

GENDER MAINSTREAMING OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS: PANACEA FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND PEACE IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION

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ABSTRACT

The concept Gender mainstreaming is one of the most recent late 20th century developmental tools designed for the achievement of gender equality in a bid to attain sustainable peace and development in the Universe. The concept is currently being adopted as policy in different sectors, regions and nations. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is known for its volatility and also for its vast deposit of crude oil in which Nigeria generates its main revenue. Nigeria is the sixth largest Oil producing nation in the World. The exploitation and exploration of oil in the region has impacted the ecology, economy and socio-culture of the region. The impact also has gender implications. The paper review through the current literatures and researches effect of oil exploration and exploitation on the citizenry and proffer ways of mainstreaming gender into the system which will serves as one of the panacea for Environmental sustainability and peace in the region.

Key words: Niger Delta, gender mainstreaming, oil, exploitation, exploration and environmental sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

The 1995 United Nations International Conference on Women brought the word “gender” into main focus all over the World. Thus, different definitions followed suit for the word “Gender” with every definition coined to suit different purposes.

Thus, gender refers to the socially constructed roles and socially acquired behaviours and expectations associated with men and women (World Bank, 2001).

Carriger (2006) also defined gender as “socially constructed rather than biologically determined roles of men and women as well as the relationships between them in a given society at a specific time and place. These roles and relationships are not fixed, but can and do change. They are usually unequal in terms of power, freedom, agency, and status as well as access to and control over entitlements, resources, and assets”.

At most times Gender is always used in terms of equality and equity. Gender equity explains the difference in control and access of resources by men and women while Gender equality is the treating of women and men the same way.

It is assumed that “issues of socio-economic development, democracy and peace are inextricably linked to gender inequality” (Rawwida et al., 2005).

It is widely believed that there is gender disparity in policy formulation and development worldwide. Thus, the designing of this “new tool” for sustainable development called Gender Mainstreaming. The paper will be looking at environmental sustainability and the gender mainstreaming of environmental concern in Niger delta region.

THE CONCEPT “NIGER DELTA”

The concept called “Niger Delta” has several definitions to the people of Nigeria. It is being looked at as political or geographical concepts by Nigerians but the Federal Government of Nigeria has his own acceptable definition of the region as its entity.

Anderson (1966) says the geographical Niger Delta is conceptualized in the ecological and geological criteria which he divides into five zones namely, fresh water alluvial zone which made up of 2,730sq miles, Saline (mangrove) zone covering 2,460sq miles, Beach-ridge zone of 500sq miles, Sombreri-Warri Deltaic plain of 30sq miles and Ogoni, excluding saline soil made up of 360sq miles while Nna (1999) said the Willink Commission conceives of the Niger Delta in terms of the non-Ibo areas of the

then eastern region by stating that “to the east of the square block of the Ibo Plateau, lie the two province, Calabar and Ogoja linked by some common use of the Efik language by the Ellse society and by a share, diminishing as are leaves of a derived culture, linked too, by resentment of Ibo leadership and divided by tribal differences and in particular by some suspicion of the Ibibios and the Efiks. The strip to the south of the Ibo block is physically divided by a strop of Ibo territory divided by the important Ibo town of Port Harcourt and tribally divided by the Ijaws and the Ogoni” (Nna, 1999).

The Federal Government of Nigeria definition of the Niger Delta comes from the Niger Delta Regional Development Master plan document which states that the Niger Delta region is situated in the Southern part of Nigeria and bordered to the South by the Atlantic Ocean and to the east by Cameroon, it occupies a surface area of about 112,100 square kilometres and represents about 12% of Nigeria’s total surface area of Nigeria having a population 28 million inhabitants by the beginning of 2006. The region has nine of Nigeria’s constituent states, Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, and Ondo Rivers (NDRDMP, 2006). Fubara (2008) did not agree with this definition he believes the so called “Niger Delta states” is a political Niger Delta.

