

## **An Investigation of Environmental Degradation and Political Anarchy in the Niger Delta Area**

by  
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### **Abstract**

Majority of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta area depend on the natural environment for their livelihood. For them, the environmental resource base, which they use for agriculture, fishing and the collection of forest products, is their principal source of food, pollution and environmental damage, therefore, pose significant risks to human rights. Despite a seeming number of efforts by the government to help resolve the crisis; vicious destruction and degrading of the environment and human lives continue unabated. The militancy, despondency, violence, kidnapping and misdirected government approaches remain as current stumbling blocks to peaceful resolution. The study utilized secondary data from the national and international government agencies. In addition, textbooks, journal articles, newspapers and magazines served as sources of data for the study. The human needs theory by Abraham Maslow served as the theoretical framework. The paper explored the people of the Niger Delta and their environment as well as the political instability that exist. Furthermore, it recommended that adequate measures should be taken to clean up the environment and restore natural environment.

**Keywords:** Environmental degradation, Niger Delta, Niger Delta Area, Political anarchy.

### **Introduction**

The Niger Delta consists of diverse ecosystems of mangrove swamps, fresh water swamps, rain forest and is the largest wetland in Africa (Eregha & Irughe, 2009). It is among the ten most important wetland and marine ecosystems in the world (Okonofua, 2011). It is made up of the nine oil producing states. These include; Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers states. Historically, the Niger-Delta peoples are known to have settled in their present locations long before the nineteenth century (Obiakor, 2012). Duru (1999) posit that the region is blessed with abundance of human and physical resources, including the majority of Nigeria's oil and gas deposits, good agricultural lands, extensive forests, excellent fisheries, as well as a well-developed industrial base. According to UNDP Report (2006), more than seventy

percent of the people depend on natural environment for their livelihood while Egbulem, Ekpe and Adejumo (2013) posit that the region is home to more than 10 million people. They further argue that the Niger Delta region is the heart of oil production activities in Nigeria, which has led many Nigerians to perceive the Niger Delta as synonymous with the oil producing areas. According to Okonofua (2011), it contains the largest oil deposits in Africa and some of the highest quality oil in the world. Its oil resources has unprecedented economic and geo-strategic significance and value (Watts, Okonta & Dimieari, 2004), and is without question the mainstay of the Nigerian economy (Watts, 2009). However, since 1956 when oil was first discovered in commercial quantities in Oloibiri, a community in Bayelsa state, an estimated \$600 billion has been generated from oil exports (Okonta, 2006).

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2006), prior to World War II, a delicate balance existed between the human populations of the Niger Delta and its fragile ecosystem. The exploitation of natural resources did not go beyond the search for medicinal herbs, fuel, game, fish, and construction materials. However, since the discovery of oil, the region has suffered environmental degradation from oil activities. Amnesty International (2005) states that in the Niger delta, oil spills are a common occurrence. Reasons for spills include corrosion of pipelines, poor maintenance of infrastructure, spills or leaks during processing at refineries, human error, and as a consequence of intentional vandalism or theft of oil. Hence, the Niger Delta has been identified as one of the world's most severely petroleum-impacted ecosystems (Annon, 2006). Oil spillage arises from routine, accidental, and illegal discharges into both terrestrial and aquatic environments. The UNDP (2006) estimates that between 1976 and 2001 there were approximately 6,800 spills totaling 3,000,000 barrels of oil. This value represents only the data oil companies reported to the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), thus may not reflect the magnitude. Studies have shown that the quantity of oil spilled over 50 years was a least 9-13 million barrels (Federal Ministry of Environment, Nigerian Conservation Foundation, World Wildlife Foundation, and CEESP-IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic, and Social Policy, 2006). Kadafa (2012) observes that owing to oil prospecting and exploration, the area is now characterized by contaminated streams and rivers, forest destruction and biodiversity loss. In general the area is an ecological wasteland. This affects the livelihood of the indigenous people who depend on the environment for survival. The consequences of this have been enormous; environmental degradation, economic impoverishment, protests and litigations, military repression, militancy, and an unending circle of instability.

