



## Militancy and oil wars in Africa: The Niger delta experience in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Since the 1990s, oil violence in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has constituted festering sores on the thumbs of the Nigerian state, the Multinational Oil Companies (MNOCs), and the Niger Delta communities. The recent resumption of attacks against the oil industry in the Niger Delta and the resultant decrease in oil supply have reminded the world that the unrest there is not a problem for Nigeria alone. Indeed, the business of militancy, involves players far beyond the shores of Nigeria. After decades of environmental abuse and human degradation coupled with unfulfilled promises of redress on the part of the State and Transnational oil companies; the agitations of the Niger Deltas have taken a violent and militant dimension. These militant activities have impacted gravely on national economy and security thus prompting the state to launch military attacks on the region intermittently. However, such military responses have done little to curtail the militant agitations in the Niger Delta and the Federal Government itself is far from winning the war. It is important to note however, that the Nigerian state has implemented some constitutional and institutional measures as deliberate efforts geared towards the resolution of the region's unrest; ranging from the establishment of Niger Delta Commission, Ministry of Niger Delta to Amnesty. All these efforts too have not brought the anticipated peace. It is against this background that the study aims to enhance understanding of the factors that have contributed to violent conflict in the Niger Delta so that the development partners and government can take them into account in strategy formation and program development. This paper is anchored on the Frustration Aggression Theory to buttress the militant and violent dimension of the Niger Delta crisis. Based on secondary research and discussion with experts on the Niger Delta, the study found that the intersection of (a) structural factors that make the region particularly vulnerable to instability; (b) specific factors that contribute to the political struggle and drive the violence; and, (c) factors that exacerbate the conflict by making violence and crime profitable result in the region experiencing violent conflict. Arising from these therefore, it is our recommendation that the federal government should urgently and comprehensively tackle the underlying economic and social problems of the Niger Delta region so as to prevent the nation from total collapse, civil war and bankruptcy.

**Keywords:** militancy, oil wars, delta experience

### Introduction

Oil has become a dominant element within the power capability profile of any nation. In spite of the huge funds accruing from the oil and gas sector of the Nigerian economy, the Nigerian state has not been able to meet up with the expectations of the citizenry. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, reputed to be one of the most richly endowed deltas in the world, contributes about 80 per cent of Nigeria's national wealth. Whereas the oil produced in the Niger delta is the life blood of the Nigerian economy, oil has failed to translate to regional prosperity and development in the Niger delta. Nigeria's oil belt, the Niger Delta region is embroiled in resistance against the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies. The region is generally restive, with pockets of insurrection and armed rebellion. Decades of oil exploitation, environmental degradation and state neglect has created an impoverished, marginalized and exploited citizenry which after more than two decades produced a resistance of which the youth has been a vanguard. A regime of state repression and corporate violence has further generated popular and criminal violence, lawlessness, illegal appropriations and insecurity. The Niger Delta is today a region of intense hostilities, violent confrontations and criminal violence. It is pervaded by a proliferation of arms and institutions and agencies of violence ranging from the

Nigerian Armed Forces to community, ethnic and youth militias, armed gangs and networks, pirates, cultists and robbers. An economy of conflict has emerged characterised with an intense, violent and bloody struggle for the appropriation of oil resources and benefits from the oil economy and a thriving market of illegal trading and smuggling of arms, crude and refined oil. The Niger Delta, in southern Nigeria, is a paradox, rich in resources but poor and racked by insecurity. A combination of local grievances over oil and gas pollution, infrastructure, poverty, unemployment, the region's share of oil revenues and its marginalisation in national politics led to protests that evolved into a full-blown insurgency in 2006. That rebellion, waged by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), severely disrupted Nigeria's oil industry, slashing earnings from its exports, the country's major revenue source. The June 2009 presidential amnesty for the militants ended the insurgency, restored some stability and created an opportunity for the government to address the multiple grievances and demands at their roots. That opportunity was lost to political inertia and bad governance. Many issues that triggered the conflict remain largely unaddressed. The presidency of Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015), the first national leader from the region, stipends and training for the former militants and arrangements with insurgency leaders kept a lid on local

agitation and conflict.

According to International Crisis Group (2015), the amnesty program, a key recommendation of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, was inaugurated by President Umaru Yar'Adua on 25 June 2009. The amnesty offer and retraining and reintegration opportunities encouraged the insurgent groups to disarm; over 30,000 purported members signed up between October 2009 and May 2011. Since then, the amnesty office has worked to reintegrate them into productive society, primarily by placing (and sponsoring) them in vocational and higher education courses in Nigeria and abroad. As of March 2015, 15,451 had graduated, while 3,482 were still in training. About 11,200 (37 per cent of those who registered) were awaiting placement in academic or vocational training facilities and receiving a 65,000 naira (about \$350) monthly stipend.

