

Review

Poverty, oil exploration and Niger Delta crisis: The response of the youth

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Oil and gas have been described as the mainstay of the Nigerian economy today. The irony of it however, is that the Niger Delta areas, where the country's oil wealth is being derived from, has been neglected since the 1970s that Nigeria's oil boom became noticeable in the global market. Successive administration in the country have either paid lip attention to the prevalence of the magnitude of problems. The operations of government's oil companies and the multinational corporations exploring oil in the regions or engage the poor population in military warfare. The responses of the people especially the youth to this perceived structural inequality are usually in forms of domestic terrorism, kidnapping of oil workers, incessant attacks on oil plants by militants whose major populations are the youth who are seriously being affected by this problem of marginalization. The aim of this study was to take a critical look at poverty as a key economic problem predisposing the youth to violent attacks on oil workers. The paper used Marxian theory of conflict to extrapolate the issue. It therefore stated that the present violent and militarized approach of the Federal Government to the Niger Delta crisis is a utopian.

Key words: Poverty, Niger Delta, youth response.

INTRODUCTION

Since the departure of the colonial masters in 1960, Nigeria has engaged herself in an independent source of economic capital to provide sustainable and equitable development for different ethnic nationalities in the country. During the colonial era up till the early post-independence era, agriculture was the mainstay of the Nigerian economy so much that most parts of Nigeria's National Development Plans depended on it. With the discovery of oil in Oloibiri in 1958 in large quantity, Nigeria has been running a mono-cultural economy relying solely on oil exportation and importation of capital in return, for the implementation of over 60% of its National Development Project. Thus, the oil sector is the most attractive sector of the Nigerian economy today (Osuntokun, 1987; Tomori, 1991; Nnoli, 1993; World Bank, 1997; UNDP, 1999). But in spite of the huge funds accruing from the oil and gas sector of the Nigerian economy, since then, the Nigerian state has not been able to meet up with the expectations of the citizenry. It is the failure of various governments in power to fulfill the socio-economic aspirations of the people that have been culminating in crises,

violent disputes between different ethnic nationalities in the country. One of the fundamental causes of these problems of underdevelopment is POVERTY, a phenomenon that first became preponderant in most African countries in the 1970s including Nigeria. The problem of poverty is so pervasive today that an average Nigerian citizen lives below one dollar per day meaning that most Nigerians are living in excruciating poverty (UNDP, 1999; World Bank, 2001; UNDP, 2001; Olurode, 2005; Iweriebor, 2007).

The paradox of the problem of poverty is that even the Niger Delta region that produces over 90% of Nigeria's oil wealth is experiencing pathetic and endemic poverty today (Smith, 2003; UNDP, 2005). No wonder, the International Labour Organization aptly commented that:

"The problem of poverty remains one of the challenges which will continue to confront humankind at the dawn of the 21st century. This holds true for both developed and developing countries, although the extent, severity and characteristics may vary greatly within and across regions, and as they affect different social groups (ILO, 1995:1).

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Perhaps it is the severity of the problem of poverty in

Nigeria especially in the Niger Delta that has motivated us to research into the dialectical relationships between poverty, oil exploration and the Niger Delta crisis.

In fact, as some have argued that the discovery of oil in Nigeria has brought both boom and doom to the nation, it is also our contention in this paper that oil exploration is not inherently inimical to human development if explorers take into considerations the socio-economic effects of such capitalistic oriented activity on their host communities (Osuntokun, 1999). But the reverse has always been the case in Nigeria as exploration simply translates into exploitation culminating into poverty which often metamorphoses into different kinds of crises such as intra-ethnic uprising, communal clashes, and youth disturbances in form of closure of assembly plants and kidnapping of oil workers. We therefore pose some fundamental questions such as what is the relationship between poverty and the Niger Delta crisis? Has oil exploration in the Niger Delta led to the fulfillments of the aspirations of the people? To what extent has the age-long neglect of the people of oil-producing areas resulted in the loss of patriotism to the Nigerian nation? In order to effectively provide answers to the above questions, we have divided our paper into seven sections: the first section gives background information on the geographical and economic significance of the Niger Delta.

The second section examines poverty as an economic and social problem. Following this, is the extrapolation of the effects of poverty on the Niger Delta people as exacerbated by oil exploration? The fourth section of this paper examines the theoretical background of the study while part five effectively links this theoretical exposition to current response of the youth to the Niger Delta Crisis. The penultimate section explains why policy efforts in resolving the crisis have remained a stalemate while the last section is a recap of the entire work.