The Niger Delta region is assumed to be the richest part of Nigeria in terms of natural resources which includes large deposits of oil and gas, extensive forests, arable land, and abundant fishing resources (Maxted, 2006). Okoh (2001) said there is enough evidence that 99% Nigeria’s proven crude oil and gas reserves are situated in the Niger Delta. As at 1999, there were more than 159 oil fields and 481 oil well producing about 2 million barrels of oil in the Niger Delta. The area has an estimated reserve of between 16 billion and 22 billion barrels of oil and 104.7, 1 trillion cubic feet of associated gas with an estimated reserve of 300 trillion cubic feet, making Nigeria one of the largest producers of oil and gas in the world (Nna, 1999).

The conflicts and instability in the oil rich Niger Delta has deeply affected the revenue generation of Nigeria which depends extensively on crude oil exportation. Crisis in Niger Delta also at most times affected the crude oil pricing of the entire World.

NIGER DELTA AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Brundtland Commission defined sustainability to mean a process of meeting the needs of the future without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their needs. The sustainable development debate is based on the assumption that societies need to manage three types of capital (economic, social, and natural), which may be non-substitutable and whose consumption might be irreversible (Dyllick and Hockerts, 2002). The expectation of United Nations Environment Project (UNEP), which happens to be one of the main thrust of the principle of sustainable development is that the quality of human life will be improved within the carrying capacity of our supporting ecosystem. Environmental sustainability being one of the millennium development goals (MDG) needs to be consciously examined critically in every part of the World. The UNDP Nigeria (2006) defines Environmental Sustainability as a process that seeks to reduce the environmental degradation arising from natural and manmade causes as well as inefficient use of resources, and to improve environmental management through private sector participation and environmentally friendly technologies. The question is whether the oil exploitation and exploration in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is environmental sustainable?

Olojede et al. (2003) observed that the search for petroleum in the Niger Delta has often involved the (sic) carrying out of seismic activities and the provision of seismic lines. This has often resulted in the destruction of vegetation and wild life habitat. A more dramatic environmental impact has often resulted from the high incidence of oil spills and uncontrollable flaring of gas. "It is also recorded that a total of 6817 oil spills occurred between 1976 and 2001 with loss of approximately three million barrels of oil in which 70% were not recovered while approximately 6% spilled on land, 25% in swamps, and 69% in offshore environments". This happens in a region where over 60% of the people depend on the natural environment-living and non living-for livelihoods (UNDP Nigeria, 2006). Thus, every facets of their environment in the region has been affected. These include their natural, social and economic environment. This is similar to the views expressed by Fubara (2008) when he noted that despite its vast oil resources, exploited for the good of the country, the region remains poor and the GNP per capita is below the national average (of USD 280). Unemployment level is high, especially among youths, agricultural production is subsistence and sometimes education levels are below national average and are particularly low for women. While 76 percent of Nigerian children attend primary schools, thus level drops to 30 per cent in some parts of the Niger Delta.

CONCEPT OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING

The concept of gender mainstreaming which is one of the key factor for environment sustainability and development came into widespread use after the 1995 UN International Conference on Women and adoption of the 'Beijing Platform for Action' for women's advancement which draws lessons from the past decades in redressing gender disparity in developmental issues. "Gender mainstreaming" was defined by DFID (2002) as a commitment to ensure that women as well as men's concerns and experiences are integral to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all legislation, policies and programmes so that women as well as men benefits equally and inequality is not perpetuated. "It is a strategy that promotes gender equality as a developmental goal. It can be understood as "consciously organized move towards integrating a gender perspective into analysis, procedures and policies" (Schalkwyk and Woronuk, 1998).

It is also (re)organisation, improvement, development, and evaluation of policy processes, so that gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy making (Andersen, 2008).