With Jonathan's defeat in the March 2015 elections, the amnesty program became threatened and patronage to former militant leaders were terminated, local discontent became deepened, and the region eventually relapsed into another violence with the emergence of Niger Delta Avengers blowing crude oil pipelines and the state trying again to use military force against the militants.

### **Theoretical Framework**

There are many theories that could be applied in this research but Frustration Aggression theory has a better capture on Nigeria's Niger Delta militancy.

This theory explains why people become frustrated and aggressive when their goals and aspiration are not achieved. In 1939, researchers at Yale University Institute of Human Relation published a small monograph that has had a tremendous impact directly or indirectly, almost on all behavioural sciences. Led by John Dollard, Leonard Doob, Neal Miller, O.H. Mower, and Robert Sear (1939), the group attempted to account for virtually all human aggression with a few basic ideas. Most of the studies investigating the causes and consequences of aggression in the immediately following decades were oriented, to some extent, at least towards issues raised by the Yale's group analysis. Frustration can create aggressive inclination even when they are not arbitrary or aimed at the subject personally.

According to Maslow (1941), the usual definitions of frustration are in terms simply of not getting what one desires, of interference with a wish, or with a gratification. Such a definition fails to make the distinction between a deprivation which is unimportant to the organism (easily substituted for, with few serious after-effects), and, on the other hand, a deprivation which is at the same time, a threat to the personality, that is, to the life goals of the individual, to his defensive system, to his self-esteem or to his feeling of security. It is our contention that only a threatening deprivation has the multitude of effects (usually undesirable) which are commonly attributed to frustration in general.

Militants activities in Nigeria's Niger Delta therefore is mostly motivated by frustration created by deprivation and a threat to the personality, that is, to the life goals of individual or a group of people in the region.

The region derives its name from being situated at the mouth of the River Niger. Before the creation of the Nigerian state, economic activities of the Niger Delta in pre-colonial days entailed mainly export of salt and fish to the hinterland. In the 18th century, when the slave trade was at its peak, the region was West Africa's largest slave exporting area, and this was

enhanced by its proximity to the sea. Slave traders, however, diverted to palm oil trade in the 19th century when the slave trade declined. The Niger Delta, the delta of the Niger River in Nigeria, is a 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 (Olushola, 2013).

### **Why Militancy and Oil Wars Have Persisted in Niger Delta**

A broad array of domestic forces has been blamed for the Niger Delta violence. Domestic forces suggest interplay of local conditions, experiences, processes, and relationships that have fuelled widespread frustrations, resentment, anger and violence. I will briefly focus on these forces, at least to show that the violence manifesting in the swamps and creeks of the Niger Delta today, are not occurring by happenstance. Instead, like a house is built brick upon brick, the violence have been building up for several decades.

### **Economic Exploitation and Exclusion**

Scholars (Offiong 1980; Ikein 1990; Olorode 1998; Iyayi 2000; Okonta 2000; Okonta and Douglas 2003; Ukeje 2001; Watts 2009) have argued that decades of oil exploitation in the Niger Delta has transformed Nigeria's political economy making it one of the most resource-dependent nations on earth. Yet, instead of turning Nigeria into one of the most prosperous states on the African continent, oil production has accentuated the socio-political and economic woes of the oil-rich Niger Delta region. These scholars and many others argue that it is the disparity between the wealth appropriated from the region and the economic marginalization of indigenes of the region that accounts for the conflict. For example, a World Bank Panel report on the Niger Delta observed that despite substantial resource flows to the government, and significant natural resource endowments, the people of the Niger Delta are destitute. It described the Niger Delta as an "iconic representation of destitution amongst the possibility of wealth" (World Bank 2007). It observed that the Niger Delta people are excluded from the wealth generated by their resource-rich region and the region having the highest unemployment rate in Nigeria substantiates this. A 2006 UNDP report also noted that remote rural communities in the Niger Delta have limited economic opportunities and often cannot access employment benefits from the oil conglomerates because they lack capital resources or skills.

