

MANAGING ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT IN THE ILAJE OIL PRODUCING AREAS OF THE NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Oil producing areas of the Niger Delta have been facing social and ecological risks which culminated in the violence that have characterized the region in recent times. This study examines the Nigerian government management of the Niger Delta oil-induced crisis through its intervention agencies in order to determine whether they have succeeded in improving the living and environmental conditions in the Niger Delta region. Primary data obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and structured questionnaire were utilized. The paper concludes that the effect of government anti-poverty programs have had marginal impact as their core rationale is income-based rather than human-based. To achieve positive peace and development in the Niger Delta, there should be a shift of focus from project-centred to integrated rural and human capacity development initiatives, which will provide employment and empowerment as well as improve the standard of living of the people.

Key Words: Oil Exploitation, Environmental Degradation, Conflict Management, Development, Agencies, Nigeria's Niger.

INTRODUCTION

Development Initiatives in the Oil Producing Areas of the Niger Delta

The oil producing areas of the Niger Delta have witnessed a number of attempts, since pre-independence times, to influence the pace and thrust of development in the area in order to bring about an improved quality of life for the people. The Nigerian government has created several development intervention agencies. However, the legacy of these attempts mostly translates into enormous disappointment for communities in the Niger Delta whose hopes and aspirations have been raised and then repeatedly shattered. The Niger Delta remains pervasively poor and underdeveloped, lacking adequate physical infrastructures, such as electricity, portable water supply, educational facilities, medical facilities, road, shelter, and so on. The government has not invested in the people, in

infrastructures that will make life meaningful. As a result, the government has created a situation of violence, called structural violence of the state, which produced the crisis witnessed in the Niger Delta areas. The youth are aggrieved and radicalized by the activities of government as well as the oil companies.

The Nigerian government's first major attempt to address the grievance of the ethnic minority in the Niger Delta was in 1957, the twilight year marking the end of colonial administration and the dawn of independence in Nigeria. The ethnic minority agitation for greater recognition necessitated the setting up of the Willink commission of inquiry to investigate the fears of the minorities and how to allay them. The commission reported in 1958 that the needs of those who live in the creeks and swamps of the Niger delta are inequities in the allocation of resource from oil and gas and the degradation of the Niger Delta environment by pollution arising from oil industry activities, which adversely affect human developmental condition very differently from those in the interiors. The commission concluded that 'a feeling of neglect and a lack of understanding was widespread'. As a result of this, a case has been made out for special treatment of the area which would require special effort because the area is poor, backward, and neglected. The Willink commission report of 1958 led to the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) in 1961 to manage the developmental needs and challenges of the Niger Delta region. The areas of focus include the Yenagoa province, Degema Province, the Ogoni division of Port Harcourt, and the Western Ijaw Division of Delta province. The board's main responsibility was to advise the federal and regional government in the Eastern and Western Nigerian (later Mid-Western) on how best to develop the area. In order to demonstrate the development potential of the area, the board carried out an extensive survey and established pilot projects. The Willink commission's expectation, that the various governments will readily implement development projects suggested by the Board, did not come to fruition (Ikporupko, 1998)

Apparently, learning from the failure of NDDDB, bodies that were subsequently set up for the development of the Niger Delta region had functions that were executory rather than advisory. Another development effort, thereafter the NDDDB, was the establishment of the Niger Delta Basin and Rural Development Authority (NDBDA) in 1976. The NDBDA also could not solve the problem of the Niger Delta. Organizational problems affected the commission from its inception. None of the board members, appointed by the Federal government to run the NDBDA, came from the Niger Delta. Later, a presidential task force was set up in 1980 in the face of growing agitation and youth restiveness, for a special focus on the development of the region. The task force was allocated 1.5 percent of the federation account for the development of the Niger Delta region. This also failed woefully to make any impact on the developmental needs of the Niger Delta region. Subsequent renamed agencies are the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), which was established after the presidential task force in 1992, and the present Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), established in 2000. One

fundamental factor in the state of development in the Niger Delta areas is the perception and reality of the terrain as an impediment. The area is seen as a difficult region where spatial interaction is largely impeded. The reality is that the provision of socio-economic infrastructure is several times more costly in the mangrove and freshwater swamps in the Niger Delta region than in other parts of the country. However, be the environmental impediment as it may, the area should have been developed if there was a commitment, particularly on the part of government. An area that is the backbone of the country's economy should not continue to be underdeveloped. The lack of a political will was very clear from the failure of these development commissions (Ikporupko, 2001)

