
Issues In The Niger Delta: A Focus On Some Government Developmental Programmes In The Region Since 1956

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Abstract

Oil was discovered at Oloibiri in Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State in the Niger Delta in 1956 (B. Odogo and C. N. Ajeabili, 2011:87). Since then, Nigeria has become Africa's biggest producer of petroleum, including many oil wells in the oil Rivers. Some 2 million barrels of oil a day are extracted in the Niger Delta. Since 1975, the region has accounted for more than 75% of Nigeria's export earnings. Much of the natural gas extracted in oil wells in the Delta is immediately burned or flared into the air at a rate of approximately 70 million m³ per day. This is equivalent to 41% of African natural gas consumption, and forms the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the planet (Angel, 2006). The environmental devastation associated with the industry and the lack of distribution of oil wealth have been the source or key aggravating factors of numerous environmental movements and inter-ethnic conflicts in the region. This paper therefore examines the various steps that had been taken by the past and present governments in handling the problems of the Niger Delta region in terms of restoring peace, stability and development in the region, and proffer ways of tackling some of these endemic problems. It is the opinion of this paper that government should take the developmental programmes of the Niger Delta more seriously so as to mitigate the various problems perverting that area.

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to examine government presence in the Niger Delta region. The area known as the Niger Delta plays a crucial role in the political economy of Nigeria. The region remains among the most disadvantaged geopolitical regions in Nigeria arising from the problems of environment which are in themselves a product of a peculiar environmental topography that presents developmental challenges; swamps, creeks, rivers, mountains and valleys, etc. This is worsened by the many years of neglect, oil exploration and exploitation and lack of political will to address permanently the endless issues of the Niger Delta.

This is despite the various efforts of various governments both military and civilian in addressing developmental issues in the area. For instance, the military administration of President Ibrahim Babangida created the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) through Decree 23 of 1992 (Ekpo, 2004), then in 2000 Olusegun Obasanjo replaced OMPADEC with the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) via a bill of National Assembly (Ekpo, 2004), then the Niger Delta

Ministry was announced by President Umaru Yar'Adua on 10 September, 2008, and recently the inauguration of the National Council on Niger Delta Affairs on April 26, 2013 by Goodluck Jonathan.

This paper thus seeks to undertake a study of these developmental agencies of the Niger Delta region namely: the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the Niger Delta Ministry and the National Council on Niger Delta Affairs, and to see how far these agencies have succeeded in solving the endless Niger Delta multi-dimensional problems.

Theoretical Framework

The current state of underdevelopment in the Niger Delta region has been brought about by government embarking on unimplementable developmental programmes and plans thus, exacerbating the suffering of the people in the midst of plenty and denying them their basic rights to existence. Thomas Paine's thesis on the "Rights of Man" states that people are born with a set of natural rights, and that any society that violates those rights is flawed and should be changed. By not developing the region, government causes crises, frustration, and alienation of the people. Thus Karl Marx, Huges and Kroehler all agree that a people who are deprived, exploited and marginalized have a tendency to revolt. This is the issue in the Niger Delta region, and the solution is for government to implement all developmental programmes planned for the people of this region so as to alleviate their suffering and curb youth restiveness in the region.

The Area and the People

The Niger Delta is the third largest wetland in the world after Mississippi and the Pantanal (Essien, 2005). The whole area is traversed and crisis-crossed by a large number of rivulets, streams, canals, and creeks, apart from extensive swamps and mangrove forest. The Niger Delta extends over 70,000km and makes up 7.5% of Nigeria's landmass. Historically and cartographically, it consists of present day Bayelsa, Delta and River states. In the year 2000, however, the Obasanjo regime expanded its definition to include: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Imo and Ondo States. Some 31 million people of more than 40 ethnic groups, speaking some 250 dialects live in the Delta. The South-South Delta include: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta and Edo States (Ekpo, 2004).

The Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission

The OMPADEC was President Ibrahim Babangida's response to the developmental challenges confronting the people of the Niger Delta (Eziwho, 2010). This Commission was set up by Decree 23 of July 1992 with the mandate of collecting revenue from the federation account in line with the oil production capacity of each state for the purpose of developing the oil bearing communities.