It is also defined as 'the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels' (Hannan, 2000). Gender Mainstreaming is integral to all development decisions; it concerns the staffing, procedures and culture of development organisations as well as their programmes; and it is the responsibility of all staff" (DFID, 2002). It suggests that equal opportunities for women and men should no longer be achieved through ear-marked policies alone but that a multi-stranded and total approach is necessary. The various policy making fields should be infiltrated with gender awareness in order to incorporate equality goals into traditional policy areas (European Commission, 1996; Sensi 1996).

GENDER AND NIGER DELTA REGION

Wamukonya (2002) said the earliest and most pronounced recognition of the gender disparities in development was the announcement by the International community of International Women's Year in 1975 and its later extension into a Women's Decade.

In February 2005, the 23rd session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum adopted decision 23/11 on gender equality in the field of the environment. The Governing Council agreed to enhance women's equal participation in environmental decision-making, encourage gender mainstreaming in environmental policies and programmes, assess the effects of environmental policies on women, and integrate further gender equality and environmental considerations into the work of environmental ministries, UNEP and other United Nations agencies (UNEP, 2006).

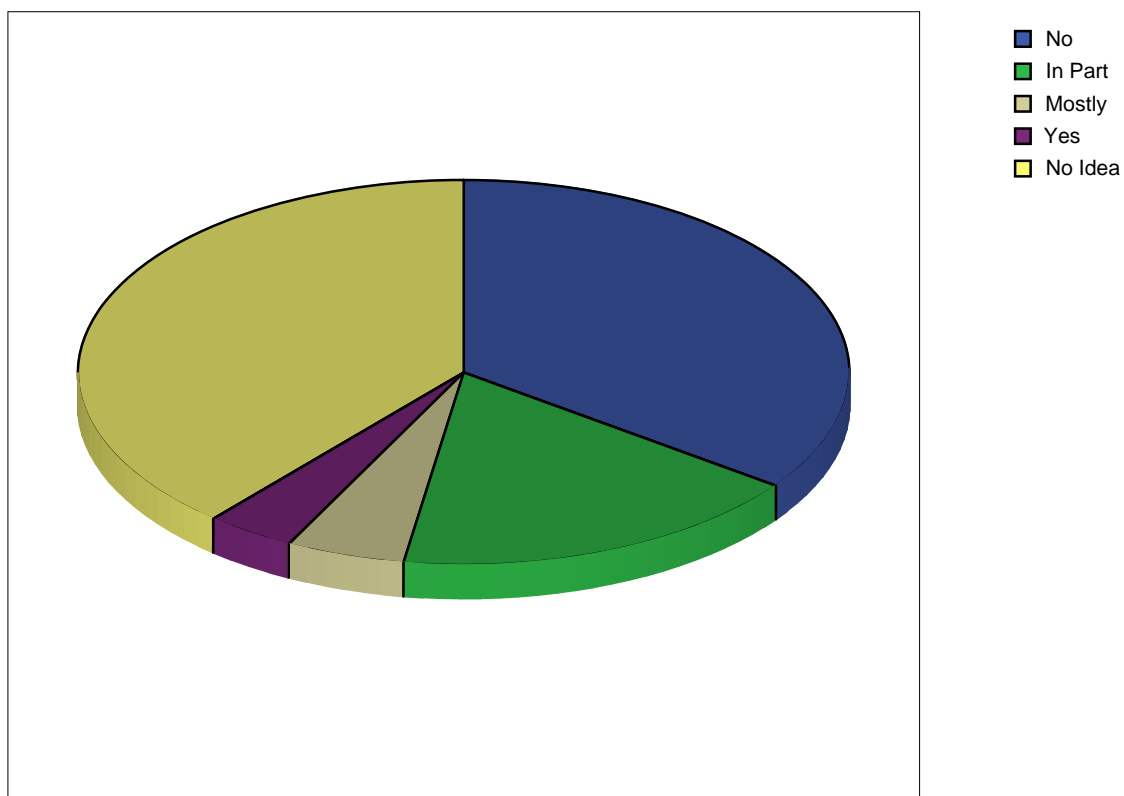
Also, Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 (Global Action for Women towards Sustainable and Equitable Development) states that equal status of women and men is vital for its successful implementation. Agenda 21 draws upon a number of international instruments supportive to gender equality, and in particular, it recommends the strengthening of elements of CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) related to environment and development" (Lambarou and Laub, 2004).