THE NIGER DELTA: FATHOM OF NIGERIA'S OIL WEALTH

The name, Niger Delta has become prominent in the global oil market. The Niger Delta is Nigeria's largest oil region and one of the highly productive oil exporting regions in the world (UNDP, 1999; Osuntokun, 2000; Nwachukwu, 2000). The Niger Delta is a heterogeneous, multi-cultural, ethnically diverse region, these particular features indicate that the region is an area for potential *Hobbesian* competitions and conflicts (Eteng, 1997). This region can be geographically, carthologically, hydrologically, politically, economically and sociologically defined.

A geo-political definition of the region would state that the Niger Delta includes those states of Nigeria that border the coastal waters of the Atlantic. They are the oil producing states such as Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Edo, Ondo, and River state including Abia and Imo (Nwachukwu, 2000 :105). Sociologically, the region would be defined as a society with people whose major econo-

mic activities revolve around coastal waters, they are people who possess similar cultural similarities and relative convergence of history. The major economic activities of the people of this region include: fishing, farming and hunting.

Though, fishing happens to be the most conspicuous economic activity among the major ethnic groups the Ijaws and Ilajes who are particularly known for their prowess in fishing.

In terms of the economic potentiality of the Niger Delta region to the Nigerian economy; the region is said to have been the bedrock of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product since the time oil was first found, and exported into the metropolitan countries. ANEEJ (2004) hinted that three of the states in the region namely: Bayelsa, Delta and River states account for 75% of oil production and over 50% of government revenues come from this region. (See appendix 1 for the position of Nigeria among African oil Exporting Countries) b.

ANEEJ (2004) aptly stated that the growth in Nigeria's GDP today is relative to the immense contributions of the oil industry since it was first discovered. Thus, the Nigerian economy is the fourth largest economy in Africa with GDP at current prices standing at \$41.5 billion as at the year 2001 coming behind South Africa's \$112.9 billion, Egypt's \$93.5 billion, and Algeria's \$ 54.6 billion. Apart from improving the country's GDP, it has placed Nigeria as one of the largest exporters of petroleum products in the world (Ross, 2003:3). Even before now, the contributions of the Nigerian oil industry had been remarkable in pre-doom era.

Taiwo and Aina (1991) stated poignantly that since the discovery of oil in Oloibiri, the Niger Delta had served as a major export zone in oil production in Africa and the entire World. They stated that when it was first discovered in 1958 by Shell, oil production and exportation started at a production rate of 5100 barrels of crude oil per day. The quantity doubled the following year, and crude oil exports from Nigeria rose from 20 million barrels per day in 1972 and reached a peak of 2.4 million barrels per day in 1979. Nigeria has since then be ranked between the fifth and seventh oil producing country in the world. Though, the instability of the ranking is a function of multiple factors that do affect economic performances of a country.

Despite this huge and abundant wealth accruing from Oil and Gas production in the Niger Delta, what has been the benefit of the donor or host communities? Is it Poverty? This is why we are focusing on poverty as the cause of persistent crises in the Niger Delta regions.

POVERTY: A BARRIER TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Poverty is one the contradictions of capitalism, and perhaps that of the capitalist world. Wherever capital is being accumulated on a large scale, some people must

be left behind; these people are usually at the extreme of poverty. Poverty though is as old as human race, the emergence of industrial revolution and globalization, has increased the number of people who can hardly cater for themselves let alone their family members. In Africa, poverty problems are enormous as health and economic conditions routinely become devastating. The Nigeria's history of poverty can be gauged from this (Smith, 2003; Adejuge, 2005).

Schaefer (2005) noted that efforts of sociologists and other social scientists to better understand poverty are complicated by the difficulty of meanings that people often give to it. This problem is evident even in government programmes that conceive of poverty in either absolute or relative terms. Schaefer posited that Absolute Poverty refers to a minimum level of subsistence that no family should be expected to live below. For instance, policies concerning minimum wages, housing standards, or school lunch programmes for the poor imply a need to bring citizens standard of living to some predetermined level of existence. On the other hand, Relative Poverty is a floating standard of deprivation by which people at the bottom of a society, whatever their lifestyles, are judged to be disadvantaged in comparison with the nation as a whole (Schaefer, 2005:211).