Aims and Objectives:

With its headquarters at Port Harcourt in Rivers State, the Commission's other mandate included the following: the tackling of ecological problems arising from the exploration of oil minerals and how best to manage oil pollution and spillages; the rehabilitation and development of oil mineral producing areas; to determine and identify the respective oil mineral producing states, the actual oil mineral producing areas and

embark on the development of projects properly agreed upon with local communities of oil mineral producing areas; to liaise with the various oil companies on matters of pollution control.

The Commission's other mandate was to obtain from the Nigerian Natural Petroleum Corporation the proper formula for actual oil mineral production of each state, local government area and community, and to ensure the fair and equitable distribution of projects, services and employment of personnel in accordance with recognized percentage production. Consult with the federal government through the presidency, the state, local governments and oil producing areas as regards project services and other issues concerning the special fund; to present annual returns to the president and copy the state and local governments on matters concerning the fund; to advise the federal, state, local governments on all matters regarding the fund. The commission was to liaise with oil producing firms regarding the number, location and other relevant data on oil producing area. It was to execute other projects and perform activities which it deemed relevant for the development of the oil mineral producing areas.

The Commission was to compensate materially, communities, local government areas and states which have suffered ecological and environmental damage or derivation as a result of mineral prospecting in their areas, effectively link them socially and economically with other parts of the nation through establishment of adequate physical and infrastructural facilities (Ekpo, 2004: 72).

OMPADEC set out constructing various infrastructures to include roads, provision of water, electricity and land reclamation. A summary of OMPADEC activities from its Business and Commercial Directorate (BCTD) as cited by Udeme Ekpo, indicated N603.44 million only was expended as loan disbursement to 500 small scale entrepreneurs (U. Ekpo, 2004: 73).

Beyond physical infrastructure, OMPADEC provided motorcycles to youths to complement the transport system in the area. The commission brought its weight to bear on oil companies during oil spill accidents, and mediated in compensation negotiations between communities and multinationals. From the foregoing, it comes clear, that OMPADEC was designed to address developmental challenges relating to oil production, but was unable to satisfactorily and successfully handle or overcome these challenges. However, by 1999, the commission had been plagued by lack of funding which meant that new projects could not be initiated and ongoing ones completed (Yishau, 2007: 7, (Eziwho, 2010: 32).

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)

The NDDC was mooted, canalized and invigorated by President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2000. This commission was put in place to replace the moribund OMPADEC. The bill establishing the NDDC into law was signed on June 5, 2000. The Commission operated under the mandate of improving the social and environmental conditions in the South-South region which it acknowledged as horrific in its own report. However, the organization came under scrutiny and according to some was generally regarded as a vehicle of corruption and prebendalism (<http://nddcgov.ng>).

The mandate of the NDDC could be explained as follows: to formulate policies and guidelines for the development of the areas; to conceive, plan and implement policies in accordance with set rules and regulations, to execute projects and programmes for sustainable development in the areas of transportation, education, employment,

industrialization, agriculture, housing, urban development, water supply, electricity and telecommunications.

The Commission was mandated also to cause the Niger Delta area to be surveyed in order to ascertain measures needed to promote physical development through a well formulated master plan. To implement all measures approved for the development of the Niger Delta by the federal government and the member states of the Commission (NDDC website: www.mzm.tmcnet.com).

The genesis of the NDDC is largely a response to the demands of the population of the Niger Delta, a populous area inhabited by a diversity of minority ethnic groups. During the 1990s, these ethnic groups established organizations to confront the Nigerian government and multinational corporations. The Niger Delta region is highly underdeveloped and these circumstances precipitated active and sometimes violent confrontation with the Nigerian state and oil companies as well as with other communities.

These confrontations led to the disruption of oil operations. The disruptions have been extremely costly to the Nigerian oil industry and both multinationals and the federal government. Thus, it could be admitted that the NDDC is an attempt to satisfy the demands of the Delta's volatile and restive population.