The policy thrust guiding development in the Niger Delta region in Nigeria is far from being engendered.

A recent research work conducted on some stakeholders in the Niger Delta region showed through focus group discussion and in-depth interviews that the newly introduced Niger Delta regional development master plan, which came into light in 2005, is not gender sensitive. The few respondents that have seen this document, found Gender issues not adequately reflected. The majority of the people believed that cultural barriers have marginalized the Women in the Niger Delta thus they are not considered during policy formulation and implementation. The researchers also observed that Gender Desk officers were not available in most Governmental organizations and offices in the region (Akiyode-Afolabi et al, 2008).

Below is the statistical enumeration of stakeholders' reaction to the delineation of gender issues in the Niger Delta regional development Master plan.

Pie Chart representing responds to question “are gender issues are delineated in the Master Plan?”



Source: Akiyode-Afolabi et al (2008)

Table 1. Statistical table representing responds to question “are gender issues are delineated in the Niger Delta Development Master Plan?”

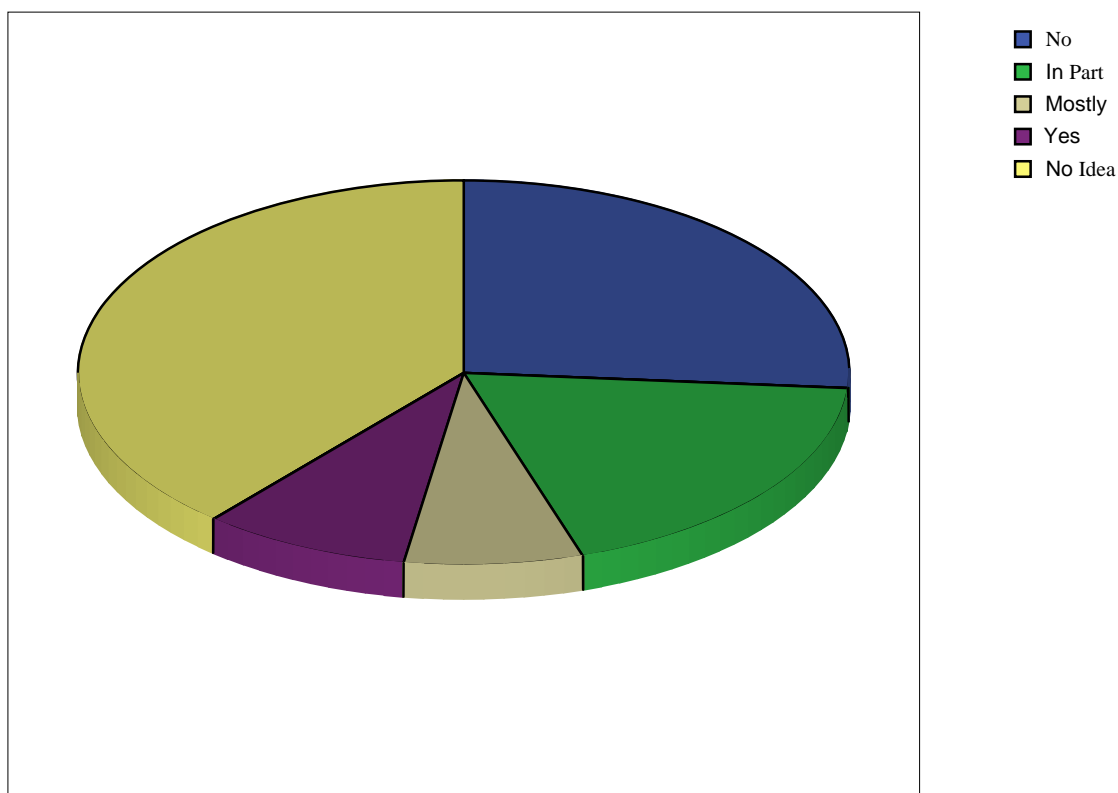
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No	28	35.0	35.0	35.0
In Part	14	17.5	17.5	52.5
Mostly	4	5.0	5.0	57.5
Yes	3	3.8	3.8	61.3
No Idea	31	38.8	38.8	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Source: Akiyode-Afolabi et al (2008)

