

# The Dilemma of Niger-Delta Region as Oil Producing States of Nigeria

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## Abstract

*This paper x-rayed the dilemma of Niger-Delta Region as oil producing states of Nigeria. By extension, the criminal neglect of the entire region was highlighted, and the various approaches to the de-development of the region were stated. The impressionistic efforts made by the Federal Government of Nigeria to ameliorate the problems of the region were identified. Thereafter, the paper posited a 12-stage strategy that could be adopted to solve the problems of the region with these strategies broken down into three phases of implementation. The paper concludes that the implementation of these strategies would bring succour to the people of the region and thereby extricate them from their present extreme poverty level.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Niger Delta, oil.

## Introduction

*Where there is no justice,  
there can never be peace.*

The Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria is made up of the following oil producing states: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. Oil as a natural endowment in a particular community, area or region, with its exploration and exploitation is expected to be an abundant blessing to such community, area or region. Unfortunately and regrettably too, oil has turned out to be a curse to the Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria since 1956 when it was first discovered in the region. The inhabitants of the region have been subjected to untold hardship through oil pollution, environmental degradation, destruction of

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aquatic lives, and other negative activities that are inimical to the existence and survival of the people of the region as a result of oil exploration and exploitation.

Oil was first discovered in commercial quantities in the Ijaw community of Oloibiri in 1956 in the Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. Today, the inhabitants of this village/community are left with nothing but damaged farmlands and polluted rivers with no electricity, potable drinking water and other basic social amenities. Like the Oloibiri situation, the locals in many of the oil-bearing communities claim to still live in primitive conditions akin to that of the Stone Age, side by side with the high tech and modern facilities of the multinational community that they play host to. It is claimed that the advent of oil business in Nigeria has not really brought with it any tangible benefits; instead it ushered in high degradation of the Niger Delta environment, with concomitant poverty and much strife to the Niger Delta Region.<sup>1</sup>

Today, the Niger Delta is best known as a region that sustains much oil exploration and exploitation by the agents of western economic powers. The Niger Delta basin is considered the mainstay of the Nigerian economy for its significantly high level of oil reserves. The region is also naturally endowed with viable deposits of hydrocarbon and gas reserves. Petroleum and derivatives dominate the Nigerian economy making up about 98 percent of exports, over 80 percent of government's annual revenue and 70 percent of budgetary expenditure. Crude oil resource gives the Nigeria government about US\$ 20 million a day. At the moment, Nigeria boasts of over 21 billion barrels of proven oil reserves. Nigeria is Africa's largest oil producer and the world's sixth most important exporter of crude oil with the bulk of its exports going to the United States.<sup>2</sup>

To a considerable extent, the geographical location of the Niger Delta and its resources determine the traditional occupation of the people: fishing and farming. But politics is the major issue of the day in the Niger Delta. This is mainly due to the long neglect of the people's welfare by the Federal Government of Nigeria and the nonchalant attitude of the Transnational Oil Companies. The people of the Niger Delta believe that they have no substantial benefit to show for their sacrifices, despite being the 'goose that laid the golden egg' – the economic success that underpins the unity of the Nigerian state. They also believe they are now at that stage in history when they must actualize their own wise-saying which states that "anyone who takes what belongs to a child and raises his/her hand up; when he gets tired must bring down his hand and the child will take back his objects (what belongs to him)". However, security agents have always responded to demands put forward by the people of the Niger Delta in a brutal manner: many of the locals have been maimed, women raped and many have met untimely deaths. Local villages like Odi, Opia-Ikenyan,

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<sup>1</sup> Nisirimovu, A. (2000) "Poverty in Wealth: Report on the People of the Niger Delta and the Display of Poverty in Wealth", Port Harcourt: Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, p3

<sup>2</sup> Onduku, A. (2001), "Environmental Conflicts: The Case of the Niger Delta" A presentation at the One World Fortnight Programme organized by the Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford, United Kingdom 22nd November 2001.