In a bid to achieve its mandates, the NDDC board identified the following areas of focus: physical infrastructure, technology, economic revival and prosperity, ecological/environmental remediation and stability, and human development (NDDC website: www.mzm.tmcnet.com). However, in September 2008, the late President Umaru Shehu Yar'adua announced the formation of the Ministry of the Niger Delta. This announcement effectively placed the NDDC as a parastatal under the ministry (<http://nddc.gov.ng>, also Shell Shutts 420,000 Bpd Facility over oil spill: www.alafrika.com/stories).

In pursuance of its mandate, the NDDC developed the Niger Delta plan. The master plan is a collaborative endeavour among all the stakeholders in the Niger Delta (Agbo, 2007). The partners for sustainable development were set up with the NDDC as facilitator. It operates at three levels: regional, state and local. At the regional level, membership comprised nine mandated state governments of the representatives, the national planning commission, international development agencies, the organized private sector and the civil society organization. At the secondary level, it comprises the state governments, community representatives, the organized private sector and the civil society organizations.

Thus, the Niger Delta master plan tries to address the problems of the Niger Delta in five key areas spread over a time frame of 15 years, divided into phases of five years each, spanning from 2006 to 2020. NDDC personnel argue that 2001 -2005 was regarded as an interim period. Quick intervention projects were formulated to later blend into the foundation phase of the master plan. Focus within the period was on economic development, physical infrastructure, human and community need, the natural environment and institutional development. This first phase is to run from 2006 to 2010. The second phase or expansion phase is from 2011 to 2015, and the third or consolidation phase is from 2016 to 2020.

While the first (foundational) phase targets enhancing and enabling environment and alleviating poverty, the second (expansion) phase would harness the wider possibilities of an improved climate occasioned by the growth of agro-based industries, solid mineral industries, petro-chemical industries and tourism. The third (consolidation)

phase would build on the gains of the preceding two phases to entrench peace. This phase (Agbo, 2007), argues, will see the growth of heavy chemical industries and generally manufactured goods. Its laudable objectives notwithstanding, the inhabitants of the Niger Delta are yet to fully reap the benefits of the establishment of the NDDC in that region.

Ministry of Niger Delta

On the 10th of September, 2008, the late President Umaru Yar'Adua announced the formation of the Niger Delta Ministry. The existing Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was to become a parastatal under the ministry (Taiwo, 2009). It seems the main objective of this ministry as formed by its founder was focused on two major areas – the development of the area and youth empowerment. The ministry which has a minister in charge and a minister of state was mandated to coordinate efforts to tackle the challenges of infrastructural development, environmental protection and youth empowerment in the Niger Delta (This Day, 2009; www.mnda.gov.ng).

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) treated the announcement of the President with caution, saying the new ministry could be yet another avenue for corruption and political favouritism (Walker, BBC News, 2009). Although the Niger Delta is the main source of government revenue, it is poor and poorly governed, suffering from violence and corruption. Activists have called for real government in the region, infrastructural development and jobs. Human rights activists are concerned that the new bureaucracy will stall progress in addressing these issues, which is a fact.

In August 2009, the ministry held a job fair in Abuja attended by over 30 companies. The Ministry claimed that over 11,000 jobs and training offers were secured during the fair (Anofi, 2009).

In November 2009, President Yar'Adua proposed to allocate N64bn to the Niger Delta Ministry for its 2010 budget. Surprisingly, the minister in charge of the Niger Delta Ministry, Obong Uffot Ekaette explained that the ministry had difficulties achieving targets in 2009 because the N19.5bn allocated for its projects was unevenly spread – a declaration which portrays failure of the ministry (Alechenu, 2009). Ex-militants have protested the award of contracts to companies from outside the region indicating that these projects may be disrupted by the aggrieved local people (Odiegwu, 2009). These projects were eventually disrupted by the local aggrieved people on the grounds that the contracts were awarded outside the region.