Consequently, the Niger Delta has become the cynosure of grave developmental defects and gross human neglect which reflects in the lack of basic infrastructure like hospitals, roads, schools, electricity, potable water and security. This dearth of amenities is heightened by the activities of oil prospecting multinational corporations whose operations continue to damage both the ecosystem and climate due to oil spills, dredging, flaring and the laying of pipelines which require the removal of large swaths of forest resources with no alternative plans for renewal and sustainability. Despite all the claims by the oil companies to be involved in the development of the region, evidences tend to

show the contrary. For example, Whittington (2001) argue that the government and oil companies have profited by hundreds of billions of dollars since oil was discovered, yet most Nigerians living in the oil producing region are living in dire poverty. Unemployment is very high among the people of the area as the oil companies do not hire their employees from the region that produce the oil, but from non-oil producing regions. Whittington (2001) describes the economic dilemma of the region thus, the oil region in Nigeria seems to be stuck in time warp, with little real change since oil was discovered 45 years ago. Aworawo (2000) argues that the pollution, along with severe environmental degradation, has largely been a consequence of the region's oil production and has made it difficult for the inhabitants of the Niger Delta to carry out their traditional economic activities of fishing and farming, as local land and river systems have been too polluted to sustain such activities.

In its earliest form, the Niger Delta question was organised around protests and the registering of formal complaints to government operatives and representatives of oil companies; the aim then was to spur positive engagement towards equitable development of this territory and the involvement of the locals in the administration of their communities which includes the natural deposits. These agitations revolve around claims of injustice with regard to the neglect on the part of the government to develop the area where Nigeria generates the bulk of its revenue, the complicity on the part of the oil companies to devote appreciable resources to bolster corporate social responsibility, the denial or failure to accept and clean up environmental damages resulting from oil production and the demand of the people for increased stake in the administration and allocation of resources.

The people could not reconcile the promise of governance and the deplorable decay that pokes them in the eye. Denial of benefits accrued from the natural resources of the Niger Delta and the destruction of the environment made the people advocate for self-determination, resource ownership and control—an off-shoot of the earlier agitations led by Isaac Adaka Boro and later, Kenule Saro-Wiwa. This political activism introduced by the two 'revolutionaries' made the people of Niger Delta aware that the government has alienated them from the oil wealth (Ibaba, 2008). However, the arrest and death of the author Ken Saro-Wiwa gave the Niger Delta struggle an international status and instead of deterring others, a myriad of militant groups started emerging.

A number of studies have been conducted to address the Niger Delta Question. Much of the research has focused on the people's agitation for the resource control and the violence that has accompanied it. While some studies link the conflict to agitation over resource appropriation and ecological damage (Olorode 1998; Iyayi 2000; Human Rights Watch 1999; Okonta & Douglas 2003; Watts 2009; and Obi 1997), others link it to political marginalization, ethnicity and corruption (Igbinovia, Okonofua, Omoyibo, & Omoruyi 2004; Okonofua & Ugiagbe 2004; Saliu, Luqman, & Abdulahi 2007), poverty, unemployment and exploitation (Saro-Wiwa 1992; Eteng 1997; Iyayi 2008; Ukeje, Odebeyi, Sesay, & Aina 2009; Peel 2010), and constitutionalism (Akiba 2004; Sagay 2008). These scholars and many others explored the connections between the oil exploration, the character of the state, politics and the violence in the Niger Delta.

Nonetheless, although existing literature seemingly capture the complications of the Niger Delta, the problem appears to hinge on how to resolve the Niger Delta question and ensure stability: would it require increased resources from the government in terms of revenue allocation and derivation principle, or more stake for political autonomy as demanded by the various agitations or is it a fundamental problem of environmental restoration which may require the provision of functional ecosystem for the livelihoods of the people. This study therefore, attempts to investigate environmental degradation and political anarchy in the Niger Delta area in order to ascertain if environmental restoration is a sufficient condition for political stability in the Niger Delta.