Shell, the largest multinational corporation active in the region, disagrees. Instead, it implicates political, social, and environmental concerns as the key factors that provoke militancy in the Niger Delta (SPDC 2007). Curiously, Shell subsumes economic issues such as resource control and resource distribution under political factors arguing that this is complicated by a high population growth rate that puts pressure on land through over-farming, deforestation, and soil erosion; the emergence of a new generation of well-educated youth attuned to the disparity between urban and rural areas and convinced that multinational oil companies (MNOCs) have the capability to redress this gap; and communities that believe that the best way of extracting a greater share of oil wealth is by holding MNOCs to ransom. Shell, however, does not address the charge of economic exploitation, which many scholars, militants, and rights

groups blame as partly responsible for the violence. For these researchers, the gap between the billions of dollars MNOCs appropriate each year as oil surplus or profit and the privation of the peasants who are forced out of their traditional homesteads and economic activity by oil-induced pollution, describes economic exploitation. Also, Shell does not address the wide scale corruption among Nigeria's political class and the misappropriation and misapplication of oil revenue that has bloated the bank accounts of a few while the majority of the Niger Delta inhabitants languish in poverty. Finally, it also does not address the role MNOCs play in courting, promoting, maintaining, and reproducing corruption and graft as rational business and profit-building strategies. Clearly, the problem in the Niger Delta demonstrates how total dependence on export-focused non-renewable resource extraction can stifle human development, impoverish local communities, and provoke and exacerbate violent conflict (Osuoka 2003; Higgins 2009).

According to the UNDP (2006) while the Niger Delta oil wealth accounts for the bulk of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings (amounting to about \$231 billion between 1970 and 1999), these vast revenues have not translated to positive human development outcomes for the people. Higgins (2009) and the International Crisis Group (2006) argue that the slow pace of systemic reforms and lack of jobs, water, schools, electricity and clinics in some parts of the Niger Delta have not only encouraged militancy in the region but have also boosted support for the insurgents among local populations. Higgins (2009) argues that the federal government support for development in the Niger Delta (both politically and financially) is in itself problematic. One of the mechanisms through which the federal government has attempted to stimulate economic development in the Niger Delta is the NDDC. The NDDC along with many other development planning institutions have failed because they are impositions from the federal government and adopt a top down approach to development planning and implementation. The amnesty program may also suffer same fate as local communities and militant groups appear to have had no say in determining the composition of members of the amnesty committee. They also appear to have no say in the types of programs, activities, and services performed by the committee. Like other institutional responses to the problems of the Niger Delta, there is the danger that local communities and militant groups that historically have experienced marginalization and deprivation may perceive the amnesty as a political party agenda designed to pursue the aims and ends of the ruling People's Democratic Party.

### **Social and Political Exclusion**

Since independence, national political power has revolved around the "big three" ethnic nationalities: Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. Thus, political access for minorities until now was closed. Moreover, elections since 1999 have been widely rigged in the Niger Delta states and most of these fraudulent results are sustained by violence and threats resulting in huge democratic deficits. Because the people are economically exploited and deprived of the opportunity to alter state economic and social policy through the instrumentality of elections, they are bitter and angry. Because many Niger Delta youths are convinced that formal institutions and local customary institutions (particularly the system of kingship) have failed and are incapable of redressing grievances, they have turned to violence and

militancy to challenge the government and extort money and oil from the oil conglomerates (World Bank 2007). Shell (2007) agrees. It notes that at the social level "anger is growing and increasing militancy is overthrowing traditional social order in some communities" leading to a situation where a "complex and dynamic fragmentation of communities characterized by frequent power shifts between factions" makes it virtually impossible to redress some of the grievances of the communities including the payment of compensation for damages caused by oil spill and land acquisition. Thus, it is the inter-ethnic strife in the region that disrupts the efficient allocation of resources and welfare especially to that segment of the population that is in dire need. While this may be true, Shell fails to explain what generates inter-ethnic strife in the first place and the role it plays in provoking and maintaining such strife. For example, Osaghae (1998), Okonta and Douglas (2003) and Okonofua (forthcoming) argue that the oil companies orchestrate the inter-ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta in a modern day attempt at "indirect rule." The strategy is to encourage oil-bearing communities to dissipate energy in fighting over which community or communities should benefit from specific welfare and rehabilitation projects to the point where no community benefits. Thus, the Ijaw/Ilaje conflict and the Urhobo/Itsekiri conflict, for example, results from MNOCs stoking ethnic fires to facilitate oil production and expand its profit base.

### **Environmental Degradation**

According to the World Bank (2007), oil exploration and production has generated serious environmental damages at several levels: land, water, and air pollution, depleted fishing grounds and territories, and the disappearance of wetlands. These serious environmental conditions have provoked serious hardships for local peoples whose sources of livelihood has been severely impacted. Many local populations have been displaced from ancestral lands and local resources and thrust into dependent relationships in overpopulated cities with no skills, craft or vocation to sustain them. The environmental devastation of the Delta has put pressure on local communities who continue to suffer from poor or inequitable land use practices (UNDP, 2006). Existing measures to counterbalance the environmental damage are at best haphazard and inadequate and grossly underestimate the enormity of damage to the Niger Delta ecology. This chronic underestimation which translates to gross nonchalance is a major source of community discontent and violence (World Bank 2007).

