



## **Combating Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta Region through Woodwork and Artistic Craftsmanship**

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**Abstract:** The study x-rayed the social challenge of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta Region and stressed the role of woodwork and artistic craftsmanship as primary tools to combat youth restiveness through engagement in skills acquisition and self-employment. Four objectives and three research questions guided the study. Relevant concepts and theories were reviewed. Both primary and secondary data were used. 420 copies of questionnaire was used to generate the primary data, which were analysed with descriptive statistics. The results showed that unemployment, poverty and political marginalisation were among the major drivers of youth restiveness, while crime, disruption of economic activities and destruction of property were the most cited consequences. Aggregate item responses showed 73.33% agreement on perceived root causes with a mean score of 3.04, 75.24% agreement on perceived consequences with a mean score of 3.08, and 75.24% agreement that woodwork and artistic craftsmanship could help curb youth restiveness with a mean score of 3.04. Secondary data also showed that Rivers State recorded a youth not in employment, education or training rate of 36.0% and an unemployment rate of 13.4% under the revised labour force methodology. The paper concluded that craft based technical and vocational education, linked to apprenticeship, start-up tools and market access, could reduce idle time and grievance driven recruitment into violent networks when combined with governance reforms and local security partnerships.

**Keywords:** youth restiveness, woodwork, artistic craftsmanship, Niger Delta.

### **Introduction**

Youth restiveness in the Niger Delta has remained a development and security concern because it reflects both livelihood stress and contested governance around natural resource benefits. While the region hosts Nigeria's petroleum infrastructure, many communities have experienced weak public services, environmental degradation, limited economic inclusion, and low trust in institutions, creating conditions where youth grievances can be mobilised into violence and disruptive protest (Oji, 2021; Adedeji, 2023).

Recent economic evidence showed that youth employment pressures were still severe within several Niger Delta states. Under the revised labour force methodology, Rivers State recorded an unemployment rate of 13.4% and a youth not in employment, education or training rate of 36.0%, while Delta recorded an unemployment rate of 8.2%, pointing to sustained livelihood gaps for young people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Poverty conditions also amplified vulnerability. The Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index snapshot reported that 62.9% of Nigerians, estimated at 132.92 million people, were multidimensionally poor, with rural poverty at 72.0% compared with 28.0% in urban areas, a pattern that is consistent with livelihood fragility in many coastal and riverine settlements (National Bureau of Statistics & Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2022).

Restiveness has had costly consequences for economic stability and public safety. An extractive industry audit reported that crude oil losses linked to theft and sabotage were valued in hundreds of millions of dollars in 2023, confirming that insecurity around oil assets continues to affect national revenue and local livelihoods (Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 2024).

Within this context, technical and vocational education that leads to self-employment has been widely argued as a practical pathway for reducing youth idleness and violent recruitment. Studies on vocational skills acquisition in the South-South region have linked structured training to improved employability and entrepreneurial intention when programmes include mentoring, practical tools and market linkages (Okoye & Imo, 2021; Sotonye, 2021). This paper therefore focused on woodwork and artistic craftsmanship as culturally familiar, skill intensive and marketable occupations that can help redirect youth energy into productive work.

Despite decades of policy interventions, violent youth mobilisation and disruptive protest have persisted in parts of the Niger Delta, affecting community safety, investment confidence and service delivery. In many localities, unemployment, skills mismatch and poverty interact with perceptions of marginalisation, corruption



and political manipulation, making young people more susceptible to criminal networks, cultism and illegal artisanal refining (Oji, 2021; Adedeji, 2023).

At the same time, Nigeria's labour market evidence continued to show high youth vulnerability, with some Niger Delta states recording high youth disengagement from work and education, and with informal employment remaining widespread across states (NBS, 2023). These conditions reduce the opportunity cost of violence and increase the appeal of risky activities that promise short term income.

Although skills training and empowerment initiatives have been promoted, there is still a need for locally grounded, culturally acceptable and economically realistic strategies that can engage youths sustainably. Woodwork and artistic craftsmanship are long standing occupations in coastal Nigeria, yet they have not been consistently positioned as structured peacebuilding tools with clear training avenues, enterprise support and market integration. This gap motivated the study.

## Objectives

### To:

1. identify the major drivers of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta Region.
2. examine the major consequences of youth restiveness for communities and development.
3. assess the perceived role of woodwork and artistic craftsmanship in reducing youth restiveness through youth engagement and self-employment.
4. propose a practical framework for implementing craft-based empowerment programmes in the Niger Delta region

## Research Questions

1. What are the perceived factors or causes of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta?
2. What consequences are associated with youth restiveness in the Niger Delta?
3. In what ways could woodwork and artistic craftsmanship contribute to reducing youth restiveness through meaningful youth engagement?

