

**ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION, RISING POVERTY AND CONFLICT:
TOWARDS AN EXPLANATION OF THE NIGER-DELTA CRISIS**

Professor H.A Saliu
University of Ilorin

Saka Luqman
University of Ilorin

Ali Arazeem Abdullahi
University of Ilorin

Abstract

It is no more a news to say that the Niger Delta region of Nigeria that bears the bulk of the nation's oil wealth has long faced with environmental degradation. This being the direct results of oil spillage, gas flaring and other environmentally negative practices that have for long characterized the activities of oil multinationals operating in the region and which has consistently endangered the lives of the inhabitants of the area. Though, the region produces the bulk of the nation's oil wealth, its people live in abject poverty and squalor. Agitations for a stake in the control of the oil wealth and more developmental projects by the people have elicited little or no favourable response from the elites that control the Nigerian state. Faced with dim prospect for decent means of livelihood amidst increasing oil wealth accruable to the Nigerian state, the people of the region, particularly the youth, took up arms against the state as their last resort in making the state to be sensitive to their plights. This has resulted in total confusion, chaos and disorderliness. This paper examines the conflicts in the Niger Delta of Nigeria and argues that conflicts in the region arise as a result of grinding poverty and environmental degradation, which has for long been the plights of the people of the region. The paper concludes that recent efforts by the new administration of Yar'adua aimed at bringing peace to the region may not yield positive results unless such efforts address the crisis of poverty and environmental degradation in the region.

Introduction

*Oil spills are like spilling blood
Sometimes one leads to the other
Birds die on beaches, and poets
Languish in prison¹*

The above quoted prose explains the complex nature of the Niger Delta crisis. Like most human problems and indeed that of the state, the crisis has strong economic underpinnings. The economic component of the national question in Nigeria and the concomitant conflicts are immense. In Nigeria, economic problems have provided the needed veneer for the expression of violence and conflict be it political, ethnic or religious (Alabi, 2004: 81). Most significant of such conflict is the crisis in the Niger Delta which at the onset was economic but has become a hydra-headed monster that threatens the political and economic security of the nation and serves as a source of friction between and among communities and nationalities in the oil bearing region.

Although the Nigerian economy has experienced economic growth in recent time especially since the inception of the democratic regime that started in 1999, such economic growth is yet to translate to economic development and an appreciable increase in the standard of living of the Nigeria masses. It is contended that the increasing pauperization of the people of the Niger Delta in particular, amidst increasing windfall of revenue accruable from oil and the growth in the oil sector have pushed the people of the region particularly the youth to the edge. The increasing marginalization, environmental degradation, pervasive poverty, perceived insensitivity on the part of the State and the failure of state interventionist efforts at ameliorating the suffering of the inhabitants of the region consequently reinforce the option of violence as against peaceful engagement with the state. This is manifested in the increasing violence, arson and lawlessness epitomized by the incidence of kidnapping of oil workers, occupation of oil sites and seizure of facilities, vandalization of oil installations, the

bearing of arms against the state and the emergence of militia groups unfolding in the region. Hence, the resolution of the current impasse in the region cannot be successful without serious efforts directed at resolving the political economy of the crisis.

The paper therefore argues that the crisis in the oil rich Niger Delta is economically induced. It is the economics of poverty and the glaring appropriation by the Nigerian State of all oil related revenues coming from the region that generate other problems, all of which combine to make the region a flashpoint of conflict. The paper is divided into six sections. This introduction is followed by the section, which discusses the people, ecology and oil exploration in the Niger Delta. Section three gives a theoretical explanation of the conflict using the human security approach. Section four explains the conflict in the Niger Delta from the environment and poverty angle. Section five takes a look at state response to the conflict in the Niger Delta, while section six gives recommendations and conclusion.

The Niger Delta: Its People, Ecology and Oil Exploration

The Niger Delta is acclaimed to be the second largest wetland in the world after the Mississippi and is the largest in Africa (Nseabasi, 2005: 165). This large expanse of marshland and creeks is inhabited by numerous ethnic nationalities. The Niger Delta comprises six littoral states of Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, and River. Teeming with bird, marine life, giant ferns and towering mangrove plants, the creeks and swamps of the Niger Delta lie atop one of the biggest reserves of crude oil in the world, currently estimated at 34 billion barrels (Time, 2006: 20; Powell, Marriott and Stockman, 2005: 8-9). The region, a watery maze of intricate marshland, creeks, tributaries and lagoons is flung across approximately 50,000 square kilometers in Southern Nigeria, and constitutes the hub of oil and gas explorations in Nigeria. Exploration from the region has been a major source of revenue for the Nigerian government and put the state at a strategic position in the global calculations of industrial states and their multinational oil corporations.