From the foregoing, palliative measures by the government from the NDDB to the NDDC have not sufficiently addressed the problem in the Niger Delta. Efforts to assuage the anger of the people of the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta through these development intervention agencies have not yielded the desired result. Instead of development, the grim reality for the people of the Niger Delta is still a life of deprivation, poverty, environmental dislocation, and increasing rate of crime. Acknowledging the fact that the attempt by the successive government to ameliorate the deplorable condition in the Niger Delta has been based on different criteria, depending on the objective of the administration in power. However, the effect of these anti-poverty programs have been limited or have had only marginal impact as their core rationale is income-based rather than human-based. This assertion suggests a shift of focus from project centered initiative to integrated rural and human capacity development initiative, which will provide employment and empowerment as well as improve the income and standard of living of the people in the region. These are the primary reasons why the region's development projects launched by successive government without first consulting the local people before making considerable expenditure on grandiose projects and technological innovation have turned out to be inappropriate and did little to improve the wellbeing of the people living in the rural oil producing communities. Therefore, the crisis that have engulfed the Niger Delta is traceable, not only to the many years of neglect by various administration of the region, but also to the failure of development projects by both government and the multinational oil companies in the region. The failure of the development projects and misplaced priorities in the selection of projects which have nothing to do with the needs of the people have been adduced as the major cause of political agitation, which has degenerated into kidnapping and hostage taking by the youth militants of the Niger Delta.

Field work observation clearly revealed that many of the projects executed by these development intervention agencies did not put into consideration the strategic needs of the oil producing communities in the Niger Delta before they were carried out. This observation found justification in Imobighe (2004) assertion of the development effort of these commissions which he opined as merely cosmetic, having failed to significantly improve the fortune of the Niger Delta people. The effect of the federal and Ondo State government development intervention agencies on this study area is fully explored in the next section.

NDDC DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN THE OIL PRODUCING AREAS OF ILAJE

The establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission was another major step taken by the Federal government to deal with the Niger Delta crisis. NDDC was set up by the Obasanjo administration in December 2000 to replace the ineffective Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission. NDDC was mandated to take over the assets and liabilities of OMPADEC with a view to improving on OMPADEC's performance. The mandate of the commission, as enshrined in the act of the National Assembly that established it in July 2000, was essentially to coordinate development efforts of various stakeholders in the region in a sustainable manner. NDDC is the ad-hoc structure, which is supposed to facilitate development in the Niger Delta by identifying and addressing the urgent needs of the people as a complement to the efforts of the state government and the corporate social responsibility contributions of the oil multinational.

The commission began operation in 2001 and at its inception, there was high expectation that NDDC had the potential to offer a lasting solution to the socio-economic difficulties of the Niger Delta, which successive governments have grappled with even before independence. To achieve its mandate, the NDDC board identified three core areas of focus, which included social and physical development, human development, and, lastly, the pursuit of a peaceful environment that allows tourism to thrive and supports a buoyant culture. NDDC also developed a regional development master plan as part of its overall strategy, which was provisionally named consolidated council on socio-economic development of the coastal states of the Niger Delta, otherwise known as the Niger Delta Marshall plan. The master plan is to serve as a pathway and harmonization framework for different intervention agencies and tiers of government to ensure purposely and even spread of developmental project among the coastal states. It consists of a robust package of policies and strategies for the development of the region (International Crisis Group, 2006). However, it took the commission about three years to prepare this developmental blueprint for the Niger Delta. It is hoped that its implementation will not take that long. If, however, faithfully implemented, it will fundamentally address the seemingly daunting developmental challenges of rural poverty, falling educational standards, inadequate infrastructural development, and inadequate power supply, among others, in the Niger Delta. The master plan is, thus, designed to address poverty through the development of human capacity. As a fundamental principle, it aims at growing a robust economy, care for the environment, and the provision of physical infrastructure.