In March, 2012, a report in the *Vanguard* Newspaper indicated that relatively little had been done and accomplished in the first four years of the establishment of the ministry portraying laxity and incoherence in the establishment and functions of the ministry. It is unfortunate that projects to improve roads, build skill acquisition centres and improve water and electricity supplies were far behind schedule. Reasons for these lapses may not be far-fetched from the bureaucratic bottlenecks that characterize government functionaries, under-funding of the projects, monies not released, or outright diversion of funds budgeted for these programmes. Sources indicate that large amount of funds had been budgeted and spent for projects related to waterfronts development, but nothing tangible had been done. There had also been a large gap between federal promises and the amounts released, an action which throws doubts on government policies and sincerity about developmental projects in the region. The Ministry was also noted for project duplication which it denies (Ikpen, 2012). Thus, there are reasons to

doubt the credibility and effective functioning of the Niger Delta Ministry and its operation in the Niger Delta region. One doubts if the purpose for which it was created is being fulfilled.

National Council on Niger Delta Affairs

On April 26, 2013, yet another body among others was formed in response to the socio-politico economic development of the Niger Delta region. This was the National Council on the Niger Delta – the brain child of President Goodluck Jonathan. The Council was inaugurated at Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital. The inauguration witnessed the presence of the cream of the Nigerian society – experts, technocrats including serving governors, traditional rulers, among others, the civil society members. This body like others before it, was to deliberate on pertinent issues bothering on the security and development facing the region.

Among the objectives of the Council were the considerations of the implementation of the Niger Delta Action Plan to complement the specific commitments contained in the Amnesty programme. Secondly, the plan is designed to be of great relevance and is to serve as a coherent programme for investments in the social and infrastructure sectors of the various communities of the region, thereby encouraging participation. For the above to be achieved, there is to be a call for active support and collaboration of major stakeholders in the oil and gas industry, development partners, states, communities and specialized interest groups in the region to partner for a new reinforced phase of effective development of the Niger Delta. This is what we know so far about this new formation – the National Council on the Niger Delta Affairs. Like other formations before it, will this council be able to meet the aspirations of the people of the Niger Delta region? Shall it not be bedeviled with fake promises, lack of remittance of budgeted funds for the region, corrupt practices, politics, personality clashes and insincerity? The world is watching to see the impact of this council on the Niger Delta region.

Failure

Historical hindsight is of necessity because previous developmental agencies to the Niger Delta failed in delivering their mandate one after the other. For instance, in 1960 the Sir Henry Willink Commission was set up to look at the peculiar nature of the Niger Delta and suggest ways of improving the lot of the people. The Commission recommended that the Niger Delta be given special attention leading to the formation of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB). The board seemed to be ineffective and was soon replaced with the Presidential Task Force (PTF) in 1980 by the Shehu Shagari administration. But again, the PTF failed, and was later replaced by OMPADEC in December 1992 (Eziwho, 2010).

It could be argued at this point, that there are two common denominators in nearly all the agencies and programmes often initiated and aimed at the development of the Niger Delta. Their objective(s) was or were to develop the Niger Delta. The second denominator was often their apparent failure to achieve their objectives. Thus, the disbanding and creation of these agencies, bodies, commissions and programmes with every administration since 1960, and their subsequent failure to achieve results have, according to Eziwho (2010), become a political ritual.

It could also be inferred that the various agencies created and aimed at addressing the Niger Delta developmental challenges seem to pursue the interest of a

small crop of elites at the expense of the general citizenry who languish in frustrating socio-economic conditions. There is also what one could term class struggle for oil in the Niger Delta. It could here again be emphasized that the indigenes of the Niger Delta have largely been deprived of their means of livelihood through the activities of oil and gas producing companies. The poor educational and infrastructure facilities in the area have meant that the people do not get the kind of skills that would make them competitive in the large Nigerian society or accumulate enough capital to establish large businesses, and thus accounts for the constant crisis and unrest in that region. The region is the least developed in the country despite the fact that it accounts for 90 percent of the nation's export earnings and about 70 percent of the revenue accruing to the federation account (Essien, 2005).