Okerenkoko and Ogoniland have been destroyed by the Nigerian military through the use of excessive force in counter insurgency measures.<sup>3</sup>

## Theoretical framework

The problem of conflict and insecurity is destabilizing the Niger-Delta Region's peace process. The fact is that whenever conflict occurs, the development of the society in most times is seriously affected. Besides, once conflict occurs, scarce resources are inevitably diverted to the purchase of military equipment at the expense of socio-economic development. While many factors contribute to creating conflicts, this study is of the view that the Niger-Delta conflicts are mainly as a result of poverty rooted on continued criminal neglect of the region over the years by the federal government of Nigeria and the Transnational Oil Companies.

Poverty is a multidimensional problem that goes beyond economics to include among other things, social, political, and cultural issues. Scholars have been trying to develop a theoretical approach to poverty and conflict for a long time.<sup>4</sup> Burton agrees that poverty as a result of lack of human needs lead to reactions that result in conflict. The human needs theory championed by Burton argues that there are conflict and instability in developing countries because people are denied not only their biological needs, but also psychological needs that relate to growth and development.<sup>5</sup>

The overriding importance of this theory is that, it understands that needs, particularly basic needs (such as food, water, shelter and health) unlike interest cannot be traded, suppressed, or bargained for, thus any attempt to do this, leads to conflict. According to Aristotle as quoted in Ikejiaku, social strife and revolutions are not brought out by the conspiratorial or malignant nature of man; rather revolutions are derived from poverty and distributive injustice. Therefore, when the poor are in the majority and have no prospect of ameliorating their condition, they are bound to be restless and seek restitution through violence. No government can hold stability and peace when it is created on a sea of poverty.<sup>6</sup>

The level of poverty in the Niger-Delta Region has gone beyond the level of absolute poverty to the level of poverty qua poverty, a term coined by Ikejiaku to describe the practical absolute poverty where the majority find life excruciating because it is difficult to

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ikejiaku, B. V. (2009), "The Relationship between Poverty, Conflict and Development" in *Journal of Sustainable Development, Vol. 2, No. 1, March, 2009*, p16

<sup>5</sup> Burton, J. (1997), *Violence Experienced: The Source of Conflict Violence and Crime and Their Prevention*, New York: Manchester University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Ikejiaku, B. V. (2009), "The Relationship between Poverty, Conflict and Development" in *Journal of Sustainable Development, Vol. 2, No. 1, March, 2009*, p16

meet or satisfy their basic needs, such as food, clothing, shelter and education beyond primary school level. It is pathetic that an average Niger-Deltan has grown poorer over the past decades, notwithstanding the enormous natural resources available in the region. Poverty qua poverty is a situation no human being would be contented with, because of the agonizing pains that follow the lack of these basic needs. Therefore, people in most cases react negatively to such situations, in order to show their grievances and discontent, particularly when the government is corrupt<sup>7</sup> as is the case with the Nigerian leaders. Conflicts are, therefore, often caused by an attempt to clamour for these basic needs by violent means. Burton's human needs theory on conflict and conflict management recognizes the indispensability of these needs, by pointing out that wherever such non-negotiable needs are not met, conflict is inevitable.<sup>8</sup>

The costs of conflicts are horrific, and in many cases conflicts wiped out the achievements of decades of economic and social development. Armed conflicts, in particular, involve complete economic paralysis, immense social costs and trauma, political quagmire and disintegration, as well as serious environmental degradation and dilapidation<sup>9</sup> as is being experienced in the region for decades now.