The NDDC funding structure includes contributions from the Federal government, the oil companies operating in the region, part of the ecological fund for member states of the Niger Delta. The NDDC received, from the federal government, 15 percent of the oil revenue allocation to the nine states, oil companies contributed 3 percent of their annual budget to the NDDC fund, and the state governments gave 5 percent of funds due to the member states from the ecological fund. The commission has developed a formula whereby 60 percent of its funds are

spent in proportion to the amount of oil produced in each state. The commission budget for 2001 and 2002 was N 10 billion and N14 billion, respectively. However, the National Assembly only allocated N 15 million of its 2002 budget (ANEEJ, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2002). The federal government accounted for 78.03 percent of the N 44 billion that was disbursed to the commission between 2001 and 2004. Even though the NDDC is better funded compared to previous commissions, this has not translated into any concrete difference. It is saddled with an assignment that covers nine states, over 300 communities each with its own peculiar and costly needs. Lack of adequate funding limits its capacity. The oil companies are not contributing their own shares regularly. They claimed they have their own community development projects to execute.

Moreover, findings revealed that the people of the oil producing areas perceived the NDDC as an imposition from the federal government and a top-down approach to development planning and implementation. The inhabitants of the oil producing areas were not involved in determining its composition, which primarily comprises appointees of the federal government. Since its commissioners are political appointees representing different states and interest, NDDC development program is further constrained by the placement of politics before the development agenda. Further, the general view of the people is that NDDC has made little progress in the area. Layers of distrust have accumulated over decades of strife in the Niger Delta, impeding the gradual efforts being made to address the lack of development in the region.

Several factors have been attributed to the lack of success of NDDC. First, its capacity is limited by inadequate funding as NDDC is grossly underfunded. Second, is that NDDC operates in utter neglect of the important provision of the law establishing it, which stipulates the usage of quota of production in sharing projects, contracts, and employment in the development of the oil producing areas. The result is that the oil producing communities are deprived of projects while the non-oil producing areas are allocated projects that should have been executed in the oil producing areas. Third, is that most of the projects executed in the oil producing communities are imposed on the people without considering their peculiar needs. In other words, there was a lack of consultation with oil producing communities in the identification and implementation of development projects.

Within two and a half years of its existence, NDDC claimed to have recorded some progress in infrastructural development. Three hundred and fifty-eight projects have been completed across the region. These included forty major roads, forty-one landing jetties, and ninety-three water schemes (ANEEJ, 2004). Also, eighty-one electricity projects and one hundred and ninety building construction works for schools and health centers have been completed. The breakdown of completed projects by states is Abia 40, Akwa Ibom 53, Bayelsa 47, Cross River 4, Delta 97, Edo 38, Imo 31, Ondo 31, and Rivers 17. The NDDC also claimed to have awarded projects worth over N 11 billion in different areas of the region.

Direct observation of NDDC activities in this study area revealed that NDDC has not made any significant progress in improving the living conditions of the people, nor the environmental conditions of the area. Further, projects executed in a few scattered communities, including a non-functioning borehole and rehabilitation works, like building of blocks of classrooms, dispensaries and health centers, provision of books, and science equipment, most of which are usually allotted with little or no consideration for their end use or sustenance.

However, the commissioner representing NDDC in Ondo state claimed that despite the difficult terrain and developmental challenges confronting the oil producing areas of Ilaje, NDDC was determined to improve the well being of the people of the areas. According to him, since its inception, NDDC has initiated 302 physical infrastructural projects in the area. The projects, as highlighted by him, included the building of roads, footbridges and jetties, construction and renovation of classrooms, hostel blocks, staff quarters, health centers, hospitals, and doctor's quarters. NDDC has also undertaken electrification, erosion control, shore protection, and water projects in the oil producing communities. In addition, NDDC has implemented various human development programs. These programs, designed for the welfare of the youths and people of the oil producing areas, included the computer literacy program, skills acquisition program, NDDC Assisted Mass Transit Scheme, NDDC Solid Waste Disposal Scheme, and NDDC Globacom self employment business scheme. All these projects cut across all the communities. Jetties and shorelines protection were provided in communities, such as Ilowo, Igbokoda, Ode-Ugbo, Ugbo-Nla, and Idi-Ogba.