From the chart and table above, it could be seen that only 3.8% of the respondents agree to the delineation of gender issues in the NDDC master plan while majority of the respondent do not agree and even 38.8% of the respondents have virtually no idea (Afolabi-Akiyode et al, 2008).

Also on whether the needs of women and men are addressed within the Niger Delta regional master plan, the WARDC team of researchers has the following statistical table.

Pie Chart showing responds to the question “ are the needs the of men and women are addressed within the overall policy goals in the Master plan?”



Source: Akiyode-Afolabi et al (2008)

Table 2. Statistical table showing responds to the question “are the needs the of men and women are addressed within the overall policy goals in the Master plan?”

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No	21	26.3	26.3	26.3
In Part	15	18.8	18.8	45.0
Mostly	6	7.5	7.5	52.5
Yes	7	8.8	8.8	61.3
No Idea	31	38.8	38.8	100.0

Total	80	100.0	100.0	
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Source: Akiyode-Afolabi et al (2008)

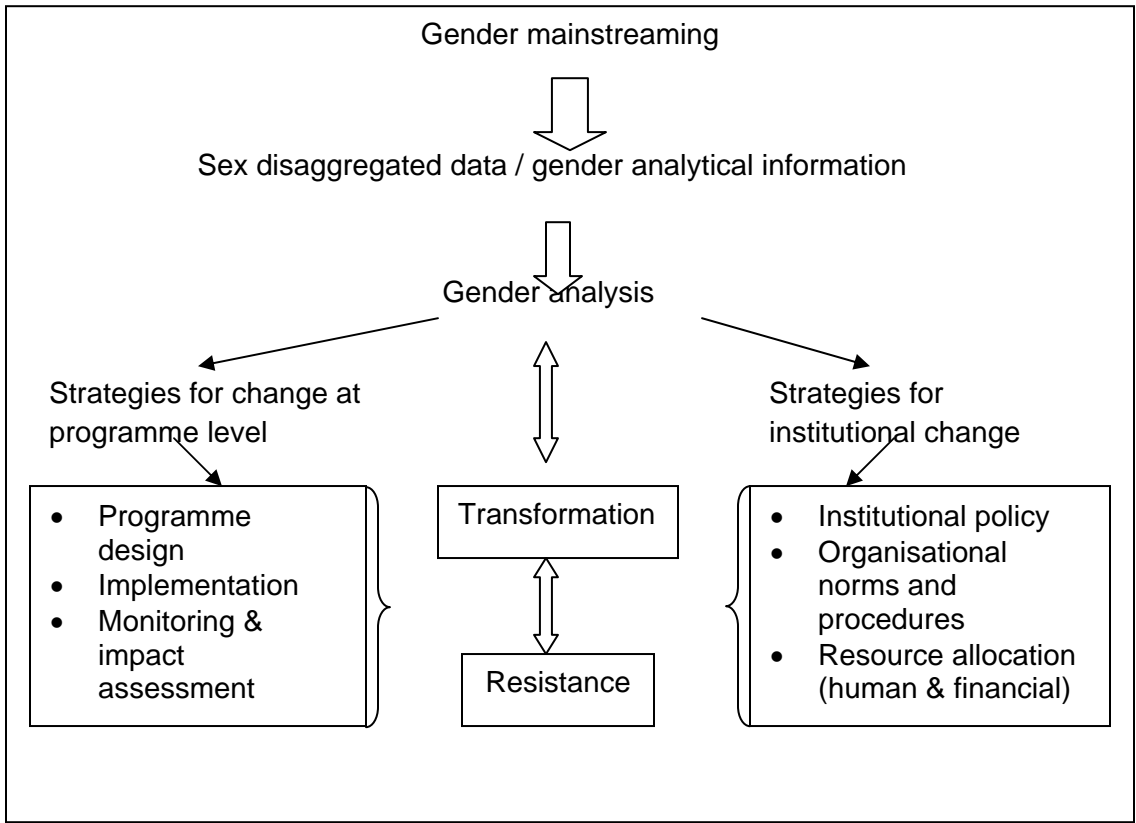
From the chart and the table, only 8.8% of the respondents agree that the needs of men and women are addressed within the overall policy goals in the Niger Delta while 38.8% never even have the idea of the policy goal of the Master Plan (Akiyode-Afolabi et al, 2008).