## Problems of the Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria

Since the mid-1970s Nigeria's political fate has been inextricably linked to oil. Petroleum accounts for over 80 percent of the government's revenue, provides more than 95 percent of export earnings and generates over 40 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>10</sup> The Niger-Delta has unarguably been responsible for the generation of the huge revenue to the Nigerian state, and unfortunately at the receiving end of oil exploration and exploitation since the mid-1970s. The region has been faced with the problems of oil spillages and gas flaring, which have caused serious atmospheric pollution, ground water and soil contamination, constant heat around the flare pits and abnormal salinity of the pool water, resulting in serious health hazards for the inhabitants, and of course grave disturbance to the life cycles of plants and animals in the region. However, different interest groups have provided different answers as to the nature of the problems in the region.

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<sup>7</sup> Ikejaku, B. V. (2009), "The Relationship between Poverty, Conflict and Development" in *Journal of Sustainable Development, Vol. 2, No. 1, March, 2009* p15

<sup>8</sup> Burton, J. (1997), *Violence Experienced: The Source of Conflict Violence and Crime and Their Prevention*, New York: Manchester University Press.

<sup>9</sup> Ikejaku, B. V. (2009), "The Relationship between Poverty, Conflict and Development" in *Journal of Sustainable Development, Vol. 2, No. 1, March, 2009* p16

<sup>10</sup> Karl, T. L. and Gary, T. (2003), "Bottom of the Barrel: Africa's Oil Boom and the Poor", Catholic Relief Services p26

Specifically, Iyayi focused on four major interest groups and these are: (i) the Nigerian state, (ii) the Transnational Oil Companies (TOC), (iii) the leading governments of the western world, and (iv) the host communities in the Niger-Delta. These are explained hereunder:

(i) According to him, the Nigerian state has consistently held the view that the problem in the Niger-Delta is the criminal activities of the people in the region. For example, consider the letter from President Olusegun Obasanjo to the Governor of Bayelsa State on 20th November, 1999 just before the military operation by the Nigerian state which wiped out Odi village and its inhabitants in 1999. In that letter, President Obasanjo as the President and Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Nigerian state was unable to make a distinction between those responsible for the actual abduction of the state security operatives in the area and those with whom the governor of the state was holding negotiations. The president saw everybody in the state as criminal including members of Bayelsa state government and the governor of the state. This presupposes that the Nigerian State epitomized by the president and commander-in-chief of the armed forces saw the people of Niger-Delta as criminals without attempting to understand their predicaments.

(ii) On the other hand, the position of the transnational oil companies is that the problem in the Niger-Delta is the attitude of the local communities to oil exploitation in their areas. For example, in a recent interview with Friends of the Earth International in South Africa, which was captured on celluloid, the managing director of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) Nigeria, explained that, but for the opposition of the Ogoni people, SPDC would have taken steps to redress the ecological damage in several parts of Ogoniland. Good that the managing director appreciated the fact that SPDC has done tremendous damage to the eco-system of Ogoniland. Nonetheless, one may ask why it took the company many years to recognize and appreciate this.

(iii) The governments of leading western countries tend to see the problem in much the same way that the Nigerian state and the oil companies view the problem in the Niger-Delta. While they recognize that issues of development may be involved, they are more inclined to see it in security terms. This explains, for example, the offer by the United States of America to train Nigerian troops for military operations in the swamps of the Niger-Delta.

(iv) On their part, the local communities hold that it is the collusion between the oil companies and the Nigerian state not just to deprive them of their resources, but to set them against each other and exploit the resources in ways that

have destroyed their environment and livelihoods that is the problem of the Niger-Delta.<sup>11</sup>

The Niger-Delta, with a landmass of 70,000 square kilometers, is described as the largest wetland in Africa and among the three largest in the world. The Niger-Delta is thus a difficult terrain. However, the eco-system of the area is acknowledged as one of the most diverse and richest in the world, and therefore, highly supportive of human life. The Niger-Delta is host to huge deposits of oil and gas. The exploitation of these resources provides over ninety five percent of the foreign exchange earnings of the country.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of accounting for a huge part of the nation's revenues, there is massive poverty in the Niger-Delta. In addition to human poverty, there is also poverty of infrastructure in the region. The state of the roads in the Niger-Delta compared with the state of roads in other parts of the country shows that the core Niger-Delta has far fewer kilometers of federal roads than several other parts of Nigeria. Worse still, the available length of federal roads in the Niger-Delta is in a far worse state than that to be found outside the region. A recent UNDP Report on the Niger-Delta confirms this picture of the Niger-Delta. The report highlighted the facts that various health indices such as infant and maternal mortality rates and HIV/AIDS infections rates are much worse in the Niger-Delta than they are in other parts of the country.<sup>13</sup>