## Conceptual Clarifications and Theoretical Review

**Youth:** Youth is commonly used to describe the population segment that is transitioning from dependence to adulthood, with a strong emphasis on education, work entry and social identity formation. In policy practice, youth definitions vary, but they generally focus on people between the mid-teens and early thirties, reflecting labour market entry and social responsibility expectations (United Nations, 2019).

**Youth restiveness:** Youth restiveness refers to a pattern of persistent agitation, disruptive protest and sometimes violent behaviour by young people in response to perceived injustice, exclusion or unmet expectations. It may manifest as communal clashes, pipeline vandalism, cultism, political thuggery, kidnapping, and attacks on public and private infrastructure, and it often escalates where institutions cannot manage grievances peacefully (Oji, 2021; Adedeji, 2023).

**Woodwork:** Woodwork involves the processing and shaping of timber into products for functional, decorative and industrial use. Artistic craftsmanship refers to creative, skill-based production of culturally meaningful items such as carvings, masks, walking sticks, drums, canoes, furniture and interior fittings. These occupations combine technical competence with creativity and can be learned through apprenticeships and structured vocational training (Sotonye, 2021).

**Skills acquisition and technical and vocational education:** Skills acquisition and technical and vocational education are interventions that build practical competence for employment and entrepreneurship, especially for young people who face barriers in formal labour markets. Evidence from Nigeria suggested that vocational skills training was more likely to translate into livelihoods when trainees received hands on practice, mentoring, startup support and access to buyers, rather than short workshops without follow through (Okoye & Imo, 2021). This study drew on **frustration aggression theory and relative deprivation** arguments to explain how unmet expectations can contribute to youth restiveness.

Frustration aggression theory proposed that persistent blockage of legitimate goals can produce anger that is displaced through aggression, especially where social control is weak and violent options are visible (Dollard et al., 1939).

Relative deprivation theory argued that collective violence becomes more likely when groups perceive a gap between what they believe they deserve and what they actually receive. In the Niger Delta, expectations tied



to oil wealth, employment and infrastructure can intensify perceived deprivation when living conditions remain poor, thereby strengthening grievance narratives (Gurr, 1970).

Within these perspectives, woodwork and artistic craftsmanship were treated as social and economic mechanisms that can reduce frustration by creating meaningful daily routines, increasing income opportunities and strengthening social identity around productive work. When combined with fair governance and inclusive development planning, skills acquisition can reduce both the drivers and triggers of restiveness (Okoye & Imo, 2021).

### Brief Literature Review

#### i) Youth Labour Market and Poverty Pressures in the Niger Delta

Labour market pressures are a key background condition for youth restiveness because they shape daily survival strategies and the opportunity cost of involvement in violent or illegal activities. The National Bureau of Statistics labour force report showed that unemployment rates and youth disengagement differed across states, but several Niger Delta states recorded notable unemployment levels and high youth not in employment, education or training rates, indicating significant numbers of idle youths (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Table 1: Selected Labour Market Indicators for Niger Delta States, 2023

State	Unemployment rate(%)	Unemployed population	Informal employment	NEET 15 to 24(%)
Abia	18.7	1,099,501	1,729,304	28.9
Akwa Ibom	5.1	334,195	1,839,099	25.5
Bayelsa	6.0	125,629	459,831	23.8
Cross River	10.1	427,709	1,221,856	26.3
Delta	8.2	427,255	2,504,616	21.8
Edo	10.2	421,728	2,385,117	21.6
Imo	12.3	544,145	1,634,550	26.3
Ondo	10.4	321,828	1,641,720	24.2
Rivers	13.4	593,720	2,407,931	36.0

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2023).

Table 1 summarised selected state indicators from the labour force report for Niger Delta states. The data highlighted Rivers State as a high-risk labour market context because it combined a relatively high unemployment rate with the highest youth not in employment, education or training rate among the listed states. High informal employment values also suggested that even where jobs existed, they were often unstable and low paying, which can sustain frustration and grievance narratives (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Poverty deepens the vulnerability of youths by limiting education quality, restricting mobility, and reducing access to productive assets such as land, tools and startup finance. The Multidimensional Poverty Index snapshot reported that 62.9% of Nigerians, estimated at 132.92 million, were multidimensionally poor, with deprivation intensity of 40.9% among the poor, reflecting the depth of overlapping disadvantages (National Bureau of Statistics & Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2022).