Shell agrees that environmental pollution including oil spills is one of the main grievances of Niger Delta communities. However, it blames the spills on sabotage. According to Shell, between 1988 and 1994, about 28 percent of the spills at its operation areas were due to sabotage. By 1994, oil spills caused by sabotage accounted for 35 percent of all oil spills in its area of influence and this figure is increasing. Increases in sabotage-induced oil spills results mainly from the operations of the militant groups who target oil facilities. While Shell is right to highlight damages caused by warring groups, it does not address that percentage of oil spill that results from the routine business of oil production. It also does not address pollutions caused by effluent and other wastes it deliberately discharges into the environment, or spills caused by defective and obsolete equipment. Studies show that much of the Niger Delta violence results from

grievances over pollution (Naanem 1995; Gbadegesin 1997; Eteng 1996). For example, Eteng (1997:4) argues that: Oil exploration and exploitation has over the last four decades impacted disastrously on the socio-physical environment of the Niger Delta oil-bearing communities, massively threatening the subsistent peasant economy and the environment and hence the entire livelihood and basic survival of the people. Up to 1.5 million tons of oil, which amounts to more than 50 times the pollution recorded in the Exxon Valdez tanker disaster, has been spilt in the Niger Delta over the past 50 years (Brown 2006). Quoting a panel of independent experts from the World Wildlife Federation UK, the World Conservation Union, and the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, Brown (2006) observed that damage to the fragile mangrove forests over the past 50 years amounts to a catastrophic oil spill occurring every year in one of the world's most important ecosystems.

Apart from threatening rare species including primates, fish, turtles, and birds, the pollution is destroying the livelihoods of many of the 30 million people living in the region, damaging crops and fuelling the upsurge in violence. The Niger Delta which is home to 7,000sq of the world's remaining 9,000sq of mangrove and some 60 percent of West Africa's fish stock is now one of the five most polluted spots on the planet. Brown argued that the impact of oil and gas drilling especially pollution was a significant contributor to the violence and instability in the Niger Delta. This situation is worsened by the people's perception that oil companies are complacent or slow to act on legitimate complaints. For example, while local peasants were groaning under the yoke of pollution, which is unaddressed by Shell and the other oil companies, Shell alone boasted profits of \$22.94bn (£13.12bn) and extracted 900,000 barrels of crude oil a day in 2005 from its activities in the Niger Delta (Brown 2006). Environmentalists accuse Shell of using obsolete equipment to rake in billions of dollars in oil profit while paying little attention to how its ageing pipes steadily leak millions of gallons of crude oil into the pristine waters of the Niger Delta.

### **Poor Infrastructure and Service Delivery**

A World Bank Panel Report (2007) describes the situation of the Niger Delta as "akin to a human emergency" and the UNDP (2006:15) describes the infrastructure and social services available as "generally deplorable." The neglect of infrastructure in the Niger Delta is either blamed on the difficult terrain or the intransigence of local communities. In either case, the neglect criminally deprives local populations of access to fundamental social services. For example, the International Crisis Group (2007) observes that the town of Edeoha in Rivers state lacks basic services such as water, healthcare, education, electricity, and jobs. Also, the presence of the state is minimal with no local government office, a primary school that lacks chairs and desks, and a hospital that is twenty kilometers away and lacks medicine and equipment. This situation exists in the majority of communities in the Niger Delta and draws the flak of community leaders and militant organizations who insist that oil majors must contribute to the development of the region.

Oil companies often argue that some of the complaints of the communities, especially those that demand that they play more active roles in the development of the communities, are illegitimate. They argue that what communities demand is that they become some kind of alternative government and provide services the government ought to provide (Ukeje

2001). They argue that this would amount to double taxation and erode their profitability since various legislations enacted by the federal government particularly the Petroleum Decree No. 51 of 1969, the 1978 Land Use Act, and the 1999 Production Sharing Contracts Act established the general frameworks for the exploitation of oil resources including the applicable royalties, tax regimes, and the manner of allocation of costs between oil companies and government. The law provides for the payment of a flat rate of 50% tax on petroleum profits by MNOC's, and sets different royalty regimes, depending on the water depth in which the operation is carried out ranging from 12% for depths of 200-500m to 0% for depths in excess of 1000m. Operations in inland basins attract a flat royalty of 10% (Pengassan 2009). Shell also claims it pays compensation to the communities for the surface rights of all land acquired in the course of its exploration and production activities, and for ecological damage due to its operations. It says its compensation rates are fair and equitable and that all parties including the communities are happy and satisfied (Okonta and Douglas 2003).

This position has been severely challenged by the communities. For example, Shell admitted that between 1973 and 1993, it extracted 634 million barrels of oil from its ninety-six oil wells in Ogoni alone. It claims that before it withdrew from the area in January 1993 following community resistance, Ogoni accounted for 1.5 percent of its Nigerian operations.