Generally, the problems of the Niger-Delta are not only multi-dimensional, but also multifarious. However, for the purpose of this paper, the following problems are identified:

(1) Since the commencement of oil exploration and exploitation in 1956 at Oloibiri, the Niger-Delta Region has not benefited much from the revenues generated, and therefore, has nothing tangible to show for it. For example, the Western Region of Nigeria has Cocoa House in Ibadan, good road network, good schools and free education to show for cocoa exploited from the region. Also, the Northern Region has a good road network and infrastructural transformations in Minna, Kano, Kaduna, Abuja, Sokoto and other parts of the region to show for cotton and oil revenues in Nigeria. However, the source of the oil revenue has been deliberately and criminally neglected over the years by the successive governments in the country.

(2) In Edo State, oil exploitation started in Oben village in Orhionmwon Local Government Authority Area in the mid-1970s. What has Oben village got to

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<sup>11</sup> Iyayi, F. (2006), "Creating an enabling environment for Development in the Niger Delta: The Role of Labour" being paper presented at the Labour Seminar on Law, Order, Security and Sustainable Peace organized by SPDC on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2008 at Wellington Hotels, Warri p1

<sup>12</sup> Blood Trail: Repression and Resistance in Niger Delta (2002), Civil Liberties Organization, Lagos p9

<sup>13</sup> Iyayi, F. (2006), "Creating an enabling environment for Development in the Niger Delta: The Role of Labour" being paper presented at the Labour Seminar on Law, Order, Security and Sustainable Peace organized by SPDC on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2008 at Wellington Hotels, Warri p3

show for it? What has Orhionmwon Local Government Authority Area got to show for it? What has Edo State Government got to show for it? Nothing, but a poor road network; decayed infrastructure; abandoned projects; dilapidated schools; youth unemployment and restiveness; underdevelopment; and kidnapping, as well as a host of other negative vices.

(3) The TOCs involved in the oil exploitation have over the years have not impacted on their host communities. While the companies and their workers have been living in affluence, the inhabitants of their host communities have been subjected to extreme poverty and penury.

(4) The laws put in place by the federal government of Nigeria for the exploitation of oil and gas resources in the Niger-Delta by the TOCs did not take the host communities into consideration, and therefore, have been flagrantly abused by the oil companies over the years.

(5) The region has become environmentally degraded through oil spillages, gas flaring that has led to serious atmospheric pollution, ground water and soil contamination, constant heat around the flare pits, which has resulted in the loss of aquatic lives; indiscriminate construction of canals and waste dumping; and companies have embarked upon major oil and gas exploitation activities without conducting Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and so on.

(6) The Niger-Delta has become an ecological wasteland. Several major rivers are heavily polluted; farmlands are under acid rain and oil spills, and carbon dioxide emissions in the area are among the highest in the world. It has been calculated that some 45.8 billion kilowatts of heat are discharged into the atmosphere of the region from flaring, 1.8 billion cubic feet of gas every day.<sup>14</sup>

(7) Intra and inter community conflicts have become a major phenomenon in the region as a result of the bribery and blocking of the community elders and elites by the TOCs.

(8) Community leaders, who opposed the policies and activities of both the government and the transnational oil companies, are often arrested and detained, and some of them have lost their lives, for example, Isaac Adaka Boro, Ken Saro-Wiwa and his Ogoni compatriots in November, 1999, just to mention a few.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Agbola, T. and Olurin, T. A. (2003), "Landuse and Landcover Change in the Niger Delta", excerpts from a Research Report presented to the Centre for Democracy and Development.