NDDC also constructed a technical college at Ayetoro and primary schools at Igbotu, Mahin, and Idi-Ogba. A community secondary school at Ilepete and comprehensive health center at Igbokoda, equipped with doctors' and nurses' quarters were executed. It also embarked on rural electrification through the donation of electricity, transformers, and electricity generating sets in some communities such as Orereara, Ilowo/Ilepete, and Igbotu/Ikpoke electricity projects. In addition, 29 water projects have been implemented in the oil producing areas, out of which 10 have been commissioned.

However, participants at the focus group discussion sessions, communities' leaders, youth, and women leaders of the sampled communities interviewed were unanimous in their responses that NDDC has not made any significant impact on their communities. Their comments indicated that NDDC is viewed as a top-down approach to development planning and implementation. It is quite revealing that officials of the commission admitted that the projects they have executed cannot compensate for the negative effects of oil exploitation because the negative impact cannot be quantified in the sense that the whole of the national budget cannot compensate for it. The respondents bitterly complained about the lack of appreciable development in their communities.

In general, the available social development indicators in the Niger Delta region point to inadequate, unavailable, and poor quality infrastructure and social services, from water to telecommunication. The historical neglect of the region's development poses a steep barrier to attaining socio-economic transformation and poverty alleviation (UNDP, 2006). Direct observation of physical projects in the communities revealed that most of the projects have not been completed. Also, they are very few, in comparison to NDDC claims. The projects are not evenly distributed in the communities, while some communities have not benefited from NDDC projects.

Data from the federal office of statistics, now the National Bureau of Statistics, revealed that water in the majority of Niger Delta States came from unsafe supply facilities, including rivers, lakes or ponds, unprotected wells, and boreholes. Ondo State is ranked among the Niger Delta States that has very acute water problems (UNDP, 2006). Findings revealed that the borehole provided by NDDC in the oil producing areas of Ilaje is not drinkable. The NDDC water supply scheme has remained incompletd, even when it has been commissioned.

A participant in one of the focus group discussion session at Orotu provided a vivid account of the water supply situation. According to him:

There is no safe drinking water anymore. Oil pollution has polluted the rivers and creeks where we derive our drinking water. The NDDC borehole is also not potable. Those who can afford it, buy pure water from Igbokoda, which cost N 200 per bag. Majority of the people drink the polluted water. Except during the rainy season when we drink rainwater.

Inadequate water supply in the oil producing areas made the people depend on the polluted water, which leads to health problems from water borne diseases. It was estimated that only 20 to 24 percent of rural oil producing communities have access to safe drinking water (UNDP, 2006). This has serious implications for the general health, environment, economic activity, and sustainable livelihood in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta.

Fieldwork observation showed that majority of the people travel far across the rivers on canoes to seek drinkable water since the river has been polluted, not just from oil, but also because it is used as refuge and feces disposal. The people also depend on rain for potable water. However, an insufficient rainwater harvesting system also made the people rely on toxic waste water from Chevron facilities for drinking.

In the same vein, the Ondo State coordinator of the NDDC put the situation in a somber perspective. According to him:

The entire Ilaje local government is on water, but no water to drink. As an engineer who grew up in the area and schooled there, we have to travel long distances to fetch the so-called good water, which is darkish and smelly. The water people excrete on, is what they drink.

Further, he stated that the lack of potable water in the areas made NDDC to place emphasis on water projects even though the challenges are much.

In the area of housing, direct observation revealed that most of the housing structures in the oil producing areas are predominantly of poor quality, especially in the swamps and creeks where dwellings are made up largely of stilt or strip foundation. A well respected opinion leader in Ugbo-nla, lamenting on the poor state of housing facilities in the areas, said:

Many of the people in the Ilaje riverine areas may not be able to point to their family houses because many of the houses used by our fathers and grandfathers were make shift ones. These houses are always washed away by water and the people have to shift to another location whenever the area is affected by sea incursion.