Nigeria was rated the fifth largest exporter of crude oil within the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Agbu, 2005:82). Before the recent spate of violence in the Niger Delta, Nigeria was producing from the Niger Delta and the adjacent areas around 1.8 million barrel of crude oil per day. Nigeria is the number one oil producer in Africa, and the country is now rated the tenth largest producer of crude oil in the world (ICG, 2006a: 1). Nigeria's crude oil is currently being produced in the six littoral states that make up the Niger Delta plus Ondo in Western Nigeria and Abia and Imo states in Eastern Nigeria. Since, the mid-1970s, Nigeria's economic and political fate has been inextricably linked to crude-oil exploration and exportation. Crude-oil exploration activities contributes nearly 40 per cent to Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product, provides over 80 per cent of annual revenue for the federal government and provides close to 95 per cent of Nigeria's export earning (ICG, 2006b: 19; Agbu, 2005: 82; Powell, Marriott and Stockman, 2005: 9; Karl and Gray, 2003: 26). Ironically the region that bears these riches is also home to some of Africa's poorest peoples, and is the theatre of the continent's worst environmental destruction (Time, 2006: 20; Omotola, 2006: 4). One is therefore compelled to agree with Agbu's (2005:81) assertion that 'Nigeria's Niger Delta and its human travails are indeed one where what may be regarded as potential "paradise on earth" has turned to "hell on earth" for the peoples of the area as a result of cumulative practice of environmental degradation caused by oil exploration'.

Due to the indiscriminate manner and lack of concern for the environment that characterized oil exploration in Nigeria, the fragile ecology of the Delta has been seriously disrupted. According to Osuoka (2003: 116), all stages of oil activity from exploration and drilling to transportation, result in the destruction of natural environment and the livelihood of the local inhabitants who depend on the land and creeks of the Delta for their survival. These, when combined with incessant oil spills and blowouts resulting from over-aged and ill

maintain wellheads, pipelines and other facilities, make Nigeria's oil field to record the highest number of oil spill incidents in the world (ICG, 2006b: 21; Agbu, 2005: 82-84; Osuoka, 2003: 116). The devastation of the natural habitat of the Niger Delta has accelerated the deterioration of the socio-economic conditions of peoples of the region (Agbu, 2005: 83).

The increasing pauperization of the local inhabitants has meant that over four decades of oil exploration brought very little or no benefit to the people. Instead it brought health hazards, loss of income to local inhabitants from farming and fishing and ecological disasters. This may have informed Saro-Wiwa's assertion that oil exploration in the Niger Delta is akin to genocide for the host communities. He poetically pointed out that oil exploration:

is an ecological war in which no blood is (apparently) spilled, no bones are broken, no one is (assumedly) maimed, so few are alarmed but men, Women and children die, flora, fauna and fish perish, air, soil and water are poisoned: and finally, the land and its inhabitants die (Saro-Wiwa, 1992: 42-48).

Human Security: Towards a Theoretical Explanation of the Crisis in the Niger Delta

It has become a common knowledge since the end of the cold war that threats to human life emanate not only from situation of violent conflicts. Indeed, other non-conflict sources of threats to human existence are becoming more important. Such other threats as environmental degradation, economic hardship and blatant violation of human rights by the state are inducing conflicts between and among communities and nationalities within state and between or among nationalities and the state. This understanding made Ate (2001: ix), to assert that the extent to which human security in Africa is violated is revealed only partially if one focuses merely on armed conflict situations. He is of the opinion that human security on the continent is more broadly undermined because of the neglect of human development since independence. Having established this, what then constitutes human security?