<sup>15</sup> Agbebaku, C. A. (2003), "Law and Development in Nigeria: The Impact of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) on Development Efforts" in F. E. Iyoha, S. O. J. Ojo and P. O. Oviasuyi (eds), *Women, Youth Restiveness and Development in the Niger Delta Region*, Ekpoma: Institute for Governance and Development p152

(9) Inhabitants of the region, which include, elders, women, children and youths have resorted to various forms of resistance due to their continued neglect, deprivation and dehumanization. These have resulted in demonstrations and protests, petition writing, legal actions, hostage taking, kidnapping, armed uprising and community mobilization, pipeline damage and vandalism has assumed new and alarming dimensions.<sup>16</sup>

## Review of related literature on Niger-Delta Region

Nigeria is the world's 13<sup>th</sup> largest oil producer, and the 6<sup>th</sup> largest in OPEC. In the domestic sector, from 1970 to 1999, oil generated almost \$231 billion for the Nigerian economy, constituting between 21 and 48 percent of GDP. Nigeria has an estimated oil reserve of 32 billion barrels – sufficient for 37 years at the current rate of production.<sup>17</sup> Oil dominates the Nigerian economy. Between 2000 and 2004, oil accounted for around 79.5 percent of total government revenues and around 97 percent of foreign exchange revenues.<sup>18</sup> This rise in oil wealth has not translated into significant increases in living standards in Nigeria. In fact, the rise in poverty and inequality coincides with the discovery and export of oil in Nigeria. As Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian<sup>19</sup> show, in 1965, when oil revenue was about US\$33 per capita, GDP per capita was US\$245. In 2000, when oil revenues were US\$325 per capita, GDP per capita was stalled at the 1965 level. Evidence such as this has led to widespread acceptance that Nigeria has suffered from the resource **curse** and according to Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian;<sup>20</sup> waste and poor institutional quality stemming from oil has been primarily responsible for Nigeria's poor long-run economic performance.

The Niger-Delta Region is the area covered by the natural delta of the Niger River and the areas to the east and west. The broader Niger Delta Region consists of nine states (Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers) and 185 local governments.<sup>21</sup> The estimated regional population is nearly 30 million people. Difficult topography encourages people to gather in small communities. Of the estimated 13,329

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<sup>16</sup>Okecha, S. A. (2003), "Flames of Sabotage: The Tragedy of Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta", in F. E. Iyoha, S. O. J. Ojo and P. O. Oviasuyi (eds), *Women, Youth Restiveness and Development in the Niger Delta Region*, Ekpoma: Institute for Governance and Development p25-28

<sup>17</sup>Heymans, C. and Pycroft, C. (2005), 'Drivers of Change in Nigeria: Towards restructuring the political economy', Commissioned by DFID Nigeria.

<sup>18</sup> UNDP (2006) *Niger Delta Human Development Report*

<sup>19</sup> Sala-i-Martin, X. and Subramanian, A. (2003) 'Addressing the Natural Resource Curse: An Illustration from Nigeria', *IMF Working Paper WP/03/159* p4

<sup>20</sup> Sala-i-Martin, X. and Subramanian, A. (2003) 'Addressing the Natural Resource Curse: An Illustration from Nigeria', *IMF Working Paper WP/03/159* p24

<sup>21</sup> UNDP (2006) *Niger Delta Human Development Report* p44



settlements in the Niger Delta, approximately 94 percent have populations of less than 5000 people.<sup>22</sup>