GENDER MAINSTREAMING STRATEGIES

The Gender Mainstreaming strategy is a veritable developmental procedure, which is very important in development decisions. It focuses “on the fact that women and men have different life courses and that development policies affect them differently” (Commonwealth, 2001).

A Gender Mainstreaming strategy often incorporates a twin-track approach. This combines a strategy for institutional change with specific actions to promote women’s empowerment where this is necessary to redress persistent inequalities. The mainstreaming approach recognises that gender equality is critical to the achievement of other development goals including poverty reduction (Waterhouse and Sever, 2005). Gender mainstreaming concerns staffing, procedures and culture of developmental organisation as well as their programmes; and its responsibility of all staff (DFID, 2002).

Diagram One: Key Steps in Gender Mainstreaming



Source: Waterhouse and Sever (2005: 4)

ADVANTAGES OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING

The sole aim of Gender mainstreaming is to make policy more gender sensitive. It also helps in understanding gender relationships and the environment means achieving a better analysis of patterns of use, knowledge and skills regarding conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. Thus a complete picture of human relationships and ecosystems can be built up through gender mainstreaming since gender is a fundamental issue of social equity (IUCN, 1998)

It leads to the design of effective new solutions to communal problems and help governments avoid poor investments and expensive mistakes thereby making projects more sustainable.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND NIGER DELTA

Gender mainstreaming and equality is a new doctrine being preached in Niger Delta and most Black Africa nations because of the existing historic and socio-cultural background, where the men or male

child are looked at as superior to the women or female child. In most parts of the Niger Delta, the men are the assumed heads of the family and women are also not allowed to be part of village or community councils. Thus, they are not also allowed to be part of decision making. This necessitated the need for gender mainstreaming as one of the cogent steps that will help in bringing an acceptable atmosphere for the most needed peace and developments in the region.

Gender mainstreaming requires a process of implementation in which specific methodologies are applied that gives visibility to and enhances gender equality (UNEP, 2006). Thus, the following methodologies that have been in use at different times need to be embraced by the policy makers as the key methods of engendering the environmental concerns in Oil rich Niger Delta. They are:

(1) Gender Analysis, Auditing, and Budgeting

These are veritable tools of achieving of sustainable environmental development of any region. The importance of sex disaggregated data as thrust in achieving gender mainstreaming cannot be overemphasised.

(2) Gender Assessment in Environmental Policy and Programs

It is of utmost important to regularly assess the gender components of environmental policy and programs in effort to measure the rate of achieving gender equality and awareness in the region.

(3) Use of Gender Indicators

Common indicators that are essential for this process include gender and poverty, gender and education, gender and health, gender and decision making/policy formulation and also gender and economy, etc.

(4) Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are powerful tools to assess gender equality in environmental work since it is the process of tracking the progress of the entire exercise.

(5) Creating a Ministry of Gender and Also Developing a National and State Gender Policies

This is necessary to promote, integrate and mainstream gender issues in all development activities (Kaudia and Obonyo, 2007)

(6) Construction of Gender Database and Environmental Networking

Adequate gender database and networking in environmental concerns are one of the powerful thrust in achieving gender equality and equity in environmental concerns.

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