Human security is the latest turn in the evolving global security discourse. While the term 'human security' may be of recent origin, the ideas that underpin it are far from being

new. Hubert (2001: 161) argued that the doctrine underpinning human security has been gathering steam since the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1860s. Broadly conceived, human security is concerned with the protection of people from critical and life threatening dangers, regardless of whether such threats are rooted in anthropogenic activities or natural events, lies within or outside states and whether direct or structural (UNU, 2001). Human security in essence means safety for people from both violent and non-violent threats. It is a condition of being characterized by freedom from pervasive threats to people's rights, their safety or even their lives (DEFAIT, 1999; Hubert, 2001: 162). The dimensions of threats to human security encompass gross violations of human rights, environmental degradation, terrorism, transnational organized crime, gender-based violence, infectious diseases and natural disasters (Hubert, 2001: 163). Indeed the widespread social unrest that often follows economic crises demonstrates the all-encompassing nature of human security.

The foregoing explanation of human security clearly shows that the continued socio-economic, political and environmental dislocation in the Niger Delta is nothing but a threat to human security of the people in the region. Since lack of human development contributes to political and socio-economic decay and the fact that Nigeria scores so depressingly low on all major indices of socio-economic development show the deplorable state of the nation's human security. No region of the country best exhibits the deplorable nature of Nigeria's human security than the Niger Delta. This state of human insecurity is aptly illustrated by the flagrant environmental degradation occasioned by oil exploration, severe and visible poverty and social discontents pervading this oil-producing region. The present state of human insecurity in the Niger Delta shows the linkage among ecological disaster, impoverishment and conflict (Adekanye, 1998; Obi, 2000). It is in view of this that the human security

framework represents a more realistic perspective for explaining the crisis and contradictions in the Niger Delta.

Environmental Degradation, Poverty and Conflict in the Niger Delta

From the past to the present, the history of social existence of people in the Niger-Delta has been one of misery, deprivation and poverty. Worst still, if the present is a reflection of what the future holds then the people of the Niger Delta, the nation's most important source of foreign exchange earning, face nothing but a bleak future. Since Shell B.P struck the first commercially substantive oil well in Oloibiri in 1956 and the commencement of exportation in earnest (ICG, 2006b: 19), the oil producing communities have known only poverty, misery and sorrow (Tell, 2005:30). Claude Ake captures better the predicament facing the people of the region when he was quoted as saying that:

It is well known that our oil wealth has become nightmare for the people of the oil producing areas. Demands for fair treatment and environmental protection have always elicited firm refusal, more repression and state violence. What is not well known is how much worse the nightmare has recently become”²

Friedman (1996) sees poverty as a form of disempowerment that can be viewed from three dimensions: socio-economic, political and psychological. To him, socio-economic disempowerment refers to relative lack of access to the resources essential for the self production of livelihood; political disempowerment refers to lack of clear political agenda and voice while, psychological disempowerment relates people's internalized sense of worthlessness and passive submission to authority. Poverty has various manifestations, which to Ijaiya and Umar (2004: 87), can be linked to the lack of income and assets to attain basic necessities of life, such as, food, shelter, clothing and access to acceptable levels of health care and education. Such manifestations include the sense of voicelessness and powerlessness in the institutions of the state and society. These manifestations according to Ijaiya and Umar (2004: 87), subject the 'poor', to rudeness, humiliation, shame, inhuman treatment and

exploitation in the hand of those in position of political power and authority. Abject poverty, which McNamara (1980:1), characterizes as a condition of life which is limited by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, high infant mortality and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency, continues to be the lots of the people of the oil bearing region. This state of being is exacerbated by oil exploration and production in the region.

Poverty is a crisis that is habitual and it conveys message of hardship difficult to deny. It speaks publicly through visible misery, persisting destitution, endemic hunger and visible malnutrition (Akanmidu, 2004: 3). Due to its nature, the endemic poverty afflicting the people of the Niger Delta amidst plenty has led to a state of hopelessness and the recourse to violence against the state and multinational oil companies operating in the region. The anger of the people in the region against the oil majors is as a result of environmental degradation and the loss of livelihood that their operations have engendered (Ovwusa, 1999: 90). Oil spillage resulting from oil exploration has led to the pollution of farmlands, fishing streams and ponds, while indiscriminate gas flaring pollute the air and result in acid rain (Raji, 1998:111). The environmental degradation meant that farming and fishing, the mainstay of the economy of the people in the region is constantly under threat. With little or no government and private sector paid employment, a large proportion of the people, particularly the youth face massive unemployment and a bleak future. The lack of gainful employment has created pervasive poverty amidst riches for the people of the Niger Delta. Given this state of being, one cannot but agree with Ledum Mitte, that the Delta's problem is a crisis of frustration (Time, 2006:23). This frustration is now being expressed through hostage taking, arson directed at oil installations and attacks on agencies of the Nigerian State.