Ogoni land is only about 400 square miles and from here Shell is estimated to have extracted oil worth over \$30 billion. Shell claims that it spends about \$20 million each year on community development projects in Ogoni and other Niger Delta communities, a claim local NGOs and rights groups hotly contest. In fact, these NGOs insist that between 1970 and 1988, Shell spent a paltry \$200,000, or approximately 0.000007 percent of the value of oil extracted from the region on community development projects (Saro-Wiwa 1992). Despite these counter claims, Shell's argument brings into sharp relief the role government (local, state, and federal) play in the violence. We can briefly discuss the government's role from three directions: federalism, corruption, and poor governance/political instability.

### **Federalism**

Sagay (2008) and Akiba (2002) blame the Niger Delta violence on the nature of Nigerian federalism. They argue that the crisis in the region is not only over environmental justice and resource appropriation and distribution but also a struggle to create a stable and equitable socio-political system. The communities through the militant groups and other rights and socio-cultural groups seek redress within a federal structure they see as firmly stacked against them in terms of revenue allocation and the parlous state of infrastructure in the region. For this reason, the crisis in the Niger Delta involves much more than agitations over ecological damages, developmental issues, or security issues. Instead, the crisis results from a combination of all these and is complicated by the struggle for a true federal and fiscal structure (Akinyemi, 1979).

By any standard of assessment, Nigeria's federal system (which has undergone numerous changes since independence in 1960) has been unable to manage and contain the nations countless ethnic, sub-ethnic, regional, and religious cleavages. Some analysts argue that the federal system has

never been properly and fully established and therefore remains a work in progress. These scholars advocate for the incorporation of fairness, justice, and equity into Nigeria's federal structure as a way of dealing with perceived shortcomings (Suberu 2001). To these scholars, then, Nigeria's federal structure has not failed; instead, it has never been properly or objectively applied. For example, Suberu (2001) argues that various military and civilian administrations have manipulated the federal system for their own gains in disregard for national development or the reduction or elimination of ethnic, religious, or regional tensions. Instead, ethno-religious cleavages have enhanced the power and influence of the federal government thereby distorting Nigeria's federal structure.

Other scholars disagree (Osaghae 1998; Sagay 2008; Akiba 2004; David-West 2002; Nwabueze 2001). They argue that Nigeria's federal structure privileges the majority ethnic groups, is responsible for Nigeria's political instability, and exacerbates corruption, nepotism, and conflict. David-West (2002) for example, argues that Nigeria's vaunted federalism is at best a "parody of federalism. It is to all intents and purposes unitarism dressed out in an elegant facade of federalism." One proof of this is the recurring controversy over resource control.

Another proof is the country's contentious revenue sharing practices. For example, the federal government allocates to itself a disproportionate amount of national revenues leaving the states and local governments with barely enough to pay salaries and wages and to maintain political patronages. This disparity has the unfortunate effect of increasing the competition by the major ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo) for control of the central government and its vast resources to the detriment of the minority ethnic groups some of which are the storehouses of the nation's natural resource wealth. Thus, the federal structure with an allocative rather than derivative revenue sharing formula is partly responsible for the lack of economic and infrastructural development in the Niger Delta region and the political marginalization of its people.

### **Corruption**

Corruption has been shown to cost the Nigerian government as much as 60 percent of its tax revenues and increases with the expansion of the public sector (Okonofua and Ugiagbe 2004;

USAID 2006). When at the highest level of government power is concentrated in a few hands, the corruption bug quickly contaminates the entire society, including the judiciary, legislature, police, military, school, and medical workers. For example, following the death of Nigeria's late maximum dictator Gen. Sani Abacha, over US\$ 5 billion was recovered from secret overseas accounts belonging to him and his family. It is estimated that between December 1993 and June

1998, over \$10 billion was stolen by Gen. Abacha and his associates. And these funds were revenues accruing to the state from oil production. When Abacha took over the reins of government in 1993, he commissioned the renowned economist Dr. Pius Okigbo to examine the finances of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) during the Babangida years. The Babangida administration (1985-1993) is believed to have turned corruption (and advance fee fraud) into an industry and in the process appropriated billions of dollars of oil revenue for himself (Okonta and Douglas 2003). While

submitting his report, Okigbo accused Babangida and members of his government of gross corruption. According to him: Between September 1988 and 30 June 1994, US\$12.2 billion of the \$12.4 billion [in the dedicated accounts] was liquidated in less than six years ... they were spent on what could neither be adjudged genuine high priority nor truly regenerative investment; neither the president nor the Central Bank Governor accounted to anyone for these massive extra-budgetary expenditures ... these disbursements were clandestinely undertaken while the country was openly reeling with a crushing external debt overhang (Fayemi 1995).