The oil boom in Nigeria has been driven by oil extracted from the Niger Delta Region. Oil wealth, from the Niger Delta Region, is largely responsible for sustaining the Nigerian Federation.<sup>23</sup> Despite fuelling much of Nigeria's economic growth, the Niger Delta is somewhat marginalized from Nigeria's national development. Essentially, there is a significant disconnect between the wealth the region generates for the Nigerian federation and the transnational oil companies extracting oil from the region, and the region's human development progress. Analysis of poverty and human development indicators paints a dismal picture for the Niger Delta. Poverty incidence increased in the Niger Delta between 1980 and 2004 as shown in Table I below:

**Table I: Incidence of Poverty in the Niger-Delta Region - 1980-2004**

Country/States	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004
Nigeria	28.1	46.3	42.7	65.6	54.4
Edo/Delta	19.8	52.4	33.9	56.1	Delta 45.35 Edo 33.09
Cross River	10.2	41.9	45.5	66.9	41.61
Imo/Abia	14.4	33.1	49.9	56.2	Imo 27.39 Abia 22.27
Ondo	24.9	47.3	46.6	71.6	42.15
Rivers/Bayelsa	7.2	44.4	43.4	44.3	Rivers 29.09 Bayelsa 19.98

**Source:** National Bureau of Statistics

The region's human development index is 0.564 and while this is slightly higher than the Nigerian HDI of 0.448, the area rates are far below regions or countries with similar gas or oil reserves (e.g. Venezuela is 0.772 and Indonesia is 0.697).<sup>24</sup> When further disaggregated to the local government level, the *Niger Delta Human Development Report* shows that state and

<sup>22</sup> UNDP (2006) *Niger Delta Human Development Report* p15

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p62

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p15

regional HDI scores mark inequalities in human development among oil producing communities. Significantly, local government areas without oil facilities appear to have fewer poor people than those with oil facilities.<sup>25</sup> The report also concludes that decline in the HDI has been steeper for the Niger Delta states than the rest of Nigeria.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the high earnings of some oil industry workers leads to localized price distortions, driving up prices and so constraining the purchasing power of ordinary people and making it difficult for many to meet the costs of basic needs such as: housing, healthcare, transportation, education and thus making poverty more pervasive than conventional measures reveal.<sup>27</sup>

Comparatively, poverty and inequality in Nigeria has strong regional concentrations, resulting in significant levels of regional disparity. Table 2 below shows that poverty is considerably higher in the northern part than the southern part of Nigeria:

**Table 2: Trends in Poverty Levels by Zones in Nigeria (1980-2004)**

<b>Zone</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2004</b>
<i>South South</i>	13.2	45.7	40.8	58.2	35.1
<i>South East</i>	12.9	30.4	41.0	53.5	26.7
<i>South West</i>	13.4	38.6	43.1	60.9	43.0
<i>North Central</i>	32.2	50.8	46.0	64.7	67.0
<i>North East</i>	35.6	54.9	54.0	70.1	72.2
<i>North West</i>	37.7	52.1	36.5	77.5	71.2

**Source:** *National Bureau of Statistics*

It is germane to state that the poverty of the northern part of Nigeria is more in terms of human development index (HDI) than infrastructural development index (IDI). On the other hand, the Niger Delta Region has better developed human capital through individual self effort, but has been infrastructurally rejected, neglected and marginalized by the federal government of Nigeria. The poverty of the north as recognized by the colonial masters led to the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914, as the surpluses from the south was used to net-off the deficit from the northern part of the country after the amalgamation. Regrettably, the poverty level of the north had consistently dragged back

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p137

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p57

and prevented the south from developing; especially the Niger Delta Region from where the major source of revenue to the federation is derived.

