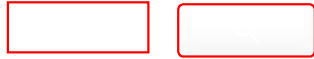


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How Presco changed our lives – Host communities

ON JULY 17, 2018 8:10 AM / IN [NEWS](#) /

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By EMMA AMAIZE & PEREZ BRISIBE

HOST communities in Edo and Delta states have spoken well of the Nigerian market leader for specialty fats and oils, Presco Plc, for turning around the lives of men and women in the localities and giving the people grounds to smile.

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Section of Sakponba Estate oil palm nursery

Community leaders and representatives, who spoke to *NDV*, maintained that the fully integrated agro-industrial establishment with oil palm plantations, palm oil mill, palm kernel crushing plant and vegetable oil refining and fractional plant, has been a source of blessing to the people, and they would want the various communities, governments of Delta and Edo states to support the company that produces excellent quality products to customer satisfaction for greater benefits to the people.

A leader of Ugbigun community in Orhiohmwon Local Government Area, Edo State, Mr. John Palmer, whose forefather originated from Igun community in Ethiope East Local Government Area, Delta State, said: “Presco is just two years old in the area (Ugbigun) and they have tried in terms of youth empowerment and job creation.”

Over 100 Ugbigun indigenes engaged – Palmer

“For now, in my community, over 100 persons made up of men and women have benefitted. They are new in that area, but have done a lot for us, including grading our road.

“The little problem we are having now is just noise over farmlands, which we believe is a normal thing but for now, in my area, the people are gradually adjusting because most of them now have jobs with the company, while

others upon being compensated, moved to other areas to continue with their farming,” Palmer said.

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He clarified that though his forefather was from Igun in Delta state, he went across the river to settle down in the present-day Ubigun, where he (Palmer) was born and attended Primary School

His words: “We in Ubigun community have always been under Orhionmwon Local Government Area right from the Mid-West era to the creation of defunct Bendel State and now Edo State. The Ubigun Primary School is being supervised by the Ministry of Education in Orhionmwon.”

...Provided contracts for locals, Pator Atoe, Orogho community

Speaking for Orogho community, Pastor Blessed Nosa Atoe, who represented the *Enojie* told *NDV*: “I was formerly the chairman of the Orogho Development Association before the Oba dissolved it. We have common boundary with Delta communities. Some of the ones close to us include Eku, Abraka and Orogun. Before the arrival of Presco in our area, criminality was on the increase amidst high rate of unemployment and food insufficiency.

“Also, the company has provided contracts for locals in the area with prompt payment upon the completion of such contracts. Anyone in the area claiming that the company has no positive impact on them, I would consider such a person as ungrateful.

“I have never heard of the name Ovre’Eku, I have only heard of the name Eku community, Igun, Abraka and a bunch of other communities which are closer to us.

No forceful entry in our area

“Before Presco started operation in the area, there were series of communications and meetings with us while I was in position as chairman. They told us of their plans before they came in, they did not come in with force, preference was given to the community in terms of jobs.

“Ivwebo is a community under the *Enojie* of Orogho. Ivwobo has a primary school called Ato Primary School. The people living there are farm settlers who were not chased out of their settlement. Even before Presco launched into that area, assessment was made, after the company carried out the assessment, many that were having crops on ground benefitted, according to the sizes of their farms and other things involved.

“So, Presco did not just walk into the place and start chasing people out of the community. I know that the very first time they went to access the area, they came to my place.

“The people of the area have at no time ever resisted the *Enojie* as their head, even when he calls on all community heads to see them in his palace, Ivwebo would be ably represented. I remember three years ago when *Enojie* did Igue festival, he toured round all the communities and he was welcomed warmly at Ivwebo,” he said.

Presco's activity speaks for it in Ivwebo– *Edevbie*

Mr Emmanuel Edevbie, a leader of Ivwebo community told our reporters: “I am a leader of Ivwebo community. I represent the Edo State Government and the *Enojie* in the community. Ivwebo is a name known in the government system; we have an electoral system there, a school and other government establishments. It is pronounced as Ivweborho by the Urhobos.

“The impact of Presco in the area is there to speak for itself. If I have the opportunity to approach the Delta State Government, I would have done so by

telling them that they should appreciate Presco for what they are doing in that axis,” he added.

80% of employees in Sakponba Estate are Deltans

Edevbie disclosed: “Sakponba Estate is owned by Presco and of the number of persons that have been employed in that area, about 80 per cent are from Delta State and I expect the state government and the Ethiope East Local Government Council, which most of the Delta workers come from, to appreciate this company because there would be no development when the people are not employed.