In terms of education, most of the school facilities are inadequate. Fieldwork observation showed that most of the staff quarters, in communities like Awoye, Molutehin, Ugbo-nla, Igo, and Ikorigho, are uncompleted. The secondary school system, in particular, has been seriously afflicted by shortages of qualified teachers. Many of the youths of these communities complained about the lack of teachers to teach core subjects. According to one of the informants in Ayetoro, there are only four teachers teaching in the secondary school. There are no teachers for core courses, such as Yoruba, English Language, Christian Religious Knowledge, and Literature. Ilaje oil producing areas are ranked among those areas in the Niger Delta with oil facilities and a low educational index (UNDP, 2006).

In the area of health care delivery, there is dearth of quality health care services in the oil producing communities, as only one health center was provided for all the eleven communities. UNDP (2006) alluded to the dismal health and health care delivery in the oil producing areas, which manifests in poor hygiene. Further, there is little or no health information and education, a grossly inadequate capacity for service delivery, inadequate provision of

hospitals, clinics and primary health centers, and a lack of effective operational plans for holistic health management. Focus group discussion sessions provided corroborative evidence on the status of health care in the oil producing communities, affirming that modern health care facilities are largely absent. The few existing public health care centers lacked qualified doctors, nurses, and critical supplies, such as drugs, syringes, and sterilizers. The people of the oil producing communities have to resort to local and traditional remedies to deal with their poor health conditions.

In the oil producing areas, all the sampled communities are not even linked to the natural electric power grid. Those they were linked have been damaged for years without any effort by the government to repair it. For example, at Molutehin, the researcher was shown the damaged electric power grid that has not been repaired for the past 10 years. These communities depend on a generator for those that can afford it, or an oil lamp.

From the interviews conducted with community leaders, it was adduced that projects that are unsuitable to their needs were imposed on the people and such projects were executed without input from the oil producing communities. In the period under review, there was no evidence of NDDC spending on human development. In terms of inequitable projects distribution among the oil producing communities, the NDDC commissioner in Ondo State explained that, as politicians, they cannot ensure that projects are evenly distributed because of placement of politics before the development agenda.

The commissioner of NDDC in Ondo State also stated that there are a lot of challenges facing the commission. He explained that the commission development efforts have not sufficiently compensated the people for the adverse effect of oil exploitation. Further, he stated that the negative effect of oil activities is not quantifiable because even the whole of the national budget cannot compensate for it. However, he identified ways in which the commission can be improved. He indicated suggestions that included proper funding of the commission through increase in the derivation fund to the oil producing states, cooperation and trust by host communities, adequate information should be provided to the people, transparency and accountability on the part of the commission, and assistance from the international communities.

It seems, however, that the scale of developmental needs in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta is beyond what NDDC alone can handle, even if all its budget are released to it regularly. In the light of this observation, a more effective institutional framework should be created in the oil producing states, which would transparently utilize accruals from oil derivation allocation. NDDC has not been seen to make any meaningful impacts on the oil producing areas.

Further, it must be emphasized that the issue of sustainability of NDDC projects, which has to do with project maintenance, seems not to have been adequately addressed. The staff of NDDC explained that they are not responsible for the maintenance of projects as intervention agencies. Projects maintenance, according to them, is the responsibility of government. This suggests that the issue of sustainability should, therefore, be addressed in the Niger Delta regional master plan.

OSOPADEC AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ILAJE OIL PRODUCING AREAS.

Ondo State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (OSOPADEC) was the initiative of the Ondo State Government. In the aftermath of the protracted communal clashes between the Ijaws and the Ilajes in the riverine and oil producing areas of Ondo state, the government attempted to embark on rehabilitation programs in the devastated areas. The areas have suffered long years of neglect and environmental degradation, accompanied by sustained agitation and restiveness that characterized the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta region. As a result of this agitation for oil derivation and resource control, some concerned indigenes of the oil producing areas went to court to prevent the government from spending the oil derivation revenue until an institutional framework was established for its utilization. This led to the establishment of OSOPADEC, the first of its kind in the Niger Delta State (ANEIJ, 2004).