### **Theoretical framework**

The human needs theory provided the framework of analysis. It was propounded by Abraham Maslow, John Burton, Marshall Rosenberg and Manfred Max-Neef. Human needs theorists argue that one of the primary causes of protracted or intractable conflict is people's unyielding drive to meet their unmet needs on the individual, group, and societal level. Christie (1997) remarks that Human Needs Theory offers insights into a range of peace building processes that are involved in the reduction of both direct and structural violence. According to this theory, in order to live and attain well-being, humans need certain essentials. These are called human needs or basic human needs. Human needs theorists also contend that conflicts and violent conflicts are caused by unmet human needs. Violence occurs when certain individuals or groups do not see any other way to meet their need, or when they need understanding, respect and consideration for their needs. Rosenberg (2003) states that violence is a tragic expression of unmet human needs, implying that all actions undertaken by human beings are attempts to satisfy their needs. If we are able to connect with our needs and those of others, we will therefore be able to look at other ways of meeting such needs, avoiding violence and destruction.

Often, human needs or basic human needs are confused with subsistence needs. However, such a view of human needs may limit the understanding of the human being to simply exist as a biological creature. Although there are conflicts over subsistence, most conflicts have to do with other unmet human needs, such as protection, identity, recognition, participation and understanding. Only by giving more importance to these latter needs, truly recognising them as human needs essential to the wellbeing of all human being, will we be able to address current and intractable conflicts. Our confused view of human needs as subsistence needs only is also in part due to the alienation of needs we have created in our society. Burton (1979) has been closely identified with the theory of basic human needs. Burton did not invent the theory, which posits the existence of certain universal needs that must be satisfied if people are to prevent or resolve destructive conflicts, but he gave it its most impassioned and uncompromising expression. In his work on protracted, social conflicts, he looks at how universal human needs often are neglected, leading groups to use violence to claim their rights and satisfying their needs. In what is really a compatibility of human needs, Burton (1990) argues that education and culture make parties manipulate the issues and dehumanizing the other parties. In Burton's (1990) view, the needs most salient to an understanding of

destructive social conflicts were those for identity, recognition, security, and personal development. Over time, however, he tended to emphasize the failure of existing state systems to satisfy the need for identity as the primary source of modern ethno-nationalist struggles. The great promise of human needs theory, in Burton's view, was that it would provide a relatively objective basis, transcending local political and cultural differences, for understanding the sources of conflict, designing conflict resolution processes, and founding conflict analysis and resolution as an autonomous discipline (Galtung, 2003).

In Marshall Rosenberg's approach, human needs are universal and meeting them is essential to human survival and well-being. Rosenberg (2003) groups the needs in sub-groups, and is open to the existence of needs beyond what he defined. He states that our education and culture often alienate us from connecting with our real needs, and through Nonviolent Communication, Rosenberg (2003) proposes a model for connecting with our own and others' needs, an approach he applies in all levels of society and which he has used in mediation in several countries.

### ***The Niger Delta people and environment***

According to Okonofua (2011), the Niger Delta is the territory that lies between the estuaries of the Benin River to the West and the Cross River to the East of the River Niger. It covers a distance of about 270 miles along the Atlantic Coast and stretches for about 120 miles inland. The region is described by Nseabasi (2005) and Saliu, Luqman, & Abdulahi, (2007) as the largest wetland in Africa and the second largest in the world after the Mississippi. Okonta and Douglas (2003) observe that it is criss-crossed by an intricate watery maze of marshlands, labyrinthine creeks, tributaries, and lagoons, which link together the main rivers: Forcados, Nun, Benin, Brass, Bonny (all estuaries of the River Niger), Kwa-Ibo, the Cross and other separate streams. The region is inhabited by numerous ethnic nationalities such as the Ijaw, Urhobo, Isoko, Itsekiri, Ogoni, Igbo, Kwale, Kalabari, Ikwerre, Okrika, Ibani, Ekpeye, Gokana, Eleme, Ndoni, Abua, Ogoni, Oduval, Edo, etc (Okonta & Douglas 2003) and comprises the six littoral states of Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers (Saliu et al 2007). The highly diverse nature of the Niger Delta makes it prone to inter-ethnic hostilities and violence. For example, there has been a long-running battle between Ijaws and Itsekiris and between Itsekiris and Urhobos in Warri, which has resulted in countless deaths and destruction of properties estimated at billions of naira. The region is also home to a wide array of animal and aquatic life, giant ferns and towering mangrove plants and its creeks and swamps lie atop one of the biggest reserves of crude oil in the world, currently estimated at 34 billion barrels (Time magazine, 2006). For Ohwofasa, Anuya, and Aiyedogbon (2012) to a considerable extent, the geographical location of the Niger Delta and its resources determine the traditional occupation of the people: fishing and farming.