Problems

It is true that the NDDC achieved some measure of success in the region, but these successes are not good enough. The region itself has its own peculiar problems some of which are endemic, man-made and government-made problems as well. These plethora of problems include high cost of projects, environmental problems arising from the effect of oil spillage in crop yield and farm (Imoni, Omofofor and Adun, 2006), and the multiplier effects of oil induced environmental degradation in the Niger Delta (Eregba and Irughe, 2009). There are untapped natural resources, high youth unemployment and politics, poor infrastructure, unkept promises, and more seriously, under-funding of the agencies and programmes in the region – the region which produces over 70% of the nation's foreign exchange in crude oil and gas (Essien, 2005).

Other problems still include high profile corruption, for example, see The Nation newspaper of March 13, 2014, page 1 on the rot at the NDDC, kidnapping of oil workers and contractors, oil theft and oil bunkering, oil pipe vandalisation, misunderstanding and clash of interest within the rank and file of members of agencies and commissions, protracted menace of the militants despite the implementation of the Amnesty programme, and the apparent poverty and neglect of some communities in the Niger Delta (The Nation, 2013; Yishau, 2007). There is lack of co-operation among the major stakeholders and the affected communities in issues affecting the Niger Delta (see table 1).

Some scholars have also identified greed and grievance as among some of the problems plaguing the Niger Delta region. These writers, (D. A. Tonwe, G. U. Ojo and I. Aghedo, 2011) commenting on the amnesty programme of Late Shehu Ya'dua, said the N50 billion budgeted for the programme became a veritable source of conflict as both members of the Amnesty Implementation Committee, local politicians as well as influential militant leaders were locked in a tussle for the largesse. Three years after its initiation, the deal, they argued, failed to address the historical grievances of the region which have been anchored on sustainable development, environmental security and political restructuring.

Environmental justice is to be achieved, hence, some militants by their involvements in oil bunkering, political thuggery, ransom kidnapping, killing of innocent people and other crimes seem to have been more in common with the rent-seeking, profligate and power-hungry political elite than freedom fighters. To these actors, the Niger Delta is more profitable in conflict than in peace. This phenomenon poses a serious threat to the peace-building efforts, and no wonder the constant eruption of disorder in the region.

Table 1 highlights some of the problems already mentioned, while table 2 shows that government has not done much especially in the areas of flood control, roads and bridges, canalization, and portable water supply in the region.

Table 1
Ranking of Major Environmental Problems, Social Issues and Priorities in the Niger Delta

Problem Type	Problem Subset	Priority Ranking
Natural Environment	Coastal	Moderate
	Riverbank/Erosion	High
	Flooding	Moderate
	Sedimentation/Solation	Low
	Subsidence	Low
	Exotic (water hyacinth)	High
Development Related	Land degradation/soil fertility loss	High
	Agricultural decline/shortened fallow	High
	Delta forest loss (mangroves, etc.)	High
	Biodiversity depletion	High
	Fisheries decline	High
	Oil spillage	High
	Gas flaring	Moderate
	Sewage and waste water	Moderate
	Other chemicals	High
		Moderate
Socio-Economic Problems	Poverty	High
	Unemployment	High
	Community-oil company conflict	High
	Inter-community conflict	High
	Intra-community conflict	High
	Conflict over land	High
	Inadequate compensation	High
	Displacement	Moderate
	Decay in societal values	High
	Poor transportation/high cost of fuel	High
	Housing pressure and infrastructure	High
	Decay	High
	Crime	High

Source: *The Niger Delta and Oil Politics, 2004*

Table 2

Developmental Projects in the Area from 2002 – 2003

Project Type	2002 Projects	2003 Projects	Completed Projects	Commissionable projects	Commissioned Projects	Total Number of Projects
Building	402	15	259	241	139	417
Canalization	4	9	0	0	0	13
Electrification	130	24	96	76	42	154
Flood Control	1	-	1	1	0	1
Jetty	41	6	27	27	11	47
Roads/ Bridges	40	18	7	7	4	58
Water	91	23	64	39	21	114
Grand Total	709	95	455	391	217	804