An Act of Parliament established OSOPADEC on October, 2001 as an intervention agency to cater for the development of the oil producing areas of the state. It is a body statutorily saddled with expending 40 percent of the 13 percent oil mineral derivation fund accruable to the state from the federation accounts on development projects in the coastal oil producing areas. The commission, which was inaugurated in November, 2001 was, however, restructured through OSOPADEC law, in 2003) for effective repositioning when the Agagu Administration came on board. The new law provides, among others, for the post of chairman to be manned by an indigene of the oil producing areas as against the previous arrangement whereby the government served as the chairman. The chairman of OSOPADEC, disclosed that the commission has received a total sum of nineteen billion, one hundred, and sixty million naira (N 19.16 billion) between 2003 to 2006 out of N 19.43 billion due to the commission, leaving an outstanding of N 270 million.

Like the NDDC, most of OSOPADEC's interventions are in the area of infrastructural development of roads, water supply, jetties, and school classrooms. OSOPADEC also developed a master plan for the development of Ilaje. However, its board of representatives, which were drawn from both the government and oil communities, was far more effective than those of NDDC. In fact, the law establishing OSOPADEC clearly states how its funds should be administered and the share of each stakeholders, be it the federal, state, and local government or the oil

communities. The enabling law, thus, makes it easier for OSOPADEC to be held accountable by indigenes of the oil producing areas in line with the human rights approach of good governance, transparency, and accountability.

OSOPADEC fund was approved by the government to take care of development projects in the far-flung ecologically ravaged riverine communities in the two coastal councils of Ilaje and Ese-Odo. The Chairman of OSOPADEC stated that the biggest of the contract, which covered the construction of walkways to link the riverine communities, concrete and wooden jetties, and electrification projects, is the construction of the Igunsin-Oloto-Igboegunrin-Madagbayin and Mahintedo road, which was designed to complement the role of the on-going multi-billion naira Igbokoda-Ayetoro road and its extension from Aboto to the site of the Olokola mega projects on the boundary with Ogun state. These projects are designed to further open up the long forgotten riverine communities.

In addition, the commission also awarded a contract for the reclamation and building of a new town, called Adagbakuja, in Ugbo-Nla, where permanent residential buildings will be provided as a replacement for the makeshift houses, which was easily washed away by sea-incursion. The chairman also stated that the commission has on-going pilot water schemes at six different communities, namely, Ajapa, Asisa, Molutehin, Obe-Nla, Ugbo, and Zion-Pepe. Footbridges, known as walkways, were built in 95 communities to facilitate mobility in the riverine areas. Concrete jetties were also constructed in communities, such as Agadagba-Obon, Igbekobo, Awoye, and Igo. Contracts for the construction of jetties in Obe-Nla, Obe-Rebiminu, and Odo-Nla have been awarded, while three additional others are also being planned for other locations.

In terms of housing, 433 rehabilitation housing units have been constructed, while 420 housing units have been recently contracted. However, these houses were built with wooden planks as a replacement for the traditional ones built with raffia palm shards.

In the area of health care, the commission has provided free medical care services and N 20 million was spent in the last four years on HIV/AIDS treatments and on procurement of various drugs. In terms of education, OSOPADEC has undertaken 58 school projects, including new buildings and renovations of existing ones. Staff quarters have also been constructed to offer decent accommodation to teachers in the oil producing areas. Yearly bursary and scholarship awards were given to students of tertiary institutions who originate from the oil producing areas. Grants and facilities, such as laboratory equipment, computer and generating sets were also donated to secondary schools in the oil producing areas.

In the area of local empowerment programs, aquaculture development and artisanal fishing support scheme, through the provision of boats, granting of loans, and training in fish pond cultivation, were provided. Lastly, employment opportunities were provided for the people in the commission and some youths of the oil producing communities were sent to the Petroleum Training Institute (PTI) at Warri on an apprenticeship to acquire various skills, ranging from plumbing and pipe-fitting, welding, and carpentry to joinery. The commission also targeted barbing, hairdressing, and sports development.