The issue of poverty in the Nigerian oil producing regions is perhaps that of relative poverty. Over the years, oil has sustained Nigeria's economic growth, improved the standard of living of other non-oil producing regions at the expense of the host communities whose natural resources are being exported into metropolitan countries for importation of capital in return. Many Nigerian cities have been developed with the oil wealth while towns and villages in the Niger Delta have become eyesore today (Osuntokun, 2000; Onosode, 2000; Okecha, 2000; Yaro et al., 2000). There are empirical evidences previously researched by scholars that confirm the assertion that poverty is a serious economic and social problem in the Niger Delta.

Writing about the nature and types of poverty in the Niger Delta, Aworawo (2000) commented that the economic conditions in the Niger Delta reflect unequivocally that poverty is endemic in the region. One of the indicators of poverty is the constant disruption of the mainstay of the traditional economy of the people by multinational oil companies. This often consequently leads to pollution of the coastal water that produces fishes for the people, stoppage of farming activities because of oil spillage. Because of this type of economic incapacitation of the people, inhabitants of the Niger Delta are today living in poor health conditions and environmentally polluted atmosphere that constrain good standard of living. Aworawo (2000: 155) has succinctly captured this excruciating poverty in his chapter titled *The Impact of Environmental Degradation on the Rural Economy of the Niger Delta* in a book published by Professor Akinjide Osuntokun. He stated thus:

While the petroleum producing companies continued to perform fitfully in the area of effectively tackling the problem of oil spillage, the people of the Niger Delta continue to groan under the burdens of the devastation of their land. A study carried out in 1995 revealed that between 1992 and 1993 the total area under major food crop production in Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta states decreased by 41.7 and 15% in 1995. The decrease is generally attributed to the increasing incidents of oil spillage which destroyed farmlands. This is a serious situation considering the nature of the land in the Niger Delta. It is estimated, for example, that of the 2,185,000 hectares that is the land area of Rivers and Bayelsa states about half of it is swamp land which hampers agriculture. In Delta state, of 1,769, 800 which represent its total land area, about a third are similarly swamps. This means that continuous loss of land to oil spillage and other activities connected with petroleum production and other industrial activities is basically the destruction of the means of livelihood of the people.

Worried about the enormity of the problems of poverty in the Niger Delta, the UNITED NATIONS in 2005 carried out a survey of human conditions in the Niger Delta states, this included among other things, an overview of past indicators of economic and social development in the area as well as a review of government efforts so far. One of the findings of the surveys explained the conditions in comparative terms; it showed that some of the Niger Delta states may be said to be improving more than what they used to be in the year 1996. Two of these states were listed as Edo and Delta states. Human conditions are relatively lower in Ondo however, meaning that there were variations across the states, it thus confirmed the fact that Ondo had longed been neglected like some other states in the oil-rich region. Making an inter-country comparison of the Niger Delta states with Indonesia, the United Nations Development Programmes remarked as follows: Indonesia is another oil-producing country that is almost at the same level of development as Nigeria. Even there, human development situation is slightly better than in the one in the Niger Delta. Indonesia's HDI for 2002 was 0.658, which is higher than the Niger Delta average of 0.564. Life expectancy in Indonesia was rated at 0.662, compared with 0.527 for the Niger Delta; adult literacy was at 0.895, compared with 0.673 on the education index for the Niger Delta; and real per capita consumption was at 0.592 compared with the Niger Delta's GDP Index of 0.570. Countries like Libya and Venezuela have also performed better than both Nigeria as a whole and the Niger Delta region in particular (UNDP, 2006: 56 - 57).

The foregoing exposition is just a meager percentage of relative poverty being experienced by the people of the oil producing region. How then can these people develop when their rural economies have been damaged by oil exploration? It is this concern that will make us understudy Nigeria's absolute poverty relative to poverty in the

Table 1. Poverty data (1996).

	Poverty Incidence (%)			
	1980	1985	1992	1996
National	28	46	43	66
Moderately Poor	21	34	29	36
Core	6	12	14	29
Urban	17	38	38	58
Moderately Poor	14	30	27	33
Core Poor	3	8	11	25
Rural	28	51	46	70
Moderately Poor	22	37	30	38
Core Poor	7	15	16	32
Male Headed Households	29	47	43	67
Moderately Poor	20	35	30	37
Core Poor	10	12	14	30
Female Headed Households	27	38	40	59
Moderately Poor	21	27	23	34
Core Poor	6	11	17	25
National	28	46	43	66

Source: Federal Government of Nigeria Millennium Development Goals 2004 Report p.69.