Ibeanu (2000) notes that oil exploration in Nigeria dates back to the first few years of this century. He opines that organized marketing and distribution started around 1907 by a German Company, Nigerian Bitumen Corporation. In 1956, the Anglo-Dutch group Shell D'Archy discovered oil in commercial quantities at Oloibiri, a town in the Niger

Delta. By February 1958, Nigeria became an oil exporter with a production level of 6,000 barrels per day.

According to Jike (2004), with the discovery of oil, all other economic activities including agricultural pursuit became peripheral and subservient to oil exploration activities. The intricate crisscross of oil exploration pipelines and rig facilities within the Niger-Delta displaced farmsteads and farmers. Virile young men found themselves out of work and began to swell the bloated labor market. The sense of social inequity and alienation felt by these people has been highlighted by Akoroda (2000), Ikporukpo (1988), and Jike (2004). The connecting thread among these writers, however, is the point where the discovery of oil coincided with the boom years of agricultural production, but agriculture fell out of reckoning in its appeal because of its relatively longer gestation period. More fundamental, as Jike (2004) aptly noted, the absence of an appropriate legislation and the general perception that oil exploration was an all-comers game set off unintended environmental consequences that are yet to be fully addressed. More specifically, productive farmlands have been lost to oil production operations. Sometimes ancestral homelands have been desecrated and converted as was the case during the Ogoni/Shell crisis in the late 1990s, thus severing the link between the living and the pantheon of forbears. Additionally, a large amount of gas is also exported from the area.

### ***Oil Dependency***

The socio-economic and political splits created by the British exist to this day and continue to influence socio-political development of the nation. Today, despite 50 years of nationhood, Nigerians either continue to see themselves as different nations: Edos, Kanuris, Hausas, Igbos, Yorubas, Niger Deltans; or bound exclusively by religion: Christians or Muslims. These divisions have become sharper following the increasing violence in the Niger Delta region, which parallels increasing religious extremism and sectarian violence in northern Nigeria. The violence in the Niger Delta has slowed down what has been a rapid expansion of the petroleum industry.

Located almost exclusively in the Niger Delta, petroleum has become Nigeria's economic mainstay and chief export earner (Okonta & Douglas 2003; Osaghae 1998). Instead of contributing to the overall development of the country and to improved living conditions for its citizens, oil wealth is distributed unevenly in a manner that benefits only those with access to state power and therefore, to the licenses, contracts, and revenues accruing to the government from the petroleum sector (Falola & Heaton 2008). Also, oil wealth is used exclusively to build sophisticated infrastructures in the nation's capital (Abuja) and many other cities across the nation, while the Niger Delta region from where the wealth is derived is neglected and its people economically, socially, culturally, and politically marginalized. The result of this is the growing dissonance between government and the Niger Delta people; a disconnection that has severely weakened the collective conscience or the moral fiber and structural regulatory capacities of the state. This has created a mass society of extreme discontentment, extreme disillusionment, and

collective regional despair. Seen in this way, we could argue that the Niger Delta violence was a disaster waiting to happen.

Commercial quantities of oil was first discovered in Oloibiri, a rural community in the heart of Bayelsa state in 1956 by Shell-BP Development Company (a joint venture of Royal Dutch Shell and British Petroleum) (Okonta & Douglas 2003; Osaghae 1998). Two years later, commercial drilling began and since then hundreds of wells have been exploited. As more wells were discovered, crude oil excavation increasingly became the nation's primary export commodity, replacing cocoa, groundnut, cotton, palm oil, and rubber (Osaghae 1998). By the 1970's crude oil production had grown exponentially as did the revenue generated from it. For example, in 1958 (the first year of commercial production), revenue from crude oil was a paltry N200, 000. By 1970, revenue from crude had reached N166 million and in 1976, Nigeria made N5.3 billion from crude oil sale.