Empirical evidence indicated that the commission placed more emphasis on the provision of physical infrastructural development than human capacity development. The zonal coordinator of OSOPADEC in Ilaje, justified the priority given the implementation of physical infrastructure. According to him, attention must be focused, initially, on the improvement of the living conditions of the people, thereby making life comfortable for the people who lacked basic infrastructures and amenities, especially in the aftermath of the Ilaje and Ijaw crisis, before effort is shifted to human capacities development. The commission intention was to open up the entire Ilaje oil producing areas through access to roads, telecommunication, electricity, and so on. By doing this, the development of the area will be a matter of course. Also, it will curb rural-urban migration. The long-term plan of OSOPADEC is to attract people back to the Ilaje oil producing area. The commission claimed to have partly achieved this feat. In addition, what is being provided for the people is based on what they expressed as their pressing needs.

The commission effectiveness has been constrained by a non-release of fund, even when the 13 percent allocation has been released to the state. Also, the 40 percent allocated to the commission out of the 13 percent is considered too small to ensure development of an area that has been neglected for decades. Perception of participants in the FGD sessions and interviews was that the commission should receive at least 60 percent of the 13 percent oil revenue derivation fund. Moreover, bureaucracy involved in the collection of the fund due the commission is another major constraint on the development efforts of OSOPADEC.

The development efforts of OSOPADEC were generally acknowledged by the people, who explained that OSOPADEC has implemented more projects than NDDC. However, participants for the FGD sessions, which comprised mostly of the youth, stated that OSOPADEC has not really done much for their communities. While respondents for the interviews, made up of opinion leaders, community leaders, and traditional leaders, indicated that OSOPADEC has achieved a lot for the communities in recent times. Youth leaders and local government officials interviewed, however, gave a divergent view. The implication is that it is mostly the elites who have benefited from OSOPADEC through contracts that actually felt the impact of the commission while the majority of the rural folk believed that the commission has not made significant progress towards the development of the

areas, since the standard of living of the people have not really improved. One of the informants further explained that most of the infrastructural facilities in their communities were actually provided by the people through self-help initiatives when the local economy was buoyant before the adverse effect of oil exploitation on their economic activities led to massive loss in income.

Moreover, projects distributed by OSOPADEC among the oil producing communities were inequitably distributed. This issue has generated tension, thereby stressing communal relations in the areas. The staff of OSOPADEC bemoaned the constraints the lack of cooperation of the people posed to their development effort. Whereas, the people complained that the commissions do not carry them along in the implementation of development projects. According to the community leader at Awoye, whenever a project is executed by OSOPADEC in their community, they became aware of the project only when the contractor started working on it in their community. They were not consulted before the projects were implemented nor carried along at the execution stage. As indicated earlier, only a small clique in the oil producing areas benefited from contracts awarded by the commission, while the rural folk were not carried along.

In respect of the above, this study postulates that the local communities were not carried along in the implementation of development projects as findings established the low level of local participation in the development activities of the commission. While the commission claimed to actively involve the people in their activities, empirical evidence indicated that the reverse is the case. Decision on which project to execute in these communities was mainly the prerogative of the commission who only paid supervisory visit to these communities at the execution stage of projects.

On the issue of maintenance of physical infrastructure provided by the commission, the area manager of OSOPADEC, stated that:

We are not responsible for the maintenance of the development projects we executed. We provided the communities with infrastructures, which we expect the government to maintain.

However, the commission explained that government has not been maintaining these infrastructural projects. Rather, the government has been very distant from the people and the maintenance culture is very poor. The commission emphasized on the need to sensitize the government about imbibing a maintenance culture. In this regard, this suggests that maintenance culture should be built into the activities of the commission, since the government that funded the commission has neglected this important aspect of the development efforts.