Losses like this that are due to corruption total more than Nigeria's foreign debt and corruption diverts foreign investment, reduce valuable expenditure on social sectors (roads, bridges, health and education), leads to bogus capital projects, reduced asset life, and undermines the creation of a professional, meritocratic civil service (Okonofua and Ugiagbe 2004). Alassane Ouattara (2001) argues that an environment prone to corruption is one where public officials are not accountable for their actions, where law does not exist, and where the respect for basic human rights is breached. This implies the vicious circle whereby poor governance has kept the formal private sector small, public institutions weak and corrupt, and rules and regulations complex, inequitable, and arbitrarily enforced. In such an environment, social decay spreads and the young who have neither political nor economic opportunities become disillusioned. These persons are left only with four choices: to join the corrupt, to go abroad, to hide in the informal sector, or to violently challenge what they perceive to be the source of their problems. The Niger Delta militant appears to fall into the fourth category.

### **Political Instability and Poor Governance**

Scholars have argued that political instability in Nigeria is partly responsible for the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta region and by implication, the Niger Delta violence (Ake 1996; Ukeje 2001). Beginning with the Gowon administration (1966-1975) to the present, governmental instability, especially the lack of continuity in government policy, has had adverse effects on the economic and social development of the region. For example, there has been only two recorded civilian to civilian transfer of power in Nigeria since its independence in 1960. Apart from the Obasanjo-Yar'Adua transition in 2007 and the Yar'Adua (Jonathan)-Jonathan transition in 2011, every transition in Nigeria has been predicated on a military coup or midwived by a military regime.

Military governments typically begin by suspending the constitution, closing all airports, seaports, and borders, and suspending the policies of the past administration while hastily contriving new policy directions. In furtherance of their goals, they dismiss all or key government officials responsible for policy implementation and replace them with people new to the demands of such offices or too inexperienced to function effectively. This typically disrupts the smooth operation of government and kills off vital development projects crucial to the nation's economic and socio-political survival. Changes in policy concerning the distribution of oil revenue between the federal, state, and local government provides one example of policy disruption due to infrequent undemocratic governmental changes. Another example is the various agencies established by

different administrations to speed up development in the Niger Delta. In every material fact, the functions of these agencies such as Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC), Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF), the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF), and the Ministry of Niger Delta overlap each other and exist most profoundly to launder the image of government and act as conduit pipes through which the government purse is drained by corrupt officials.

### **Ideology**

Niger Delta militants accuse government and oil companies of misapplication and misappropriation of oil funds to the neglect of the communities and people. They challenge not only the prevailing revenue sharing formula but also the political structure and its mechanisms for the allocation of power. Thus, the agitations of the communities and militants are first and foremost based in ideology. Two central issues constitute the ideological basis of the Niger Delta struggle: self-determination and resource control (Osaghae *et al* 2007). Self-determination involves the right of the Niger Delta people (or any distinct nationality for that matter) to live together in “its own way, determine its own political fate, preserve its own affairs and develop itself or even democratize as it may deem fit” (Okwu-Okafor 1994). It relates to the “right or freedom of a people that are subordinated, oppressed, dominated, colonized or even marginalized to assert and constitute themselves into a separate state” (Osaghae *et al* 2007). The right to self-determination devolves from the Nigerian constitution. In section 3 (c) the constitution confers rights to individuals to freely form associations and to take steps to preserve group integrity and personal liberty. Self-determination, in this context, implies the right of a people to associations that are spatially distinct with clear geographic, social, cultural, and political markings. Both the United Nations Charter on Human Rights and the African Charter on Human Rights also guarantee this right. The right to self-determination assures that cultural, religious, and linguistic minorities and peoples can strive for liberation from structures and institutions that subordinate, oppress, and marginalize them. The implication of this is that Niger Delta militants consider the Niger Delta people an oppressed, dominated, stifled, and exploited group who must be liberated if not by peaceful means, then by violence. Self-determination translates to self-existence, self-management, self-development, and control over resources that inhere in the region. However, the government and other political stakeholders interpret self-determination as a clamour for separate and independent existence, and hence, must be brutally suppressed. But self-determination or autonomy does not necessarily mean separate and independent existence; rather, it is a desire for cultural autonomy, ethnic rights, political representation and inclusion, justice, and development (Osaghae *et al* 2007). Irrespective of how it is defined, the right or freedom to self-determine has driven numerous peoples all over the world, to mobilize, solidarize, build nationalism and to organize resistance through popular movements and institutions of violence. Also, the world over, the issue of self-determination is ideologically linked to the question of group identity. In the Niger Delta this identity is deeply etched in collective experiences of oppression, marginalization, and discrimination. And as has happened in other parts of the

world, discrimination-defined difference or “otherness” have provoked fierce and violent agitations and led to the likelihood of a potentially devastating civil war in Nigeria.