The Niger Delta Region today is a place of frustrated expectations and deep-rooted mistrust. Unprecedented restiveness at times erupts in violence. Long years of neglect and conflict have fostered a siege mentality specifically among youths who feel they are condemned to a future without hope and see conflict as a strategy to escape deprivation. While turmoil in the delta has many sources and motivations, the preeminent underlying cause is the historical failure of governance at all levels. Declining economic performance leading to rising unemployment or underemployment; the lack of access to basic necessities of life like water, shelter, food and clothing; discriminatory policies that deny access to positions of authority and prevent people from participating in shaping the rules that govern their lives – these all indicate that governance over time has fallen short of the people's expectations.<sup>28</sup>

Many reports have chronicled the region's monumental problems. The magnitude of the problems of the people of the Niger Delta is best illustrated in the report by the World Bank in 1995. In 1995 the two volume study entitled; "Defining an Environmental Development Strategy for the Niger Delta" was conducted by the Industry and Energy Operations Division of West Central Africa Department of the World Bank. The region is described in the following words:

The Niger Delta has been blessed with an abundance of physical and human resources, including the majority of Nigerian's oil and gas deposits, good agriculture land, extensive forests, excellent fisheries, as well as a well developed industrial base, a strong banking system, a large labour force, and a vibrant private sector. However, the region's tremendous potentials for economic growth and sustainable development remains unfulfilled and its future is threatened by deteriorating economic conditions that are not being address by present policies and actions.<sup>29</sup>

The report goes further to lament that:

... Despite its vast reserve, the region remains poor (GNP) per capita is below national average of \$280.<sup>30</sup>

The report continued:

Education levels are below the national average and are particularly low for women. While 76 percent of Nigerian children attend primary schools this level drops to 30 percent in some parts of the Niger Delta. The poverty level in the Niger Delta is exacerbated by the high cost of living. In the urban areas of Rivers State, the cost of living index is the highest in Nigeria.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Wifa, B. M., being paper delivered at the Niger Delta Development Commission - Nigerian Bar Association Conference on Law, Peace and Development in the Niger Delta region, 2008 May 4 – 7, Hotel Presidential, Port Harcourt, Rivers State p3

<sup>29</sup> World Bank, 1995

<sup>30</sup> *ibid* .

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*

*The federal government of Nigeria has never been sincere to the Niger-Delta people.*

## **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.

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<sup>32</sup> Iyoha, F. E. (2006), "The Role of Government in creating Sustainable Development in the NigerDelta Region" being paper presented at the Labour Seminar on Law, Order, Security and Sustainable Peace organized by SPDC on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2008 at Wellington Hotels, Warri p5

(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.

In a nutshell, one can categorically infer without fear of contradiction that these agencies were not really established to bring succour or development to the Niger-Delta Region, but mere impressionistic or cosmetic efforts, because it did not take the same federal government of Nigeria long to develop and transform the federal capital, Abuja, situated in the north, to a world class standard.

*Development can only strive in a peaceful environment*

## Recommendations

Governments at all levels in Nigeria must as a matter of urgency involve the ordinary people, communities, women, youths, community or ethnic leaders, traditional rulers, militants and oil companies in the following ways:

- (1) Enlighten and encourage the communities to take part in the process of discussing their problems and suggesting possible solutions;
- (2) Involve community based associations (CBAs), village councils, village heads, women, militants, activists, community leaders/elders, religious leaders, youth leaders and community youth leaders in interactive study workshops designed to suggest possible solutions and strategies for implementation;
- (3) On the basis of the suggestions during the interactive study workshops, design training programmes and organize training sessions for them;
- (4) Organize dialogue sessions, interactive workshops for traditional rulers, traditional rulers' council, women, youths and militant groups in each of the states and local government authority areas on how to solve the problems of each community;
- (5) Encourage the formation of neighbourhood, creeks and village watch associations to provide surveillance and security for security personnel and company installations;
- (6) Give voice to the socially excluded through the involvement of CBAs, ordinary people's representatives in a participatory process of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of community projects;
- (7) Transnational oil companies should reserve a percentage of job openings for qualified and employable youths in their host communities;

- (8) Governments and the transnational oil companies should invest heavily and continuously on the training of youths from the host communities;
- (9) Governments and transnational oil companies should adopt a deliberate policy of village, community and indigenes ownership of a fraction of oil companies operating in their areas through allocation of shares and profit sharing;
- (10) Research should be conducted into the possibility of using community based associations, village councils or neighbourhood assemblies at local and state government levels as possible organs for receiving, disbursing monies and implementing projects on behalf of the identified groups in the region;
- (11) Oil companies should always implement the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed with the communities;
- (12) Oil companies must strive towards the modernization of infrastructures and equipment, replacement of old and corroded pipes to prevent further oil spillage.