Source: NDDC

Why These Programmes Always Fail in their Implementation Stages

At this point, it could be argued that these programmes always fail at their implementation stages because public policy formulation and implementation hinges on the following factors: poor implementation in which most policies and development plans in the third world are ambiguous, trying to accomplish too many objectives at a time without considering other variables, such policies are grandiose in design but vague. Another reason is lack of sufficient and reliable statistical data, inadequate manpower and personnel, misappropriation and diversion of funds. It is on record that misappropriation and diversion of public funds are responsible for project abandonment or outright non-implementation in most third world countries. This is often perpetuated, according to Kalama (2008) by policy makers who have about one or two years to remain in office. In most cases, career civil servants (administrators) play active role in the process of fund diversion by acting as facilitators. Still other reasons for failure include unanticipated disturbances which could affect the policy progress such as youth restiveness and militancy as has been the case in the Niger Delta, reactions from the international community, trade fluctuations, political instability (*coup-de-tats*), religious and political crises such as the pending Boko Haram problem, and economic crisis such as riots and industrial actions. These and other factors could affect good government intentions and policies.

There is also what could be referred to as institutional weakness. Kalama (2008) posit that separation of career civil servants from the day to day decision making machinery of government is a factor of failure. Also, there is failure on the part of policy makers, administrators and political leaders to engage in a continuous dialogue and internal communication with stakeholders about policy goals and strategies, and international transfer of foreign policies which may be inappropriate to local domestic conditions. There is also weak and slow bureaucratic process coupled with corruption and poor implementation. State and federal ministries are saddled with incompetent and unqualified civil servants who rely on cumbersome bureaucratic procedures. In addition, lack of motivation and commitment to national goals and objectives constitute major problems in the implementation of some government developmental programmes. Yet other failure include lack of awareness and publicity. Here, most of the government developmental projects and programmes are never widely publicized enough to rally the people along with the government, hence the people are usually left out in the process of policy formulation which also makes the implementation of such policies difficult. A classic example of this is where contracts are awarded to outsiders who know little or nothing about the Niger Delta region leaving the indigenes out of the business which concern their own region.

Finally, there is what we could refer to as the lack of political will. Here again, Kalama (2008) reveals that records have shown that the main cause of weak government policies and the growing gap between policy formulation and governmental programmes and implementation is not simply lack of economic potentials or even inadequate administrative capacity, but rather, it is attributed to lack of commitment and political will on the part of third world leaders. This is the reason why good projects and programmes are abandoned after their formulation. This lack of political will has led to the abandonment of many governmental programmes not only in the Niger Delta but also in states all over the country.

Recommendations

Government should pay particular attention to the Niger Delta environmental issues, because environment and development are not separate challenges but inexorably linked. This would make the developmental efforts holistic. Whenever these agencies, commissions and councils are formed, they should always ensure participation and coordination among the different actors and stakeholders. Essien (2005) argues that where there are different actors and stakeholders, each adds unique value to overall development efforts. Recognition of the comparative advantage strengthens, and limitation of different stakeholders is therefore essential to optimal and effective intervention. It is counter productive for any single stakeholder to expect or attempt to satisfy the needs of the people.

These agencies, commissions, boards, ministries and councils formed for the development of the Niger Delta with their duplication of functions should always give the people of the Niger Delta region a channel to air their views, and be allowed to be involved in all aspects of the developmental programmes and efforts affecting them. The people are the best architects of their own development. It is the conscious initiative of the benefiting partners not channeled, or imposition of development projects, which holds the greatest prospects for efficacy and sustainability. The people should be encouraged to own, lead, and manage their resources and development. It seems that all the government developmental programmes in the Niger Delta region have the same aims and objectives. Government should therefore be honest and sincere when initiating and implementing these programmes. Apart from infrastructures, the region need massive industrialization programmes, not on paper, but programmes that would be made functional, actualized, and beneficial not only to the Niger Delta people but to Nigerians in general.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to reexamine issues in the Niger Delta region and efforts made by successive governments to meet the needs of the people of the region. Government approaches adopted was the formation and formulation of policies, agencies, ministries, boards, commissions and committees all aimed at ameliorating the suffering of the people of that region. Most of government's efforts to this end had in most instances failed for obvious reasons. It is hoped that government will avoid mistakes of the past and come up with implementable programmes and projects that would transform the Niger Delta region into a modern and a highly industrialized society, because there are readily available abundant natural and human resources to do so.

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