### **Effects of militancy in the Niger Delta on sustainable development Shortfall in production:**

The Niger Delta conflict has worsened with increased pipeline vandalism, kidnappings and militant takeovers of oil facilities since 2005. The consequential instability has caused a significant amount of short fall in production. The Nigeria’s effective oil production capacity was estimated to be around 2.7million barrels per day (bbl/d) but ranged between 1.8million to 2.1million bbl/d as a result of the crisis. (Akinbobola in Ojatorotu,op cit; Nwogwugwu,op cit;29).

**Capital Flight:** The militant uprising in the Niger Delta equally encourages capital flight. Capital flight no doubt has a multiplier effect on any economy. It impedes business investment, economic growth and productivity, spurs inflation, etc. This ugly scenario leads to low economic activities and have even swelled up the unemployed army in the country. Put differently, it inhibits the creation of multi-million naira projects that will inject fresh capital to the polity, create jobs and improve the standard of living of the citizenry. (Kimiebi, 2010; Ejibunu, op cit: 21).

**Unemployment:** Although the region is well endowed with intelligent human resources, it has the highest illiteracy and unemployment rates in Nigeria. Statistics show that while 76% of Nigerian children attend primary school, this level drops to 30-40% in some parts of the Niger Delta. Unemployment rate in the region is reported to be 30% (Uyigie and Agho, cited in Odoemene,op cit: 129). This is because of the low skills syndrome leading to the unemployability of the region’s people. Again, change in means of livelihood from natural sectors to non-natural sectors due to the degraded and devastated environment has equally affected the people adversely (Odoemene,op cit).

**Poverty:** The region that produces this amount of wealth has nothing but poverty to show for this huge contribution to the economy. The cost of goods and services in the Niger Delta are quite high compared to other parts of the country because of the presence of oil business activities thereby birthing a high cost of living in the region. This is at the detriment of the local peoples because the more costly the prices of goods and services, the more the local people are impoverished. An unfortunate aspect of this situation is the fact that Niger Delta indigenes are seldom employed by the oil businesses operating in the area, save for menial/low cadre positions (Odoemene,op cit:128).

**Insecurity and emigration:** Insecurity itself breeds divestment as nobody will be prepared to risk his life-saving in ventures which he is not sure to be alive to reap the fruits of his labor. (Epelle in Ojatorotu,op cit.) With divestment also comes emigration. Most European governments have declared Niger Delta a high-risk area and evacuated its citizens living there. Due to the continuing and festering crisis situation in the Niger Delta, numerous foreign companies are pulling out daily from the region and foreign workers are retreating to their native countries. A notable example is the case of Julius Berger, one of the foremost foreign construction firms in the country, which has

abandoned most of its contract jobs due to the persistent cases of kidnapping and abduction of its staffs. (Agbo cited Kimiebi, op cit.). Foreign tourists no longer consider the region a veritable attractive spot in their itinerary. Even the indigenes themselves especially the high net-worth types now live in Abuja and Lagos preferring to visit the area unannounced (ibid.)

**Social deprivation:** The following could be regarded as the peculiar condition of the Niger Delta child: a. Impoverished, hungry and unkempt b. Malnourished and neglected. Mostly out of school as a result of incessant crises and street hawker. d. So depressed as a result of the sense of being hated by other federating units. e. Insecure in the face of invading forces. f. Patriotic but sees no reason to be nationalistic g. Grossly unhappy with his fatherland. Molested. Potentials of being recruited into militant groups. Cannot compete favourably with his counterparts from other zones (Okafor *et al* in Ojaborotu op cit 120).

**Abuse of cultural values and mores:** The legendary „respect for elders“ in African societies has also been largely truncated in most Niger Delta communities. As a result, the typical Niger Delta youth sees the elders as corrupt, inept and the epitome of colossal failure: who have nothing to show for the resources from the region while the resources were ferreted to build skyscrapers and overhead bridges in Lagos and Abuja,...an era where a massive oil spillage with untold environmental consequences could be hushed up with a paltry compensation sum of N5, 000 (5,000 naira/U.S. \$25) and a bottle of gin. This is the quintessential era of the elder that is best forgotten... [It] also explains why in every conflict, particularly in the Niger-Delta, the youths are more likely to hold on to a viewpoint that contrasts with those of their elders (in Odoemene, 2011),

#### **Efforts so far made by the federal government of Nigeria to ameliorate the problems of the Niger-Delta Region**

Since Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the federal government of Nigeria had made the following impressionistic efforts at ameliorating the problems of the Niger-Delta Region:

(1) The first attempt at addressing the backwardness, poverty and neglect in the Niger-Delta Region from 1956 when oil exploration and exploitation started found expression in the establishment of the Niger-Delta Development Board (NDDDB) in 1959 by the Colonial Administration. Unfortunately, NDDDB's assignment suffered major setback with the onset of the Nigerian Civil War in 1967 as the board became functionally otiosified.

