely, human capital theory and resource based theory.

Human Capital Theory

This theory has long been argued as a critical resource in most firms. The search for sources of sustainable competitive advantage increasingly pointed inward towards organizational capability and more specifically to the strategic management of human resource (Dyer, 2003; Wright and Mc mahan, 2002), as capital and technology become increasingly available to virtually anyone anywhere (Ulrich and Lake, 2001). Human capital refers to the productive capabilities of people, skills, experience and knowledge have economic value to organizations because they enable it to be productive and adaptable; thus people constitute the organizations human capital (Schuler, 2005). From micro economics perspective, human capital theory suggests that people possess skill, knowledge, and ability that have the potential to generate economic rent. Economic rent refers to profits in excess of formal economic returns. Like other assets, human capital has value in the market place, but unlike other assets, the potential value of human capital can be fully realized only with the cooperation of the person, since firm investment to increase employees skills, knowledge, and abilities carry cost to the organization, they are only justified if they produce future returns by means of increased productivity and overall firm performance and growth. Jackson and Schuler (2005) argued that, all costs related to eliciting productive behavior from employees including those related to motivation, monitoring and retaining them, constitute human capital investment made in anticipation of future returns. People possess knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) that are of economic value to the firm and, therefore, firm investments to increase these, e.g. through training programs, are only justified if they produce future returns to the firm in the form of increase productivity. Therefore, the higher the potentials for employees to contribute to the firm, the more likely it is that firm will invest in human resource management activities specifically aimed at increasing individual productivity and overall firm performance. Grant (2006) suggested that knowledge is the most critical competitive assets that a firm possesses. Niger Delta region is blessed with abundant human and mineral resources that are capable of enhancing its economic growth and sustainability but the case is different as manpower

is supplied to the area from distant lands leaving the Niger Delta jobless and economically strangulated.

Resource-Based Theory

(Barney, 1991, 1995) is generally accepted as a background for understanding the relationship between strategic Human resource management and economic growth (Wright & Mc Mahan & Mcwilliams, 2004). Three types of resources associated with organization as identified by Jackson and Schuler (2005) are (a) physical resources (plant; technology and equipment) human resources (employees experience and knowledge), and organizational resources (structures, system for planning, monitoring, and controlling activities; social relations within and between organization and external contingencies). Armstrong (2009) refers to human resources as the accumulated stock of knowledge, skills, and abilities that individual possess, which the firm has built up overtime into an identifiable expertise. Wright (2001) discussed at length the impact of the resource-based theory on SHRM theory and practice. A fundamental assumption of this view is that organizations can be successful if they gain and maintain competitive advantage. The resource-based theory of the firm is based on the notion that a firms HRM system can constitute one source of competitive advantage (Wright et al., 2005; Barney 1991). A resource can consider being a source of sustained competitive advantage if it meets the criteria of value, rarity, non-substitutability, and inimitability.

CONCLUSION

Strategic human resource management is the practice of attracting, developing, rewarding, and retaining employees for the benefit of both the employees as individuals and the organization as a whole. Strategic HRM utilizes the talent and opportunity within the human resources department to make other departments stronger and more effective.

Every business adopt some strategy to survive in the market, the organization simply copy another organization structure which were present in the environment which is directly linked with changing commercial , economics, technical ethical and social environment. Strategic management refer to the most difficult challenges that an organization confront on how through the competition for survival and prevalence in the market in the present, will put foundation for the success, maximizing performance and growth is the main goal of the every manager in the organization which mean that organization reached their organizational goal with efficiency and effectiveness this effort will lead to the success. The main purpose of the human resource management is to maintain rule and regulation in the organization to set some policies and rules under which everyone should be rewarded or punished, hence if we talk about strategic human resource management which mean that organization believe in long term relationship between employee such type of organization will try to fulfill all type of employee need, to motivate them , train them, increase their salary and also provide incentives to boost performance and to inspire loyalty and job security.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Niger Delta region has been the mainstay of the Nigerian economy by producing the golden egg and such should not be neglected and relegated, there should a massive manpower development plan to enhance economic growth and turnaround of the region.
2. The government should provide educational scholarships for the indigenes of the region to enhance better placement in the companies that work in the land.
3. Provision of basic social services such as portable water, roads, schools, electricity and skill acquisition programmes.

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