The impressive growth in the nation's GDP has not translated to reduction in the number of citizen living below poverty line. Indeed, 55% of the populations live on less than

one dollar per day, one of the highest poverty rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. With an annual population growth of about 2.5 percent, the GDP growth rate is grossly insufficient to alleviate poverty, one of Nigeria's most pressing problems (USAID, 2006:3). Nigeria's main challenges are to reduce poverty, diversify the economy, improve basic health care, and education for the poorest half of the population (USAID, 2006; 5). These challenges are more pressing in the Niger Delta, a region that sits on top one of the world largest reserve of oil and natural gas, but where unemployment, poverty and squalor are the stacking realities of daily living for most of its people.

Poverty is an acute problem in Nigeria. An estimated 70 million in a total population of 136 million (55%) live on less than one dollar a day in purchasing power parity terms. This gives Nigeria the third largest number of poor in the world after China and India (World Bank, 2005). Worst still is the realization that Nigeria's oil and gas wealth has done little to alleviate poverty due to resource mismanagement and over reliance on oil. The economy's reliance on oil for export earnings and government revenue has hurt the poor more than the rich (USAID, 2006:5). Oil revenue has also fostered inequality and a rent seeking political economy, undermining transparency and accountability and leading to conflict, often violent over the allocation of oil resources as being witnessed presently in the Niger Delta. Indeed, the inability of state managers to translate the appreciable rise in revenue from oil and growth in real GDP into a reduction of the nation's poverty level has reinforced the option of violence for the youth of the Niger Delta.

Consequent upon this is the fact that poverty has become more than before a serious social problem and tops the country's list of policy priorities. The country's impressive foreign reserves estimated at about 43 billion dollar (CBN, 2006:17) and the recent relief from its debt burden has not led to a reduction in poverty for the poor either. The bottom line argument is that though the growth in real GDP, impressive foreign reserve and forgiveness

of the nation's debt by the Paris club are all good signs of economic prosperity, these have not translated to reduction in poverty for the teeming populace. The continued pauperization of the majority amidst wealth particularly in the Niger Delta cannot but heighten frustration with the state.

Forced by the circumstance of their people's existence and the lack of political will to address the problems of the region by the Nigerian State, militant groups started mounting series of violent attacks on oil facilities, workers and state agencies particularly the armed forces (Daily Independent, 2006: ix). Virtually all oil majors have been hit by the upsurge of violence in the Niger Delta. This coupled with crisis in the Middle East and Persian Gulf, has led to an upward swing in the price of crude- oil at the world market (Time, 2006:20; Thisday, 2006). However, the spate of violence should not be taken to mean that, this is the only strategy utilized by the people of the region in their struggle for justice. The people of the Niger- Delta have utilized various options ranging from dialogue, litigation, peaceful protest and lately, open violence (Ogbogbo, 2005:170-1770; Ovwasa, 1999:93). The recourse to violence by the people of the Niger-Delta may be as a result of government unresponsiveness to their plight and their increasing level of frustration with the state.

Aside the short-lived '12 day revolution' of Isaac Adaka Boro (Ogbogbo, 2005:176;Akinwumi, 2004: 117;Raji, 1998:114), the people of the Niger Delta have most often utilized non-violent strategies in their struggle against the state and oil companies. As in most conflicts, the first option adopted by the people is dialogue. The people of the region have also used the litigation option especially against oil companies. This option involved the resort to courts by the host oil producing communities against Oil multinationals. The slow pace of the Nigerian judicial system and the failure of dialogue may have compelled the oil producing communities to shift their strategy to protest both peaceful and violent. Indeed, the option of protest can be said to began in the year 1990 as that decade marked the beginning of

well organized, mass uprising against the state and oil companies by the people of the Niger Delta (Ogbogbo, 2005:174; Ovwasa, 1999:93; Raji, 1998:114-116). The most important highlight at this stage was the celebrated Ogoni uprising against the state and Royal Dutch Shell, under the aegis of Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) (Obi, 2000:139-140; Obi 1997:137-146; Apter, 1998:121-123; Ogbogbo, 2005:176-177). The strategies adopted by the Niger Delta peoples in the course of their struggle are largely dictated by the response and or non-response of the managers of the Nigerian State and the oil companies to their plights.