Upon the admission that the commission has not achieved much by way of developing the area and that the benefit accruing to the people is far less than the negative impact, staffs of the commission and respondents for the FGD sessions and interviews were asked to suggest how the commission can be improved. Their responses indicated suggestions that included increase in the fund given to the commission from 40% to 60%, transparency and accountability on the part of the commission, cooperation of the communities with the commission, fair distribution of projects, emphasis on both physical and human capacities development through provision of quality infrastructural facilities, the establishment of micro-credit scheme where loan can be obtained for rural enterprise development with little or no bureaucracy, and the establishment of auxiliary industries that would create employment for the youths.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Attempt by successive Nigerian government to ameliorate the deplorable condition in the Niger Delta region have been based on different criteria depending on the objective of the administration in power. The effect of these anti-poverty programs have been limited or have had only marginal impacts as their core rationale is income-based rather than human-based. This assertion suggests a shift of focus from project-centered initiative to integrated rural and human capacity development initiatives, which will provide employment and empowerment as well as improve the income and standard of living of the people in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta region. These are the primary reasons why the region development projects, lauded by successive government without first consulting the local people before making considerable expenditure on grandiose project and technological innovation, have turned out to be inappropriate and did little to improve the well-being of the people living in these communities.

The government must do away with the half hearted and top-down public policies of the past and embrace more participatory and people-oriented choices. Therefore, the imperative for a new development agenda arises from the fact that development planning efforts have failed to adequately address the region needs. The result has been disillusionment and frustration among the people about their increasing deprivation. They have seen one government agency after another without any significant changes; instead their physical environment has been deteriorating at an alarming rate, which hinders economic prospects and harm human well being. Misdirected resources, inappropriate policy framework, and a poor visioning of what development should look like have contributed to a destabilization of the societies and stroked deep and proliferating concerns. If not addressed, these do not bode well for the future of Nigeria or an oil hungry world.

Such a fundamental shift in the attitude of government toward the oil producing areas would go a long way to determine the future or otherwise of the development commission. For the government intervention agencies to

wipe out the bitter experiences of today, the commissions have to embark, first and foremost, on programs that will regenerate the environment and that are capable of sustainable development. Instead of only dealing with a shortage of income, the strategy should also deal with what people can achieve with the resources in their possession. Providing the excluded people of the Niger Delta with income generating activities may solve their poverty problem, but it does not overcome exclusion. A basis for the integrated development of the Niger Delta oil communities should be created. The commission must first see itself as a partner in progress with oil communities, rather than another elaborate institution for siphoning huge government resources. The commission must give greater attention to the development project that will economically empower the people and alleviate the socio-economic problem facing these communities.

These commissions must also ensure that community projects are evenly spread across the oil producing communities. The most important revision in strategy may be in laying the political and legal basis for inclusive development, tackling discriminatory resource policies, and creating public policies that foster growth with equity. In this regard, the commissions' developmental projects must involve a local process including not only the economic targets, but also the political and the psychological aspects of life.

The implementation of governments' structural reform and the commissions' program should focus on three broad objectives: improving the coverage and quality of basic services targeted to the Niger Delta, supporting public sector reforms and institutional strengthening as the government embarks on the redefinition of its role, and creating the necessary conditions for private sector and NGO-led growth in the region.

The bottom up approach that could make the development of the region relevant to the need and aspiration of the people of the Niger Delta is paramount. In this respect, dialogue is imperative. The people are the best architects of their own development, as they are the best architect of their lives, thus holding the greatest prospects for efficacy and sustainability. The special circumstances in which the people of the Niger Delta find themselves, requires programs that recognize that poverty eradication and successful rural development depending on the involvement of local communities. There must be a strong focus on strengthening grassroots organizations and on making resources available for community development activities. The program for addressing rural poverty must identify and target the most vulnerable, empowering them to participate effectively in development activities.

The central government should ensure equity and provide adequate access to quality education, affordable health care, and a reliable policy for environmental protection. Government must abandon what presently amounts to a "patch-patch" approach to the development of the Niger Delta. Also, the government should monitor these commissions in order to ensure that it is not politicized, over-bureaucratized, under-funded, or hijacked by the

elite for sectarian ends. All these would, in the short and long term, help to avert the bitter acrimonies of the recent past.

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