In riverine environments of the Niger Delta, poverty is often intensified by seasonal livelihood shocks, weak transport connectivity, and exposure to environmental hazards. These conditions limit the prospects of young people who depend on fishing, petty trade and informal services, and they can increase the attractiveness of illegal refining, bunkering and other high risk income sources (Oji, 2021).

#### ii) Drivers of Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta

Unemployment and income insecurity have been consistently identified as major drivers of youth agitation in the Niger Delta because they create idle time and increase the appeal of violent entrepreneurship. In communities where formal jobs are scarce, youth groups may be mobilised for political violence, communal disputes or sabotage of oil assets as a bargaining strategy (Adedeji, 2023).

Environmental degradation and weak resource governance also contribute to restiveness. Oil spills, gas flaring and damaged fisheries undermine traditional livelihoods and create a perception that local communities bear environmental costs without proportional benefits, which can fuel anger and resistance (Oji, 2021).

Marginalisation and inequality are often framed as spatial and political problems, where oil producing communities perceive unequal distribution of public infrastructure, education opportunities and employment. This perception becomes more potent when political elites use youth groups as instruments during elections and abandon them afterwards, reinforcing cycles of grievance and violence (Adedeji, 2023).



Corruption and poor governance weaken the credibility of interventions. When empowerment programmes are captured by patronage networks, youths may view violence as the only effective bargaining tool, while peaceful participation is seen as unrewarded, leading to the normalisation of confrontation (Oji, 2021).

Low access to quality education and skills mismatch further deepen the problem. Even where youths complete formal schooling, limited practical competence and weak labour market connections can create frustration, suggesting the need for vocational pathways that combine technical training with real market exposure (Okoye & Imo, 2021).

### **iii) Consequences of Youth Restiveness**

Youth restiveness has direct human costs through loss of lives, injuries and displacement, while also weakening social cohesion and trust between communities and government. In addition, fear of violence can disrupt schooling, limit entrepreneurship and reduce the willingness of private investors to operate in affected areas (Oji, 2021).

Economic decline is another consequence because insecurity disrupts markets, transport and production. In the oil sector, theft and sabotage reduce government revenue and can also reduce legitimate local employment opportunities, reinforcing a vicious cycle where lost revenue further limits social investment (Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 2024).

Environmental impacts are also amplified, particularly where illegal refining and sabotage lead to spills and burn sites that contaminate soil and water. These impacts reduce fishing and farming potential, and they can create new public health risks, raising the long-term development cost of restiveness (Oji, 2021).

### **iv) Woodwork and Artistic Craftsmanship as a Pathway for Youth Engagement**

Woodwork and artistic craftsmanship can be positioned as peacebuilding tools because they offer structured learning, immediate visible outputs and culturally valued products. In many Niger Delta communities, canoe carving, furniture making, drum crafting, masks, walking sticks and decorative art have long been part of local identity and commerce, suggesting that youth engagement strategies can build on existing cultural capital (Sotonye, 2021).

Creative and craft work also connects to the wider cultural and creative industries. A global policy report on creativity noted that cultural and creative industries accounted for 3.1% of global gross domestic product and 6.2% of global employment, demonstrating that creative skills can be economically significant when production is linked to markets and supportive institutions (UNESCO, 2022).

For the Niger Delta, craft-based employment pathways can be strengthened through clustering, tool banks, shared workshops and apprenticeship networks that connect trainees to orders from schools, churches, offices, hospitality businesses and household furniture demand. When these linkages are built, woodwork becomes more than a hobby and can support stable income, self-esteem and social inclusion (Okoye & Imo, 2021).

However, the effectiveness of craft interventions depends on implementation quality. Vocational programmes that focus only on training without providing starter tools, mentorship and buyer access have been criticised for limited impact, reinforcing the need for an enterprise-oriented model that supports production, branding and distribution (Okoye & Imo, 2021; UNESCO, 2022).

### **v) Vocational Skills and Youth Stability**

A study on vocational skills acquisition programmes in the South-South region reported that participation in vocational training was associated with improved employment readiness and youth empowerment outcomes, and the authors stressed the importance of practical learning environments and supportive learning materials for sustainable results (Okoye & Imo, 2021).