Oil Communities Response to Environmental Degradation and Long-term Neglect

As earlier noted, the people of the oil bearing communities have not being passive about environmental degradation and long-term neglect that have long been their plight. The people of the region have expressed their dissatisfactions through various forms of protests, both peaceful and non-peaceful. However, it needs to be noted, that peaceful protests and litigations as means of drawing attention to their plight were the earlier methods used by the people of the region. Indeed, the present violent confrontation epitomized by rising radicalization and militarization of the people's struggles for resource control, environmentally sensitive practices and socio-economic development clearly shows the failure of responses of both the Nigerian State and oil majors to the plight of the people of the oil bearing communities (Omotola, 2006:5; Ikelegbe, 2001).

At the earlier stage of their struggle, the people of the region utilized peaceful means to register their dissatisfaction to the crisis of environmental degradation and State apparent neglect of their developmental needs. These peaceful means ranges from street protests and demonstrations to verbal appeals. The peaceful modalities also includes, legislative debates, presentation by activists at local and international for a, court litigation against the State and oil multinationals, press releases and other media and publicity tactics (Ovwasa, 1999: 93,

Omotola, 2006: 12). The apparent inadequacy of the responses compelled the people of the region particularly the youth to take recourse to the non-peaceful option in their struggle. For now militancy and criminality have become the convergent streams of the popular resistance that now characterized the struggle for emancipation by the people of the Niger Delta (ICG, 2006a: 1).

Although the ‘12 Days Revolution’, led by late Isaac Adaka Boro in 1966, was the Delta’s first post-colonial uprising against the Nigerian State, yet Boro’s revolution was largely symbolic as it was short-lived (ICG, 2006a: 4). The Ogoni uprising of the 1990s championed by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People [MOSOP], under the leadership of writer-cum environmentalist late Kenule Saro-Wiwa can be said to be the beginning of the modern Niger Delta struggle for resource control and sustainable management of the Delta ecology (Omotola, 2006: 13; ICG, 2006a: 4). The Ogoni struggle was predicated on an adopted “Ogoni Bill of Rights”, in which the Ogoni people use to demand for political autonomy and the right to the control and the use of a fair proportion of economic resources available in Ogoniland for Ogoni development³.

The Federal government under the Abacha military junta responded to MOSOP agitation with crackdown, creating the River State Internal Security Task Force Unit to deal with the Ogoni crisis. Following internal wrangling and the mob killing of Four Ogoni leaders, Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni activists were arrested and charged with murder. Saro-Wiwa and his compatriots were found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging by the military tribunal that handled their trial (ICG, 2006a: 5; Agbu, 2005: 86; Osaghae, 1995). Though the rest of the story for Saro-Wiwa, his Compatriots and MOSOP is history, yet MOSOP ideal and resistance blaze the trail and continue to inspire resistance of various groups and nationalities in the Niger Delta.

The legacy of Saro-Wiwa and MOSOP has show how an organized group can press for change from an avowed recalcitrant regime and state. However, emerging groups and movements in the region are distinct from MOSOP with regards to the use of force. Amongst the emergent groups the Niger Delta Volunteer Force [NDVF] led by imprisoned Ijaw leader Asari Dokubo and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta [MEND] stand out. MEND particularly stands out as a well-coordinated and highly armed group. The group has also demonstrated clearly through its violent campaigns against the Nigerian State and Oil multinationals its potential to disrupt oil exploration and exportation, as well as, its capability to cripple the national's oil sector.

MEND has destroyed pipelines and claimed responsibility for attacks that have killed nearly 50 members of the nation's security agencies, including a deadly attack on Shell Benisede flow station in January 15 2006, that badly damaged the facility and left fourteen soldiers and two civilian contractors dead. The group has also claimed responsibility for most of the hostage-taking saga witnessed since January 2006. MEND through collaborations with other loose groups is attempting to become an umbrella organization for the coordination of agitation by the people of the Niger Delta (ICG, 2006a: 1).