“And each time salary is paid, you see the boom in commercial activities at Eku market and if you go to Eku every morning when the workers are going to work, you would see a large number of Deltans leaving Eku to Edo State for work and this is just a fraction of the number of persons to be employed for this project. So, it is like an open door for both indigenes and non-indigenes of the place. The impact is immeasurable if you ask me,” he said.

Nobody drove us from our land

The community leader disagreed that the company forced people out of the area, saying: “There were consultations at some levels before the misapprehension, so the company pulled out, met us at Ivwebo, had series of meetings, then the Eku Traditional Council, Eku, Delta State, also invited them for similar meetings, they came with the chairman but the meeting met a deadlock as there was no mutual agreement and before they carry out any project, they normally embark on sensitisation of the people, especially as regards their High Conservation Area, for people to steer clear of such areas.”

According to him: “The people of Ivwebo were not chased away and there are people living there. Like I said earlier, we have a school there, a church and a borehole erected by the Edo State Government and a school built by New Cross Petroleum and I am the Community Liaison Officer, CLO. We are not having any problem with New Cross as well.

“In my community, Ivwebo, Presco has not tampered with any land there though Ivwebo is in their concession, and they had also acknowledged that they would come in to extend their farms because the community is in the middle of their Certificate of Occupancy, C of O, but that does not mean that we would not have a place to farm. Where they are now is the desert area and other unreserved area.

“Talking about compensation, yes, it has been paid. So many of the farmers if not all, have been compensated except those who were not on ground,” the community leader said.

Secretary-General of Ivwebo community, Mr. Robinson Ohwojeheri, who also spoke to *NDV*, said: “Presco should stay because they have actually impacted our communities and environs positively. Immediately Presco came in following the economic meltdown in the country, they did some employment, and in no time, I personally noticed that the market place that I used to pass has started booming, especially when the salaries of Presco staff are paid and the Eku people can testify to that.”

Iwevbo founder is from Eku- Ohwojeheri

“The company has employed Ivwebo people, who are firstly Eku people because the founder of Ivwebo is from Eku. He crossed over and founded the place, so by implication, the founder of Ivwebo crossed over from Eku to found the place.

“And I also want to appreciate the *Okarho* of Eku for his understanding because at a time, he was misled, but when he saw the goodness that the company is bringing down to Eku, himself and other elders of the community stopped listening to those against Presco,” he revealed.

Criminality reduced

Ohwojehri said: “They now realise that armed robbery and other forms of criminality have reduced. If you go to Eku now, you would see new

motorcycles. The people having worked in Presco have been able to save some money, buy new machines, and embark on transportation after the close of work. The Delta State Government should be happy about the presence of this company.

“I heard a woman who said she has been into farming for donkey years and she has not been able to change her mattress and buy a television, but for the few months she was employed by Presco, she has been able to buy new mattress, television and now pay her children’s’ school fees and this also does not stop her from her little farming activities. When I heard her story, I was elated,” he stated.

“Go to the Eku Police Post, they would tell you that since the presence of the company, the incidence of stealing has reduced to the barest minimum, so I would say that Presco has impacted us positively. Apart from that, we have people that have vehicles and equipment which are hired by the company for the transportation of workers, and other uses.

Farming can’t stop development

“It is also worthy of note to state here that farming cannot stop development and I cannot see reasons with those clamouring that they would not see garri to eat because development is coming to us,” he said.

Big relief to Obanakhoro community – Orogun

Mr. Jackson Orogun from Obanakhoro community in Orhionmwon, Edo State, stated categorically: “As far as Presco is concerned, they are a very nice company. The first time they came in, nobody understood their views, but to the best of my knowledge, Presco is a very good company and their coming has become a very big relief to so many people in terms of employment and other areas.

“I am a community representative of the *Enojie* or *Orogho* under the community Elders Council in Obanakhoro. At Presco, if we, indigenous

contractors and others, meet them for contract, they always stand by us and do it. So we have been living peacefully with them as regards this project. We have never had any fight with Presco.

“Presco has a new plantation called Sakponba Estate and I think Obanakhoro has the largest land in that estate. Presco has never done anything bad to us, we have been working peacefully with the company and as I speak with you now, they are all in the field working,” he stated.