Research on adult and vocational education in the Niger Delta also argued that skill-based learning can reduce restiveness by providing legal income alternatives and by strengthening civic responsibility when programmes include counselling and community engagement components (Oji, 2021). Another study on fine and applied arts noted that artistic and vocational training can reduce youth unemployment and restiveness by building creativity, self-reliance and employable competence, especially when trainees are supported to convert skills into micro enterprises (Sotonye, 2021).

These empirical insights supported the view that craft-based skill development is relevant for peacebuilding, but they also suggested that training must be integrated with markets, mentorship and governance reforms if it is to have measurable security outcomes (Okoye & Imo, 2021; Adedeji, 2023).



### Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and relied primarily on data obtained through a structured questionnaire. A total of 420 copies were retrieved from randomly selected respondents. The instrument measured perceptions on the causes of youth restiveness, the perceived consequences, and the perceived effectiveness of woodwork and artistic craftsmanship as an intervention strategy for reducing restiveness.

The questionnaire was structured into four sections. The first section captured basic respondent characteristics. The second section addressed perceived drivers of youth restiveness. The third section focused on perceived consequences of youth restiveness. The fourth section examined perceptions on the use of woodwork and artistic craftsmanship, including practical engagement pathways for craft based empowerment. Responses were measured using a four point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, with results presented in tables for clarity.

To strengthen interpretation and provide contextual evidence, relevant secondary data were reviewed from national labour market and poverty reports and from extractive industry governance audits (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023; National Bureau of Statistics and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2022; Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 2024).

### Results and Discussion

Table 2: Responses on Perceived Root Causes of Youth Restiveness

S/N	Perceived root causes of youth restiveness	SA	(%)	A	(%)	D	(%)	SD	(%)	Total
1	Unemployment contributes to youth restiveness	183	43.57	125	29.76	70	16.67	42	10.00	420
2	Poverty increases youth agitation	171	40.71	137	32.62	79	18.81	33	7.86	420
3	Lack of good governance fuels restiveness	155	36.90	153	36.43	82	19.52	30	7.14	420
4	Marginalisation of communities causes unrest	155	36.90	153	36.43	79	18.81	33	7.86	420
5	Lack of social amenities encourages violence	155	36.90	153	36.43	78	18.57	34	8.10	420
6	Corruption worsens youth grievances	163	38.81	145	34.52	79	18.81	33	7.86	420

Source: Researcher's fieldwork and analysis, 2026

Table 2 shows that respondents largely agreed that unemployment, poverty, weak governance, marginalisation, lack of social amenities and corruption were key root causes of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. Across the six items, agreed responses (strongly agree plus agree) accounted for 73.33%, while disagreed responses (disagree plus strongly disagree) accounted for 26.67%.

Table 3: Responses on Perceived Consequences of Youth Restiveness

S/N	Perceived consequences of youth restiveness	SA	SA (%)	A	A (%)	D	D (%)	SD	SD (%)	Total
1	Youth restiveness increases insecurity	185	44.05	131	31.19	73	17.38	31	7.38	420
2	It lowers the standard of living	170	40.48	146	34.76	77	18.33	27	6.43	420
3	It increases cost of living	162	38.57	154	36.67	77	18.33	27	6.43	420
4	It reduces economic growth and development	154	36.67	162	38.57	80	19.05	24	5.71	420
5	It reduces productivity	150	35.71	166	39.52	77	18.33	27	6.43	420
6	It leads to destruction of infrastructure and oil facilities	170	40.48	146	34.76	80	19.05	24	5.71	420

Source: Researcher's fieldwork and analysis, 2026

The results reveal that respondents strongly perceived insecurity, poor standard of living, higher cost of living, economic decline, reduced productivity and destruction of infrastructure as major consequences of youth restiveness. Across the six items, agreement responses accounted for 75.24%, while disagreement responses accounted for 24.76%.



Table 4: Aggregate Responses on the Use of Woodwork and Artistic Craftsmanship as Intervention Measures to Curb Youth Restiveness in the Region

Item	Response category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>The use of woodwork and artistic craftsmanship will help curb youth restiveness in the region</b>	Strongly agree	181	43.10
	Agree	135	32.14
	Disagree	45	10.71
	Strongly disagree	59	14.05
	Total	420	100.00

Source: Researcher’s fieldwork and analysis, 2026

Table 4 presents aggregate responses on the use of woodwork and artistic craftsmanship as intervention measures to curb youth restiveness in the region. The results show that 43.10%strongly agreed and 32.14% agreed, giving a combined agreement level of 75.24%. Disagreement responses accounted for 24.76%.