Attacks on the oil industry in recent months, hostage taking, sabotage of remote riverine installations and the two car bombs so far, have gone along way to highlight the increasing militarization of the struggle of the people of the region. Today's militant movements in the region may be loosely connected and speak different languages, yet they share an increasingly common goal: 'resource control and better environmental management'. Though various response options are open to the people of the region, it is however, regrettable that they have come to learn the unfortunate lesson violence, extortion and kidnapping are a way and sometimes the only way to be taken seriously. This realization

has reinforced the option of violence in the agitation for resource control and sustainable environmental management by the people of the Niger Delta.

The Nigerian State and its Response to the Agitation's in the Niger Delta

The Nigerian State has not been passive to the crisis in the Niger Delta, indeed successive regimes have taken steps aimed at addressing the crisis. It is however, worthy to note that the responses of the state and oil companies to the agitation and demands of oil producing communities have always ranged from double talk, unfulfilled promises and arm-twisting strategy (Ovwasa, 1999:93). State repression and violence have been a prominent strategy deployed most especially by military regimes in quelling uprising in the Niger Delta. Such repressive acts often involve the drafting of mobile police and the armed forces to the region, with the mandate to put such uprising under control and facilitate the smooth operations of the oil companies. Specific instances of state violent repression against oil communities include: Egbona Crisis (1989-91); Oburu violence (1989) Umuechem Massacre (November, 1990); Bonny tragedy (1992); Egi-Obaji mayhem (1994) Tai-Biara (Ogoni) Massacre (1994); Ubima tragedy (1995); Odi Massacre 1999e.t.c (Eteng, 1996:140; Akinwumi, 2004:131; Ovwasa, 1999: 94; Raji, 1998:116). Presently, the whole of the Niger Delta is under military occupation. However, this should not be taken to mean that state response has always being through violence and repression. Aside repression, the Federal government has responded to the demands of the peoples of the oil-producing region by setting up of development commissions and boards.

The peculiar developmental challenges of the Niger Delta were recognized well before political independence of Nigeria with the setting up of the Wilikin Commission in 1958 to look into the fears of minorities. Based on the recommendations of the Commission, the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) was set up in 1961 (ANEIJ, 2004:20). However, the board failed to achieve it objectives before the outbreak of the Nigerian civil

war. Subsequent efforts at developing the Niger Delta include the establishment of the Niger Delta Basin and Rural Development Authority in 1976, the setting up of a presidential task force with 1.5% from the federation account allotted for the development of the region. After this came the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC). All these institutions utterly failed to make any meaningful development impacts on the area. These institutions are mere palliative measures and crisis management approach (Newswatch, 2003:16). They created avenue for corruption and personal enrichment for individuals and groups at the expense of the poverty stricken masses of the oil producing communities.

To address the renewed and heightened wave of youth restiveness in the region, following years of neglect and under development in the midst of oil wealth, the federal government in December 2000 set up the Niger Delta Development Commission [NDDC] (ANEJ, 2004:22; Akinwumi, 2004:130). The act establishing the Commission charged it with the responsibilities to:

Conceive, plan and implement, in accordance with set rules and regulations, projects and programmes for the sustainable development of the Niger Delta area in the field of transportation, including roads, jetties and waterways, health, education, employment, industrialization, agriculture and fisheries, housing and urban development, water supply, electricity and telecommunication⁴.

The Commission began operation in 2001 and is funded by the federal government and oil companies⁵. The Commission also receives aid from abroad (Akinwumi, 2004:130). It however needs to be pointed out that the NDDC is just an interventionist measure that offers too little and has come too late. The monumental developmental needs of the region are far beyond what the NDDC alone can handle. It may be this realization that prompted the federal government under President Obasanjo to announce a plan to construct a 1.6 billion Dollar highway throughout the region and create 20,000 new jobs in the Military, police and state owned oil companies (Time, 2006:23; ICG, 2006: 2). These gestures do little to

appease feelings of longtime neglect by the people of the Niger Delta. No wonder that stakeholders, particularly the oil companies seems unconvinced of the ability of the Nigerian State to manage the crisis in the region. This explains why most oil multinationals are taking separate steps at protecting their investment in the volatile oil bearing Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Recommendations and Conclusion