(2) In 1993, the federal government of Nigeria established the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in line with the recommendations of The Belgore Commission. OMPADEC suffered from lack of planning and collapsed leaving numerous unfinished projects. Eventually, OMPADEC failed to solve the problems in the Niger Delta Region, thereby necessitating the need for the federal government to return to the drawing table in order to improve the situation.<sup>32</sup>

(3) In 2000, the federal government established the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) amidst opposition from activists in the region that the commission would not be accountable to the communities, and would suffer from mismanagement and corruption. Some Niger-Delta residents

are already criticizing the NDDC, while the commission's staff had been complaining of inadequate funding. In 2004, NDDC prepared a Draft Master-Plan for the region, which was estimated to cost US\$2.9 billion over a fifteen year period. Unfortunately, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) rejected NDDC and criticized the commission on the grounds that it is: "a channel for further looting of the meagre sums of money allocated to the development of the Niger-Delta Region". As if (MEND) was prophesizing, Nigerians were recently astonished to hear that the chairman of the board gave the sum of 800 million Naira (Nigerian currency), an equivalent of US\$5.1 million to a witch-doctor to assist him consolidate his position as the chairman of the board, and one wonders how a paid employee was able to raise such a huge sum of money. From all available information, the effect of NDDC is yet to be felt by the people of the Niger-Delta Region.

(4) In 2009, the federal government established the Ministry of Niger Delta to handle the infrastructural development of the region. So far and unfortunately too, adequate financial allocation has not been made to the ministry and the implications of this is that the ministry may fail woefully like its predecessors if adequate fund is not given to it.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Massive infrastructural and human capital development of the region must be undertaken jointly by the state and federal governments and the oil companies operating in the area. Empowerment opportunities should be expanded to absorb trained and qualified youths from the area. Planning, implementation as well as monitoring options and principles should be evolved to guide the committee in delivering its services. It is believed that the findings and recommendations of this study will aid the policy makers to ensure that the Federal Government Amnesty Programme surely yield the desired dividend namely sustainable peace and progress in the Niger Delta Region and the Nigeria nation at large.
2. The Federal government should mobilize and mandate relevant intelligence agencies to comb the Niger Delta states and mop up hidden or unsundered arms and ammunitions. Perhaps, what the Federal government should have done at the beginning of the amnesty period was to have persuaded the militants to lead security operatives to their respective armouries, instead of convincing them to surrender their weapons themselves. Clearly, this created a security loophole which was capitalized on by some militants, who may not have surrendered the totality of their weapons. If the resurgence of youth militancy must be checked.
3. The Nigerian state should pragmatically diversify its economy, as over reliance on petroleum rents from the Niger Delta are the major reasons why the state desperately represses the deltans at the slightest provocation. The urgent diversification of the Nigerian economy will trigger qualitative development and bring to an end its rentier, predatory and beleaguered disposition.
4. Oil companies should improve measures to ensure transparency in all aspects of business operations; from contracts and environmental impact assessments (EIA) to community payments and compensation for land use and pollution. Corporate transparency should also be improved by releasing detailed public reports of

expenditures, including costs of development and payments to governments, community groups and contractors. The results of EIAs should be made widely available in local languages so that communities are aware of the impact of the oil industry on their environment and so that people can be properly informed before any further activities take place.

5. Finally, environmental concerns in the region should go beyond rhetoric. Action should be taken on zero tolerance for gas flaring, and such other factors which degrade the environment of the Niger-Delta during exploitation.

### Conclusion

There is no denying the fact that militants in the Niger Delta have demonstrated the ability to destroy large parts of the oil production facilities in the country. And even the Nigerian military has found it difficult to achieve a decisive advantage over them due to the guerrilla tactics they adopt, the terrain of the swamps where the militia camps are located, and the dispersed infrastructure of oil pipelines and production facilities in the delta. The activities of the militants without mincing words has negative consequences on the Nigerian economy with the destruction of oil installations and facilities, creating uncertainty and shrinking of the nation's source of revenue. The undeniable fact is that, if the principle of good governance and equitable distribution of resources is undermined, it precipitates opposition, alienation, resistance and disillusionment. Furthermore, bad governance, and the obnoxious laws that governs the oil industry in Nigeria breeds discontent and frustration, and has allowed for the growth in violent behaviours cum restiveness with deleterious socio-economic implications that captures reality in the Niger Delta.

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