With 6 companies like Presco, life will not be the same – Ojo

Another community leader from Iwevbo community, Chief Adjene Ojo, asserted: “Presco has really done well for us. The only issue we have is in the area of compensation. The company only paid compensation for crops on the land, but for persons like us, my father has up to 10 acres where people farm and when the company came to do the enumeration, my tenants were compensated, but I that own the land, the officer in charge told me that he is not paying for the land, this is the only area I see that did not go well with us.

“That aside, it is now that I know that when you finish school, there is opportunity for you to have employment because the word, employment, had died a natural death, especially in Delta State, but with Presco, you would see that they have room for various categories of people, both educated and uneducated.

People troop to Eku

“In nearby communities like Eku, if you see the population, it is much as people have been trooping in to see how they can get jobs. We did not even know that we had such population that are looking for jobs.

“This has also improved the society and environment. People even came from Warri, including Calabar. In short, if we can see six companies like Presco, I believe the problem of unemployment would be solved and at the same time,

the crime in the area has also reduced as prior to now, we have had cases of breaking and entry into people's houses to steal as little as garri.

"I reside in Eku in Delta State and I am from Ivwebo community. Not everybody in the community, however, has a job with Presco to feel the impact of the company. Some have land but do not have farm, people rent their land. Like in my area, they took land, for which people had earlier paid me rent, but I had to refund money to them, so in such cases, not everybody would be happy.

Nothing like Edo, Delta when Ivwebo was founded

"While in the defunct Bendel State, it was our forefathers that went to Iwevbo to found the place, but the land in question is an Edo land. But at the time, there was nothing like Edo and Delta states. As at then, there were people taking responsibility for the teachers in Ivwebo and same also applies during electoral process, but now that they have carved out the two states of Edo and Delta, boundary adjustment has not been made.

Why there is divergence

"There is impact of Presco in the area. But like the King of Abraka now, he has palm trees in the area, so now that Presco has taken the place, his own needs to be removed so that Presco can use the land; this is where you see crisis.

"Besides, to enter Abraka, there should be proper negotiation, that I do not know if they did, but in Eku, they came, in Ivwebo, they came, but I cannot tell in the case of Abraka. Also, some persons would feel they were not properly compensated, if not, everybody feels the impact, including those residing in Abraka with many also demanding to be employed.

Undercover from Eku to Sakponba state

With the buzz about Presco and employment index in Eku, one of our reporters joined the workers undercover from Eku to Sakponba Estate in Edo

State recently.

“The average day of a Presco staff starts from 5.30 am and ends at about 12 noon from Monday to Sunday depending on the department/unit of the staff.

Presco buses arrive the various bus stops at Eku, Samagidi and Sanubi, all in Delta State and Obanikhoru, Orogho communities in Edo State. A huge chunk of the staff reside in Eku community, which has eight buses conveying workers to Sakponba Estate, 35 minutes away from Eku main town.

The staff, most of whom work at the Palm field, are grouped into gangs (units) with a headman/headwoman overseeing their daily activities. Gangs are made up of 30 workers and are placed under a Division, which has an average of 400 workers. The headman/headwoman reports to the Technical Officer answerable to the Estate Manager.

Commencement/End of day activities

From the bus stop, the workers are dropped off at their various muster points for onward dispersal as gangs to their respective work outlets which starts at about 8 a.m.

At the muster points, each worker records his/her presence for the day's job by entering their thumbprint on a biometric device, which is monitored by a biometric officer stationed at the various muster points in the estate. This is done alongside a headcount by the headman/headwoman of the respective gangs in a bid to check absenteeism by the workers.

The workload of the workers includes slashing, ring weeding, fertiliser application and wire collaring.

At the end of the day, the workers after clocking out using the thumb printing machine, are conveyed back to their respective bus stops with the company buses.

Another empowerment for locals

The bus providers, mainly people from the communities, are paid by Presco for conveying the workers to and from work. This is a goodwill gesture aimed at empowering people from the community.

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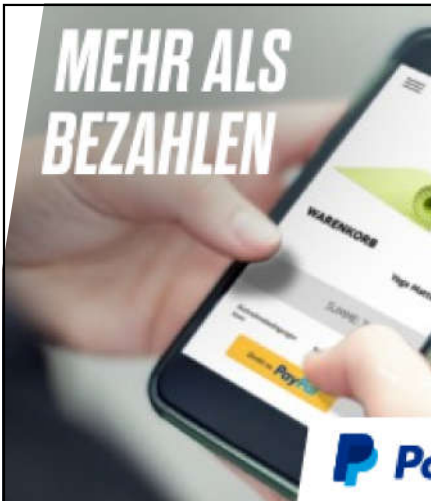
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