As youth restiveness, general lawlessness and bearing of arms against the state by militants groups in the area continue, the search for strategies that would assist in turning oil associated ‘curse’ into blessing is also intensifying. The strategies that have been employed at ensuring development of the area before are; the direct utilization by the state of oil revenue, the creation of interventionist agencies, and the institutionalization of corporate social responsibilities in the operations of oil companies working in the region. These strategies have failed due to the predatory nature of the Nigerian state, corruption and lack of transparency in the running of the development commissions while efforts by oil companies are partly effective, they are, however, too little and cannot replace the developmental responsibility of the state to the people of the oil bearing region (ANEEJ, 2004: 27; HRW, 2002a: 31-33). In order to stem the tide of insecurity, lawlessness, arson and violence in the Niger Delta the following are recommended:

The federal government needs to go beyond putting in place palliative measures and instituting agencies or commissions. The federal government can only tackle the developmental needs of the region through planned intervention policies, programmes and projects, which are true reflections of the desires and needs of the peoples in the oil producing communities. The recently announced nine point development plan of the federal government is a good step, though it may be coming a bit late. It needs to be noted that declaration of intention is different from actual implementation. Therefore the federal

government needs to ensure that her comprehensive action plan is carried out meticulously so as to maximize its impacts and benefits for the peoples of the region.

The state governments in the region need to embark on programme and projects that have direct bearing on the people of the region. Such programme and projects should be such that would empower the people particularly the restive youth to make a decent living from their environment.

The multinational corporations operating in the region need to address seriously their corporate social responsibility to host communities. Corporate social responsibility of companies must not stop only with the provision of few boreholes, constructions of block of classrooms and awarding of few scholarships. It needs to be extended to other welfare projects as electrification, road construction, while skill acquisition and empowerment programme needs to be instituted for the host communities' benefit.

The NDDC as presently constituted is doing its best within resource limits, however, the best of the agency seems not to be enough given the long years of neglect and marginalization of the people in the area. In view of this, the federal government needs to strengthen further the agency by committing more resources to it. The agency, on its part should ensure that its projects and programme have direct impacts on the lives of the people, which it is meant to serve.

There is the need for the revision of laws relating to oil and gas exploration in the Nigeria Niger Delta. Such revision should be aimed at reducing to the barest minimum, practices that are harmful to the fragile ecology of the Niger Delta.

The federal government needs to de-emphasize confrontation and military approach in handling dispute with the people of the area. Incidents like Odi Massacre, Umuechem killing and others gave bad image to the state. The order to shoot at sight recently given by the Federal Government to its security apparatus in the area and the subsequent incidents of

violence all give the indication that the State is still bent on using confrontation in resolving the impasse in the region against peaceful dialogue. However, the fact still remains that violent confrontation cannot solve the problem rather it is an all-inclusive peaceful dialogue that can take the state and the people of the region out of their present predicament.

Lastly, it needs to be noted that conflict in the region revolves around poverty, bad governance, insincerity, ineffective corporate-community relationship, underdevelopment, environmental degradation, among others (ICG, 2006a: i; Nseabasi, 2005:173; Nseabasi and Akpabio, 2003; Obi, 2000: 143-144). Reducing violence and conflict would have to entail capacity building for the youth, implementation of community oriented developmental projects, regards for the environment, corporate social responsibility and participatory approach in resolving issues and problems among stakeholders in the region. Deceit, repression and use of force by the State cannot lead to the abatement of violence in the Niger Delta.

Notes

- 1) Remembrance of a Certain Death in Nigeria', by Jonathan Hart quoted from Abdul-Rasheed Na' Allah (Edited) 'Ogoni's Agonies: Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Crisis in Nigeria, Trenton, NJ: African World Press Incorporation, 1998, p. 91.
- 2) Claude Ake, 'A People Endangered by Oil', Guardian Newspaper, 18th August 1994. Quoted from Akinwumi, O 'Crises and Conflicts in Nigeria: A Political History Since 1960, Munster: LIT VERLAG, 2004, p. 116.
- 3) The demand of the Ogoni, which formed the basis of MOSOP face-off with the Nigerian State and Royal Dutch, B.P that operated all the oil wells in Ogoniland was contained in the 'Ogoni Bill of Rights'. The Bill was presented to the government and people of Nigeria with an Appeal to the international community by MOSOP in December 1991 at Port Harcourt.
- 4) See the Act establishing the Niger Delta Development Commission, NDDC Act, Section 7 (1) (b).
- 5) Funds for running NDDC comes from the federal government which contribute 15% of the 13% oil revenue allocation due to the nine oil producing states from the federation account. 3% of annual budget of oil companies operating in *the region and 50% of ecological fund due to the nine oil-producing states.*

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