Niger Delta and the emergent crisis

NIGERIA'S DECADES OF POVERTY, ITS EFFECTS ON POVERTY IN THE NIGER DELTA AND THE EMERGENT CRISIS

Poverty in Nigeria is one of the indicators of Nigeria's decades of economic crisis which have had attendant effects on the citizenry today. In the context of this paper, this could be regarded as absolute poverty in Nigeria. The failure of the postcolonial state and the Oil doom of the late 1970s that hit the global oil market had been collectively attributed as the causes of abject poverty in Nigeria. Other factors that have been increasing the level of poverty in the country are easily noticeable in the high rate of inflation, job loses, mass retrenchment in the public service, reduced salaries of public servants, high rate of unemployment, increasing crime rate and massive looting of public treasury. Ordinary Nigerians, by 1980s had realized that the state in Nigeria was in a big mess as foreign debts were mounting and a lot of social services remained scarce; this crisis of governance was also accentuated by the state that had become a warfare state.

The above is just half of the terrible experiences of many Nigerian citizens. Professor Charles Soludo (2004) observed that poverty has persisted in Nigeria especially since the 1980s due to economic recession and mismanagement of state funds by the ruling elites both military and civilian alike. Also, in the Federal Government Report on Millennium Development Goals (2004) documented that over the period of 1980 to 1996, the proportion of

poor people in Nigeria rose from 28.1% in 1980 to 65.6% in 1996. This translated into 17.7 million poor people in 1980 and 67.1 million people in 1996. By 2015, it is estimated that between 30.1 million and 40.4 million people would still be living in poverty if nothing is done to reduce the problem drastically. The statistics below further show poverty distribution over a period of four crucial years in Nigerian history (Table 1a and b). Thus, it is in the midst of this excruciating poverty that is facing Nigeria that the people of the Niger Delta are routinely being impoverished and pauperized.

Studies have shown that when some individuals or a group of people are confronted with abject poverty, there is a tendency that they would devise an alternative means of salvaging themselves from the trouble or form a strong alliance against such a tyrannical and oppressive government especially if the majority of the citizenry are well informed or have high level of social consciousness. This position has been well expounded by The African Network for Environment and Economic Justice (ANEEJ) in their survey of poverty in the Niger Delta.

This agency highlighted further that despite the huge allocations by the Federal Government to the Niger Delta states, there are no visible development programmes that could be used to remedy the problems caused by oil exploration in the region. In fact, ANEEJ (2004) lamented that the 13% special allocations to the Niger Delta states, between 2000 and 2003 have not been feasibly utilized to transform the lives of the downtrodden people. According to ANEEJ, the allocations could not be equated with the visible governmental programmes implemented in the area of education, health, employment, gender equality

Table 1b Incidence of Poverty in the Niger Delta 1980 – 2004.

	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004	
Nigeria	28.1	46.3	42.7	65.6	54.4	
Edo/Delta	19.8	52.4	33.9	56.1	Delta	45.35
					Edo	33.09
Cross River	10.2	41.9	45.5	66.9	41.61	
Imo/Abia	14.4	33.1	49.9	56.2	Imo	27.39
					Abia	22.27
Ondo	24.9	47.3	46.6	71.6	42.15	
Rivers/Bayelsa	7.2	44.4	43.4	44.3	Rivers	29.09
					Bayelsa	19.98

Source: National Bureau of Statistics 2004 as cited in the United Nations Human Development Report on the Niger Delta.

Table 2. Summary of state government expenditure (1998 - 2002) (N million).

	Recurrent expenditure	Capital expenditure	Extra budgetary	Total
Abia	28238.4	16396.9	2822.7	49588.2
Akwa Ibom	41322.4	34339.4	3189.0	76851.0
Bayelsa	42280.6	25780.6	2804.3	70864.9
Cross River	25270.7	24398.9	131.9	49901.5
Delta	4232.4	84552.4	5176.5	164261.3
Edo	14063.2	10920.4	1198.8	6182.2
Imo	26342.1	24992.9	2200.8	53535.8
Ondo	32262.1	18252.6	4837.1	55351.8
Rivers	50459.8	38807.9	6957.1	96324.8
Total	334471.7	278742.0	29418.2	642831.5

Source: Central bank of Nigeria annual report (1998 - 2002) as cited by ANEEJ (2004).

and roads. In spite of the non-availability of this welfare projects in their constituencies, governments still shout about the dividends of democracy. This contradiction is more discernible in the state government expenditure in the region (Table 2).

