



Tropentag, September 16-18, 2026, hybrid conference

“Towards multi-functional agro-ecosystems
promoting climate resilient futures”

Rural development beyond agriculture: community governance and environmental citizenship in the Niger deltaagbonifo

JOHN AGBONIFO

Osun State University, Sociology, Nigeria

Abstract

Discussions of climate-resilient futures in the Global South often frame rural development primarily through agriculture and food production. Yet in many rural regions, especially those shaped by extractive industries, the central drivers of resilience lie outside agriculture itself. This paper examines how non-agricultural dimensions of rural development shape rural resilience in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. While rich in natural resources, decades of oil extraction have degraded ecosystems, disrupted traditional livelihoods, and weakened local development prospects in the region. In response, rural communities have developed alternative forms of collective organisation and governance to confront ecological damage and economic marginalisation. These include community environmental monitoring, youth and women’s associations, local dispute-resolution systems, and grassroots mobilisation for environmental justice. Such initiatives create institutional spaces through which communities negotiate resource access, demand accountability from corporations and the state, and maintain social cohesion in fragile ecological environments. Drawing on historical analysis and community-level evidence, the paper argues that these forms of social organisation constitute critical but under-recognised pillars of rural development. They function as mechanisms of resilience that help communities navigate environmental crises, governance gaps, and shifting political economies. Rather than being passive recipients of development interventions, rural populations actively construct local governance arrangements that sustain livelihoods and social stability. By foregrounding these non-agricultural dimensions of rural transformation, the study contributes to debates on multifunctional landscapes and climate-resilient futures. It suggests that sustainable rural development in extractive regions requires greater attention to community institutions, environmental governance, and participatory decision-making. Recognising these social foundations of resilience is essential for designing development strategies that are both locally grounded and globally relevant.

Keywords: Community governance, Niger Delta, Oil extraction, Resilience, rural development