The growth of the petroleum sector was occasioned by a global scarcity of petroleum products, which forced prices up. In 1973, for example, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Nigeria became a member in 1970) embargoed western countries over their support for Israel in the Yom Kippur War. This created extreme scarcity and pushed the price for a barrel of crude oil from \$3.80 in October 1973 to \$14.70 by January 1974 (Falola & Heaton 2008).

By 1981, the price per barrel of crude had reached an all-time high of US\$38.77 and it has been increasing since then. Today, Nigeria is rated the fifth largest exporter of crude oil within the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Osaghae 1998) producing an average 2.2 million bpd and constituting nearly 40 percent of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product, over 80 percent of annual revenue and 95 percent of Nigeria's foreign earnings (Osaghae 1998; Agbu 2005).

Indeed, corresponding to increases in oil revenue was an increase in the nation's dependence on oil. Petroleum revenue was so constant and relatively easy to derive, that it was convenient for government to condition itself exclusively on it. Subsequently, the government increasingly divested itself from exploiting and developing other revenue streams. Even traditional mechanisms for generating revenue such as taxation and customs duties were neglected and these became exclusive cash cows for corrupt government officials who milked them for personal gain. Similarly, agriculture, which was the most dominant economic activity in Nigeria prior to the discovery of oil, was neglected and overnight; Nigeria became a state dependent upon a single natural source. For example, between 1975 and 1978, the total area under cultivation fell from 18.8 million to 11.05 million hectares at the same time that food imports rose from US\$353.7 million to over US\$1 billion (Osaghae, 1998). According to Osaghae (1998) the neglect was so serious that oil palm, rubber, groundnut, for which Nigeria was once among the world's leading producers, were being imported to offset local shortfalls." Other sectors that were necessary to stabilize and balance the economy were similarly neglected. Manufacturing, which in 1970 accounted for 9.4 percent of GDP fell to 7.0 percent in 1974 and has been decreasing since. The net result of the dependence on oil was that the

Nigerian economy became increasingly vulnerable to the “fluctuations and shocks of the world market (Osaghae 1998).

Mirroring the decline in agricultural and manufacturing activities is the standard of living, which has since the late 1970s taken a nose dive following the implementation of the recommendations of the 1970 Dina Commission. The commission was set up by the Gen. Gowon military administration shortly after the three year Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), to among other things review the existing system of administration and make recommendations on how to make it better and more acceptable. Its report rejected the historical approach to revenue allocation as a constitutional exercise and recommended that it be established as an instrument of development planning and national integration. This recommendation sought to establish the centrality of the federal government by giving it control over disbursements of the expanded Distributable Pool Account (DPA) and all principal tax receipts and major share of royalties from oil. In terms of oil revenue, for example, a distinction was made between onshore and offshore oil, dealing a fatal blow to the oil producing states and communities. This meant that these states and communities were to be excluded from any share in offshore royalties (the federal government was to retain 60 percent, DPA 30 percent, and 10 percent to a special contingency account), and were to receive 40 percent less than previously for onshore royalties under the principle of derivation (Osaghae 1998). In essence, the proportion of oil revenues allocated on a derivation basis declined from 50 percent of mining rents and royalties in 1969, through 2 percent of the Federation Account in 1981, to only 1 percent of mineral revenues in the account during the period from 1989 to 1999 (Suberu 2001).

Higgins (2009) argues that the federal government support for development in the Niger Delta (both politically and financially) is in itself problematic. One of the mechanisms through which the federal government has attempted to stimulate economic development in the Niger Delta is the NDDC. The NDDC along with many other development planning institutions have failed because they are impositions from the federal government and adopt a top down approach to development planning and implementation. The amnesty program may also suffer same fate as local communities and militant groups appear to have had no say in determining the composition of members of the amnesty committee. They also appear to have no say in the types of programs, activities, and services performed by the committee. Like other institutional responses to the problems of the Niger Delta, there is the danger that local communities and militant groups that historically have experienced marginalization and deprivation may perceive the amnesty as a political party agenda designed to pursue the aims and ends of the ruling People’s Democratic Party.