In Table 2.0 above, the total capital expenditure for the nine states of the Niger Delta amounts to 642.8 billion. According to African Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (ANEEJ), this report has shown that there is a fiscal deficit of #29.7 billion when compared with #613.1 billion total revenues earned during the same period in the same states. What is responsible for this could be traced to the nature of the Nigerian state, which lives on primitive capitalism.

Since the increase in oil production and exportation to metropolitan nations, the Nigerian state has sophisticated itself as a predatory state like other African postcolonial states. Evolving with the state in the process is a corrupt political class who live on capital accruing from oil wealth. The blessings of oil exploration are usually reaped by this politically brutal class; this is seldom actualized in connivance with the elites of the oil producing regions. One would, at this juncture be wondering how the \$ 606 billion total revenues accruing to OPEC member countries, in

which Nigeria is a member were spent (OPEC, 2003). Was the Nigerian share properly utilized to effect changes in the lives of the Niger Delta people or even the ordinary Nigerians? Obviously, the money must have been part of the stolen state funds that the EFCC have been repatriating from the corrupt politicians and state executives since it was established by the Federal Government in 2002 as an anti-corruption agency.

It is also pertinent to note that the activities of the OIL COMPANIES otherwise known as the Transnational Corporation (TNCs) are not encouraging in the region. Most the multinational companies either pay little attention to social services or ignore a whole lot of their social responsibilities to the people who own the resources which they are exploring to their mother nations in anticipation of huge capital from the business. It was as a result of the social consequences of the oil business in the Niger Delta that made the World Bank (1995:1) lament that "despite the vast oil reserves, the Niger Delta remains poor. GNP per capita is below the national average of US\$ 280 in the face of high population growth rate combined with severe habitable land constraints". We are surprised that despite this alarming comment, the TNCs response to the distress call of the host communities has been weak.

Table 3. Unemployment rates by educational level and age group in Nigeria, December, 2000.

	Composite	Urban	Rural
No schooling	16.5	12.9	18.0
Primary	17.8	13.8	19.5
Secondary	21.9	17.6	23.3
Above Secondary	15.8	10.1	18.3
Age Group			
15-24	39.7	42.1	38.7
25-44	15.6	10.4	17.8
45-59	10.9	8.1	12.1
60-64	13.6	9.0	15.6
65-70	17.6	21.3	16.0

Source: Federal office of statistics, statistical news, August 2001, p.5.

Because of this weakness, the oil companies rarely resist paying compensation when they are approached by the community leaders. The entire failure of governance in the Niger Delta is a combination of conspiracy between some Nigerian government officials and the oil multinationals. This is the fathom of the crisis in the Niger Delta (Osuntokun, 2000). And because the main interest of most of the TNCs is capital repatriation from poor countries to the advanced capitalist countries, they devote little attention to the effects of their activities on their host communities. And where some provide jobs and pay compensation, great majorities of the illiterate population are left behind (Ukaogo, 2000). A greater proportion of the compensations are usually paid to the Elites who have constituted themselves into conduit pipes in state treasury. The establishment of a board or commission by government is not a guarantee that the mass population would benefit. Hence, a sense of loneliness, deprivation and marginalization has become an inbuilt psychological thinking in individuals. No wonder people express hostility to the staff of these multinational companies. For over three decades, oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta has turned a greater majority of the youth, women and aged into misery.

Unemployment has become a serious predominant in the area as many of the youths whose previous economic activities were fishing and farming could not be accommodated in the oil industry. This was occasioned by the demand for skilled labour in the new industry. And where the oil companies gave scholarships, beneficiaries were and are usually domiciled in the cities. The implication of this is that only a few opportunists in the city will benefit from employment opportunities provided for host communities. Statistics on the rate of unemployment in Nigeria confirms that over the years, youth unemployment has been persistent in the country including the oil producing regions (Table 3).