## Strategies for the implementation of the recommendations

For proper articulation and coherent implementation of the solutions to the problems of the Niger-Delta Region, the following three steps of implementation are recommended:

### (1) *Short term strategy (two year period)*

- (a) Organize enlightenment, encouragement and dialogue sessions with all the stakeholders, where they will be informed of the government's urgent plan to commence the development of their areas;
- (b) Commence immediately, massive and enduring construction and rehabilitation of all roads in the region, especially Edo and Bayelsa States. In Edo State, the oil producing community of Oben and the entire Orhionmwon Local Government Area should be given preference. A situation where one needs to go to major towns in the local government area, and has to go through Delta State is pitiable;
- (c) As a matter of urgency provide electricity to all the nooks and crannies of the region;
- (d) Provide potable water for the inhabitants of the region;
- (e) Provide good schools and all the needed components in the region.

### (2) *Medium term strategy (five year period)*

- (a) Encourage the formation of neighbourhood, creeks, village watch associations, community based association forums to provide surveillance and security for the protection of government investment achieved at the short term level as well as for the security of personnel and oil companies' installations;

- (b) Design training and development programmes for the youths, youth leaders of the region and they should be employed by the transnational oil companies;
- (c) Design empowerment programmes for the inhabitants of the region who are not directly involved in the training and development programmes;
- (d) Continually budget funds for the maintenance and consolidation of all the achievements so far recorded by all parties in the region.

### (3) *Long term strategy (ten year period)*

- (a) Governments and the transnational oil companies to adopt a deliberate policy of village, community and indigenes ownership of a fraction of oil companies operating in their areas through allocation of shares and profit sharing;
- (b) Conduct research into the possibility of using community based associations, village councils or neighbourhood assemblies at the local and state government levels as possible organs for the receiving and disbursing of monies and implementing projects on behalf of the identified groups in the region.

## Conclusion

The inhabitants of the Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria have suffered untold hardship as a result of the criminal neglect, abandonment, exploration and exploitation of oil and gas by the federal government of Nigeria in collaboration with the Transnational Oil Companies (TOC) operating in the region. Oil and gas, with which the Almighty God has endowed the region, has become a **curse** to the people of the region, instead of being a blessing. What an irony of fate for the people.

Late maximum dictator "Sani Abacha" in 1996 invited all youths from across the country to a five million-man march in support of his quest to metamorphous from Military Head of State to Civilian President of Nigeria. Youths from the Niger-Delta Region were astonished to see the level of transformation and development of Abuja City at their own expense, as revenues from their region were being used to develop the northern part of the country with their region having nothing to show for the oil wealth. This led to youth restiveness, which gave birth to hostage taking, militancy and recently the kidnapping of prominent persons in the region. In Edo State, for example, between the months of July and August, 2009 over 65 prominent persons were kidnapped as reported by the State Police Command. Worse still, some of the kidnapped persons paid ransoms to be freed, while the unfortunate ones paid ransoms but were nevertheless killed. The security of lives and properties in the region is a mirage as no one is sure of what will happen to him/her at any moment.

The so-called stage-managed amnesty for the militants of the region, as reported by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) may be an exercise in futility and colossal wastage of public funds, which should have been used to develop the region.

The federal government does not have a concrete post-militancy/amnesty arrangement for the militants, and this means leaving the substance and pursuing the shadow.

Finally, it is my sincere submission that governments at all levels should adopt the above stated recommendations in order to bring succour to the people of the region and thereby extricate them from their present extreme poverty levels.

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