Table 5: Responses on Suggested Engagement Pathways for Craft Based Empowerment

S/N	Suggested engagement pathways for craft based empowerment	SA	(%)	A	(%)	D	(%)	SD	S(%)	Total
1	Establish community based craft centres	186	44.29	144	34.29	68	16.19	22	5.24	420
2	Provide modern tools and equipment	192	45.71	138	32.86	68	16.19	22	5.24	420
3	Partner with experienced artisans for mentorship	183	43.57	147	35.00	69	16.43	21	5.00	420
4	Provide start up grants for trained youths	195	46.43	135	32.14	66	15.71	24	5.71	420
5	Link craft products to local and online markets	186	44.29	144	34.29	68	16.19	22	5.24	420
6	Encourage collaboration between oil companies and communities	192	45.71	138	32.86	68	16.19	22	5.24	420

Source: Researcher’s fieldwork and analysis, 2026

The results showed strong support (with the agreed responses making 78.57% while the disagreed responses was 21.42%) for structured engagement pathways for craft based empowerment. Across the items, respondents favoured community based centres, provision of equipment, mentorship, start up support and market linkages. In general, the pattern of responses suggests that respondents supported not only skill training, but also practical systems that can sustain craft based empowerment.

**Practical Framework for Implementation**

A craft-based approach to reducing youth restiveness should be implemented as a structured pipeline rather than a one-off training event. The first stage should be community mapping and participant selection. This includes identifying high risk youth clusters, assessing existing craft practitioners who can serve as mentors, and agreeing on transparent selection criteria that prioritise unemployed youths and school leavers, while also ensuring gender inclusion (Oji, 2021).

The second stage should be skills training and apprenticeship. Training should combine basic safety, measurement, design, tool handling, finishing and business skills. Where possible, training should be delivered in partnership with experienced artisans and technical instructors, and the curriculum should be linked to real production tasks such as school desks, household furniture, doors and windows, canoes, and cultural art products that have local demand (Sotonye, 2021).

The third stage should be enterprise support. Evidence from vocational skills studies suggested that training was more likely to yield livelihoods when beneficiaries received starter tools, mentoring and market access. A practical model is to provide tool kits, shared workshop spaces, and small order contracts that allow youths to earn while learning, thereby reducing the temptation to return to illegal income activities (Okoye & Imo, 2021).

The fourth stage should be market integration and value chain development. This includes product standardisation, branding, cooperative marketing, and digital promotion. Partnerships with schools, construction firms, hospitality businesses and cultural tourism operators can create steady demand for wood products, while local exhibitions and online platforms can expand buyers beyond the community (UNESCO, 2022).

Monitoring and evaluation should be built into the programme. Key indicators can include enrolment and completion rates, number of apprentices certified, number of startup tool kits provided, number of trainees who



reported income from craft work within six months, and changes in reported involvement in risky activities. Where security data are available, community safety indicators such as reported cult related violence and vandalism cases can be tracked over time to assess whether livelihood support is translating into social stability (Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 2024).

### Conclusion

Youth restiveness in the Niger Delta was strongly linked to livelihood insecurity, perceived exclusion and weak governance, and it continued to generate insecurity, economic disruption and damage to public and private assets. Survey evidence from this study showed strong agreement that unemployment, poverty and marginalisation were key drivers, and it also showed strong agreement that woodwork and artistic craftsmanship could reduce restiveness through meaningful youth engagement.

Given the labour market pressures and poverty indicators reported in national statistics, craft-based vocational pathways are not merely cultural options but practical employment strategies. When designed as structured pipelines that include apprenticeship, startup support and market access, woodwork and artistic craftsmanship can help reduce idle time, build dignity of labour and weaken the incentives for violent mobilisation.

### Recommendations

1. Government at state and local levels should establish and fund community based vocational centres that focus on woodwork and artistic craftsmanship, with modern tools and safety standards, and with transparent selection of beneficiaries.
2. Oil companies and development agencies should support craft-based empowerment as part of community development programmes by providing tool banks, workshop spaces and structured apprenticeship stipends, especially in high risk riverine communities.
3. Community leaders, youth organisations and security agencies should strengthen local conflict management, counselling and mentorship programmes so that skill training is combined with values formation and civic responsibility.
4. Training providers should integrate enterprise skills, product quality control and market linkages, including cooperatives that can negotiate bulk orders for school furniture, doors, windows and cultural products.
5. Continuous public enlightenment should be carried out on the dangers of violence, cultism and illegal refining, while showcasing successful youth artisans as role models to build positive social norms.

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