From the above statistics, it can be deduced that 39.7

% of Nigerians who were unemployed as at year 2000 were youth followed by those that could be categorized as adults within the ages of 25 - 44 using the UN definition of youth. Whereas the youth in other parts of the country may not be very reactionary to exploitation, the violent and intense environment of the Niger Delta has further exacerbated the level of frustrations in the area leading to violence and conflicts (Osuntokun, 2000; Babawale, 2003; ANEEJ, 2004).

Arising from this economic marginalization coupled with age-long political marginalization is what is today tagged "The Niger Delta Crisis". Before delving into the comprehensive analysis of this crisis and the ensuing youth social movements, we will like to theoretically do the expose of the Marxist theory of conflicts.

MARXIST THEORY OF CONFLICTS: AN EXPLANADUM OF NIGER DELTA CRISIS

Marxist theory of conflicts evolved from the various works of Karl Marx and Engels, his contemporary. Marxism is a response to the consensus theory which holds the view, that society has a tendency of being stable if the state is allowed to integrate different social groups, and peoples with their disparate social values. This theory argues that there is a value consensus which every member of society must hold as the truth and normative system; the trust of which is bestowed in the state and its organs (Chambliss, 1964; Jones, 2001). Marxist conflict theorists start their argument by criticizing the capitalist system that favours consensus of social values and cultural differences. To the classical economists, capitalism has come to provide a level playing field for every citizen to compete in the capitalist markets. The classical economists, though, recognized the social inequality that this mode of production might generate but held that the state is there to regularize social relations through the constitution and enforcement of the laws therein. Because capitalism gives every individual the opportunity to think, there will be feasible and sustainable human development in science and technology industry, which is expected to translate into human centered development (Ake, 1996). So conflicts are a normal occurrence and a process of modernization which will be taken over by events.

This debate put forward was sharply criticized by Marx in his various works. The same view held by Marx is also being sustained in contemporary Marxism. Marxist conflict theorists argue that the basis of human history is the sustenance of economic needs. This is because man is naturally an economic animal, the need to eat, live in affluent society as well as the need to accumulate capital. In order to satisfy these various needs, men have always come together by engaging themselves in different forms of economic relations that is, the production of goods and services (Schaeffer, 2005). The main aim of providing goods and services is for profit maximization through the maintenance of complex division of labour and class proliferation. At the top of this struggle for existence through

the economy as the substructure is the state. The state, according to Marx is a committee of the capitalists. The state exists solely to permeate capitalist interests and ensure the subordination of other classes in society. This is constituted by the elites and is reconstituted by them; the mere election of state executives is usually a deceit. Men therefore live by Michael's Iron Law of Oligarchy.

According to the Marxist Conflict theorists it is this form of economic relations that divide human society into different opposing classes (Chambliss, 1975; Ake, 1996; Jones, 2001) the most conspicuous of them are the bourgeoisie and the proletariats. Because the bourgeoisies possess economic capital, they are always at the corridor of power, dictating the laws that regulate the capitalist markets. Land and business policies are dictated by them in a way to protect their pivotal interests (Gordon, 1973). Thus, the working class and other classes are at the mercy of the ruling elites. The possession of economic and political powers gives the capitalists an unfettered use of state funds in satisfying their selfish interests especially in developing countries (Adisa, 2007).

Marxists argued that these unequal economic relations would lead to social conflicts. And in as much as the oppression of the proletariats continues, there is a likelihood that conflicts will persist. This theory has suitably and largely explained the relationships between poverty in the Niger Delta and the outburst of conflicts. Perhaps, because, the people have realized the extent of exploitation of their natural resources and the economic values of those resources in the World Capitalist Market, the only option left in this kind of pauperized social condition, is to engage the Nigerian state in conflicts and warfare. Since the aborted 1967-1970 Nigerian civil war, the Niger Delta people have been conscious of the despotic nature of the Nigerian state and its effects on their standards of living, this is the genesis of the Niger Delta Crisis. The same poverty ridden situations of the 1970s have been worsened as cost of living has increased maximally.

THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS: RESPONSE OF THE YOUTH AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Since the 1990s, the Niger Delta crisis has taken a dramatic turn with the formation of Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). In November 1990, Chiefs and Opinion Leaders of Ogoni mooted the idea of seeking a better life for their citizens. They got together and compiled a document captioned "Ogoni Bill of Rights". Some of the basic rights included in the document are: (1) Political control of Ogoni People. (2) The right to the control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni development. (3) Adequate and direct representation as of right in all Nigerian national institutions. (4) The right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation (FGN, 1996; 9). With the declaration of this Bill, the Federal government of Nigeria under the military head of state Gen. Sanni Abacha knew all was not well again. In other words, this movement symbolized that the

people had risen to the occasion to defend their fundamental rights.