More so, since independence, national political power has revolved around the big three ethnic nationalities: Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. Thus, political access for minorities until now was closed. Moreover, elections since 1999 have been widely rigged in the Niger Delta states and most of these fraudulent results are sustained by violence and threats resulting in huge democratic deficits. Because the people are economically exploited and deprived of the opportunity to alter state economic and social policy



through the instrumentality of elections, they are bitter and angry. Because many Niger Delta youths are convinced that formal institutions and local customary institutions (particularly the system of kingship) have failed and are incapable of redressing grievances, they have turned to violence and militancy to challenge the government and extort money and oil from the oil conglomerates (World Bank, 2007).

### ***Environmental degradation***

According to the World Bank (2007), oil exploration and production has generated serious environmental damages at several levels in the Niger Delta region: land, water, and air pollution, depleted fishing grounds and territories, and the disappearance of wetlands. These serious environmental conditions have provoked serious hardships for local peoples whose sources of livelihood has been severely impacted (Okonofua, 2011). Many local populations have been displaced from ancestral lands and local resources and thrust into dependent relationships in overpopulated cities with no skills, craft or vocation to sustain them.

The environmental devastation of the Delta has put pressure on local communities who continue to suffer from poor or inequitable land use practices (UNDP, 2006). Existing measures to counterbalance the environmental damage are at best haphazard and inadequate and grossly underestimate the enormity of damage to the Niger Delta ecology. This chronic underestimation which translates to gross nonchalance is a major source of community discontent and violence (World Bank, 2007).

Shell agrees that environmental pollution including oil spills is one of the main grievances of Niger Delta communities. However, it blames the spills on sabotage. According to Shell, between 1988 and 1994, about 28 percent of the spills at its operation areas were due to sabotage. By 1994, oil spills caused by sabotage accounted for 35 percent of all oil spills in its area of influence and this figure is increasing. Increases in sabotage-induced oil spills results mainly from the operations of the militant groups who target oil facilities. While Shell is right to highlight damages caused by warring groups, it does not address that percentage of oil spill that results from the routine business of oil production. It also does not address pollutions caused by effluent and other wastes it deliberately discharges into the environment, or spills caused by defective and obsolete equipment. Studies show that much of the Niger Delta violence results from grievances over pollution (Eteng, 1996; Gbadegesin, 1997; Naanem, 1995). Up to 1.5 million tons of oil, which amounts to more than 50 times the pollution recorded in the Exxon Valdez tanker disaster, has been spilt in the Niger Delta over the past 50 years (Brown, 2006). Quoting a panel of independent experts from the World Wildlife Federation, the World Conservation Union, and the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, Brown (2006) observed that damage to the fragile mangrove forests over the past 50 years amounts to a catastrophic oil spill occurring every year in one of the world's most important ecosystems.

Apart from threatening rare species including primates, fish, turtles, and birds, the pollution is destroying the livelihoods of many of the 30 million people living in the region, damaging crops and fuelling the upsurge in violence. The Niger Delta which is

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

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

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

Military governments typically begin by suspending the constitution, closing all airports, seaports, and borders, and suspending the policies of the past administration while hastily contriving new policy directions. In furtherance of their goals, they dismiss all or key government officials responsible for policy implementation and replace them with people new to the demands of such offices or too inexperienced to function effectively. This typically disrupts the smooth operation of government and kills off vital development projects crucial to the nation's economic and socio-political survival. Changes in policy concerning the distribution of oil revenue between the federal, state, and local government provides one example of policy disruption due to infrequent undemocratic governmental changes. Another example is the various agencies established by different administrations to speed up development in the Niger Delta. In every material fact, the functions of these agencies such as Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC), Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF), the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF), and the Ministry of Niger Delta overlap each other and exist most profoundly to launder the image of government and act as conduit pipes through which the government purse is drained by corrupt officials.

Niger Delta people accuse government and oil companies of misapplication and misappropriation of oil funds to the neglect of the communities and people. They

challenge not only the prevailing revenue sharing formula but also the political structure and its mechanisms for the allocation of power. Thus, the agitations of the communities and militants are first and foremost based in ideology. Two central issues constitute the ideological basis of the Niger Delta struggle: self-determination and resource control (Osaghae et al 2007).