Because of internal crisis, MOSOP produced a youth wing known as the National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCON) headed by late Dr. Saro-Wiwa. The youth wing was a militant wing which led to the killing of some Ijaw Chiefs whom were regarded by the youth as saboteurs. In response to this dastardly act (according to FGN,1996), Ken- Saro Wiwa and other Ogoni leaders were gruesomely killed by the Federal Government under the Civil Disturbances(Special Tribunal) Decree Cap 53, Laws of Federal Government of Nigeria 1990. Though, there were international pleas for amnesty for Saro-Wiwa but the military insisted they must be killed (FGN, 1996). The crisis accompanying this GENOCIDE in the Niger Delta marked the beginning of a new dimension to the Niger Delta crisis. Militant Youths started to respond in negative ways to government policies in the Niger Delta. There began in the Niger Delta, the activities of militants youths demanding ransom amount of money from multinational companies. In the first instance, the Land Use Act of 1978 which vests the ownership and control of all land and minerals in the Federal government came under intense criticism. Deeka Menegbon spoke on the vision and mission of the Niger Delta people especially MOSOP.

The autonomy we seek is actually a vital part of the democratic development which we are facing in a halting fashion in Nigeria. More than anything else it provides the key to part of our national problem where there has been a total breakdown in the relationship between the people and those in government who are supposed to maintain a contract of services and protection in return for the payment of taxes and responsible civic behaviour. Those of you who were familiar with our testimony before the Oputa Panel would be aware of the extent of violence and human rights abuses which were conducted by the River State Internal Security Task Force (RSISTF) and associated bodies where thousands of ordinary people faced years of assaults, rapes, killings and looting (Menegbon, 2003: 127).

We should not therefore be wondering why youths constitute themselves into new social movements to end this oppression. As Schaeffer has rightly observed that social movements are groups of people who usually organize collective activities to bring about or resist fundamental change in an existing group or society. This is not far different with Herbert Blumer's definition, which says that social movements are "collective enterprises to establish a new order of life" (see Schaeffer, 2005: 515). The youth organizations in the Niger Delta are social movements meant for the actualization of self-actualization and suppression of economic marginalization. With this approach, the people believe poverty would be overcome.

This is why militants approach to the crisis of underdevelopment since 1999 to date, is to kidnap some of the staff of multinational companies working in their area in antici-

pation for huge ransom. Although, some elites have been taking advantages of this action, the approach has earned them international recognition. Criticisms are routinely being made on the illegal activities of the oil companies like Shell, Chevron, Total etc., especially from international Human Rights Organizations (Daily Independent, July 2, 2007: 6). Julius Ihonvbere in his chapter titled "Recipe for Perpetual Crises: The Nigerian State and the Niger Delta Question" published by Committee for the Defence of Human Rights summarized the role of the Nigerian state in the entire crises in the Niger Delta.

According to him, the character of the Nigerian state continues to be directly responsible for reproducing the country's deepening socio-economic and political contradictions. In fact, the state seems to worsen the country's predicaments with every policy action or inaction it initiates or fails to initiate in the process of trying to consolidate the interests of its custodians. The state has never been able to build appreciable degree of confidence among Nigerians, ensure some discipline within the ranks of the elites, manage the economy in the interest of the people, or construct the much needed platforms of inclusion, tolerance, and participation. As well, the state has been captured and privatized by a tiny fraction of the elite that use public institutions and resources to terrorize non-bourgeois communities, abuse human rights, loot public funds, and mortgage the future of the citizenry. Perceived as a wicked, aloof, insensitive, corrupt and distant force, Nigerians relate to the state as an enemy. It is seen as an enemy that must, as opportunity permits, be subverted, avoided, cheated, dismantled and destroyed if the interests of the majority of the citizenry are to be protected. For all intents and purposes, the repressive and "captured" postcolonial Nigerian state seems to do everything to provoke non-bourgeois forces. The custodians of state power in Nigeria have done such a terrible job at building those elements that pull a people together to cultivate a national identity and culture. The evidence can be seen in the fact that on the eve of the twenty-first century, Nigeria has no national hero, hardly enjoys stability, no national identity, and the rate at which the youth abandon the country for foreign lands remains alarming. At all levels economic, political, social, and ideological, even spiritual- the state and its custodians have failed woefully. This has been Nigeria's experiences since political independence in October 1960. The plight of the communities and the nationalities of the Niger Delta arise from the situation and patterns that we have summarized above (Ihonvbere, 2000).