Self-determination involves the right of the Niger Delta people (or any distinct nationality for that matter) to live together in its own way, determine its own political fate, preserve its own affairs and develop itself or even democratize as it may deem fit (Okwu-Okafor 1994). It relates to the right or freedom of a people that are subordinated, oppressed, dominated, colonized or even marginalized to assert and constitute themselves into a separate state (Osaghae et al 2007). The right to self-determination devolves from the Nigerian constitution. In section 3 (c) the constitution confers rights to individuals to freely form associations and to take steps to preserve group integrity and personal liberty. Self-determination, in this context, implies the right of a people to associations that are spatially distinct with clear geographic, social, cultural, and political markings. Both the United Nations Charter on Human Rights and the African Charter on Human Rights also guarantee this right. The right to self-determination assures that cultural, religious, and linguistic minorities and peoples can strive for liberation from structures and institutions that subordinate, oppress, and marginalize them.

The implication of this is that Niger Delta militants consider the Niger Delta people an oppressed, dominated, stifled, and exploited group who has been deprived of their natural endowment and sources of livelihood. And they must be liberated if not by peaceful means, then by violence. This explains the circle of anarchy and instability that have characterised the Niger Delta over the decades.

Thus, the Niger Delta identity is deeply etched in collective experiences of oppression, marginalization, and discrimination. And as has happened in other parts of the world, discrimination-defined difference or “otherness” have provoked fierce and violent agitations and led to the likelihood of a potentially devastating civil war in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made:

1. At the general level, measures should be taken to clean up the degraded environment of the Niger and restore fertile, productive natural environment of the delta.
2. An Oil Spill Contingency Plan (OSCP) for Niger Delta, covering both land and water environment, should be developed. The plan should be communicated to the community, with particular emphasis on how any delay in reporting or responding to a spill will have disproportionate environmental consequences. When an oil spill occurs, adequate resources should then be deployed to put the plan into operation.
3. Finally, a campaign to end illegal oil activities (tapping into oil wells/pipelines, transportation of crude, illegal refining) should be conducted across the Niger Delta region. The campaign should be a joint initiative between the governments, the oil companies and the communities.

### **Conclusion**

The study has established that environmental degradation, which is as a result of unsustainable oil exploration is a basic factor in the loss of agricultural land and nutrients, extinction of wildlife and aquatic species, deforestation and ecosystem destruction, poverty, unemployment, absence of basic amenities, youth restiveness and delirious violence that characterize the Niger Delta region. This has resulted in vicious circle of crisis in the region. Yet finding a solution to the intermittent crisis in the region have remained a mirage as strategies intended to resolve the crisis have failed to deliver lasting stability, because it appears such efforts failed to take cognizance of the environment factor in the conflict. Moreso, the protraction of the Niger Delta conflict is not due to the lack of responses by the government. Indeed, a number of institutions and strategies have been adopted by the government in dealing with the recurrent crisis in the Delta. However, these institutions and strategies have failed to address the basic factor in the crisis, that is, environmental degradation. While government efforts have seemingly shown a great deal of compromise aimed at pacifying certain actors including the political elite, certain community interests and youth leaders, host communities, multinational oil companies and the militants; the interests of the larger communities and rural dwellers, who depend on the natural environment have essentially been neglected. For instance, the 13% derivation formula appears to satisfy the desire of the political class; the regional development organizations seemingly aimed at contractors and community leaders; the amnesty programme resulted in compromise by pacifying the desires of the militants and the multinational oil companies since it has guaranteed uninterrupted oil exploration; while the numerous committees and commissions on Niger Delta, whose reports and findings are hardly implemented epitomize government empathy.

Until concerted effort is geared towards environmental restoration, which requires understanding ecological deficiencies, environmental cleanup, protection and revitalization of productivity of the ecosystem for the local people, stability in the Niger Delta would remain an illusion. Nonetheless, when it comes to finding lasting solutions to the situation in the Niger Delta, all root causes need to be addressed. Ensuring political stability in the region represents a big challenge that will require coordinated and collaborative action from all stakeholders. Therefore, what is required is a holistic approach that must accommodate the fundamental cause of the Niger Delta crises, which is environmental degradation and how to sustain the livelihood of the over 60% of the local people who rely on the natural environment for existence. Environmental quality and sustainability are fundamental to the overall wellbeing and development of the people of the Niger Delta. This may be fundamental ingredient for political instability in the Delta of Nigeria

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