Having explained the enormity of the problem within the context of the state and unfolding crises of confidence, we now proceed to look at the evidences of state failures in its policies on Niger Delta over the years.

POLICY RESPONSES TO THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS

The Niger Delta crisis has been posing as a peculiar national problem since 1958. It was this conviction that

made the Federal Government to initiate the Wilkins Commission. Findings of this commission really helped the government to initially respond to the problem by establishing the Niger Delta Board in 1961. However, not much was achieved before the outbreak of Western Region civil disturbances in 1962 (ANEJ, 2004). The inefficiency of this board led to the creation of another body known as the Niger Delta Rural Development Authority (NDRDA). Later, a Presidential task force was set up in the face of youth restiveness in the area which led to the allocation of 1.5 percent of the Federation Account. Then in 1992, the Oil and Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) came to replace NDRDA. The endemic nature of corruption in OMPADEC made the then military government to scrap it in 1998.

But the Federal Government could not fold its hands in the face of the persistent youth restiveness and violence in the area. This led to the establishment of the present Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in December 2000. The commission was charged among other things, with the task of bringing sustainable development to the people and bridging the age long economic marginalization. Has NDDC sustained its mandate in the face of a predatory state? The true answer to this poser, is No. This is because poverty has continued to strike on many inhabitants of this region while some people at the affairs of the state continues to embezzle the funds allocated to the region for the eradication of poverty. The recent case of Chief James Ibori, the former Governor of Delta State suffices a semblance of how states funds are usually siphoned by the members of the political class. Ibori has been arrested by Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) for embezzling millions of naira while in office. Besides, he is also answering questions on money laundering. This case, though, is still before a court of law, the arrest of Ibori shows that lack of sustainable development in the Niger Delta is as result of corruption that is endemic in our society. Thus, it would be germane to ask a question. Is Oil a curse in the Niger Delta people? Further research will buttress this point.

CONCLUSION

This paper has taken a critical look at poverty as one the immediate causes of the Niger Delta crisis. As the saying goes, a hungry man is an angry man. For years, the people of the Niger Delta have been marginalized, neglected, these attitudes have in no small measure resulted hostile relationships between the state and the citizens of this region. It is even more pathetic that the traditional economy was not only bastardized but also submerged by the merging oil business. It was this that led to the emergence of highly impoverished as earlier expatiated upon in this paper. In this age of globalization, it is an irony of life to hear that a region that is rich will have majority of its houses under the polluted atmosphere of chemicals

used in the production of oil. We have read and heard of several stories of how oil spillage had resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people, while foreign experts were rarely affected by such ecological disasters.

What do we expect from these people chattered by the state violence? This paper has tried as much as possible to demonstrate that poverty is major cause is a major cause of the crises in the Niger Delta relying on Marxist theoretical paradigm. This paper's position, that poverty is a serious economic variable for violence and crisis in the Niger Delta has been well deliberated upon throughout this paper. The paper concluded that policy responses in the past had overlooked the serious impacts of poverty on the crises until recently. Thus, we believe that solutions to the Niger Delta crisis abound in the creation and sustenance of the culture of a democratic state that gives room for the majority to participate in all spheres of life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Under the above discourse, we believe the following solutions can be provided to downturn the crisis:

- There should be convocation of all inclusive Niger Delta Conference to be organized by the Federal Government, where all stakeholders, militant leaders, chiefs, women, youth and children will be fully represented and issues concerning the region will be seriously discussed.
- Activities of the Oil Companies must be subjected to the scrutiny of National Environmental Protection Agency that will focus on environmental degradation, pollution and displacement of the rural economy. Free Media coverage must be allowed of these activities and the report of the agency.
- A Periodic National Assessment Survey is needed to evaluate extent of poverty in the area. Evidences of quantitative and qualitative reports of such survey can be subsequently used for development programmes.
- A Periodic Assessment of the activities of NDDC is needed; such assessment can be published for public scrutiny.
- Security and Safety Survey can also be conducted to know the rate of crimes in the region.
- Equitable share of the oil wealth must always be the priority by the Federal Government especially the National Assembly.

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