

CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA'S NIGER DELTA REGION: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

The Niger Delta of Nigeria is the largest mangrove forest in Africa and the chief source of wealth to the Nigerian state. This naturally endowed region once became a hot bed of kidnapping, violence, insurgency, crude oil bunkering, gang war and hostage taking. This paper investigates the challenges of democracy and development in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. It relied heavily on secondary data. Using the Marxist political economy approach, the paper reveals that the tensions that rob the region of its peace and stability were the people's quest to get a reasonable share of the states resources. Since democracy and development cannot thrive under a restive atmosphere, it recommends that current measures at restoring peace and infusing a massive infrastructure in the area should be maintained. Lastly, the provision of life sustaining skills for the youths of the region should be continued. This will enable them survive without recourse to violence and criminality.

Keywords: Crisis, Democracy, Development, Federalism, Niger-Delta.

1.0 Introduction

The Nigerian state like many other states in Africa has experienced many disturbances, like colonial rule, military rule, political conflicts, civil war etc. the Nigeria situation is peculiar because the military held sway in governance up to 1999. Civil rule only

provided rude interludes. The long stay of the military in power is claimed to be responsible for majority of Nigeria's problem, including her inability to operate true federalism.

On return to democratic rule in 1999, expectations of Nigerians were very high. This was particularly so in the area of true federalism. At this point, the Niger Delta question appears the most critical component of the National Question in Nigeria. This was so because the people in this region strongly believed that democratic rule will give them the golden opportunity to air their views and demand for their rights.

This was a mere wishful thinking. The people of the Niger Delta region never witness any positive changes rather they viewed the Nigerian democracy at that point in time as a military type of democracy because the dividends of democracy were farfetched. At this point, the disenchanted, abandoned, exploited and marginalized people of the Niger Delta began to engage the state through environmental activism.

The people of the region are exposed to a number of health perils and socio economic constraints which for long has made the people more impulsive resulting in youth's agitation: conflicts between youths and community leaders, youths and government agencies, youths and multinational companies and so on. Efforts by government and multinational companies (operating in the area) to address this ugly scenario of reckless destruction of lives and property as well as interference on the exploration process of crude oil, refining and distribution of petroleum products has not yielded the desired results. (<http://www.opppapers.com/essays/The-Conflict-In-Niger-Delta/575614>)

The challenges evoked by the age long neglect of the Niger Delta Region became a snag to the Nigerian body polity. The dusts and thorny issues it raised have been a bone in the neck of the Nigerian government for several decades. The Niger Delta crisis (in the recent past) made negative headlines in both local and international media, portraying Nigeria in a bad light. The Nigerian government later realized that normal oil exploration activities – the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, could no longer continue in the face of militant uprising and warfare in the Niger Delta. The government thus saw the need to take proactive measures in addressing the problems of the area.

The paper undertakes to examine the development challenges of the Niger Delta people. The paper owes a duty to bring to lime light the causes of the struggles, efforts made by the Nigerian government in addressing them, the effectiveness or otherwise of such efforts, and the way forward.

2.0 Definition Of Concepts

It is significant at this juncture, to try a clarification of the important concepts which are relevant to the understanding and illumination of our topic. These are Democracy, Development, and Niger-Delta

2.1 Democracy

A plethora of definitions have been offered for the concept of democracy. To Dahl (1982:11), democracy is “a system of elected representative government operated under the rule of law, where the most significant groups in the population participate in the political process and have access to effective representation in the practice of making governmental decisions, that is, of allocation of scarce resources”. Sand books sees democracy as “a political system characterized by regular and free elections in which politicians organized into political parties compete for power by right of the virtue of all adults to vote and the guarantee of a range of political and civil rights” (Ukase, 2010:83).

These two opinions on democracy are both relevant, but for the purpose of this paper, the description of democracy by Animashaun (2008) is most relevant. Citing Obasi (1988), Animashaun posits that the ultimate goal of democracy is to civility rooted in respect and justice for each man to achieve a human policy. Democracy as a descriptive term is synonymous with majority rule. This means Government by the people, exercised either directly or through elected representatives. In this system of government the common people are considered as the primary source of political power, and there exist the principles of social equality and respect for the individual within a community. Democracy embodies the ideal that decisions affecting people’s systems and social structures are taken with the active participation of all the members. A state can be said to be democratic if its government is chosen by, and is accountable to the people.

2.2 Development

The concept of development is both elusive and fluid. The principal obstacle to a universally accepted notion of development has been the ideological disposition of most scholars who look at development from a preferred position of certain ideological underpinnings (Vande, 2003). To Rodney (2009), development is encompassed within the idea of the ability of a society to be able to tap its natural resources in order to cater for the material and social lives of the generality of the people. This is simply a reference to the manner of production of goods and services in a society. Development cannot be measured

by the number of big hotels, by how many people owned cars, by how many rich people can afford medical treatment abroad, etc. Development means progress in the following:

- Health and well being of all;
- Good reward for labour;
- Improvement in both standard and quality of living;
- Education for all.

The above can be achieved when we take account of local conditions, we should not blindly believe that what is right in one place will work well in our another place. We also need to respect and use local knowledge and above all we need to listen to what local people say and what they think their needs are. The fact is that development cannot be imposed on a people it has to start from the people. This does not mean we should not use technology or expertise from outside, we should guide against blind adoption. Development is therefore a multidimensional process which connotes change from a less to a more desirable state. Its concern is the improvement in the total living condition of a people.

2.3 Niger- Delta

The Niger-Delta is a geographical area in Nigeria. It has two words namely the Niger and Delta. Each of these words has five letters. The Niger-Delta is one of the largest delta in Africa which is made up of vast coastal plain and rich in crude petroleum. The region is known to have many waterways and tributaries which flow into the Atlantic Ocean through the Gulf of Guinea. ‘The Niger Delta is Africa’s largest delta, covering an area of 70,000 square kilometers. About one third of this area is made up of wetlands and it contains the largest mangrove forest in the world’ (Mangut and Egbefo, 2010). The Niger Delta region comprising of present day Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Abia, Imo and Rivers States of Nigeria and with an estimated population of over 30 million Nigerians has been the foremost economic resource generator for the Nigerian state since 1937 when crude oil was first struck at Oloibiri in the present day Bayelsa State. It is estimated that over USD 300 billion has accrued to the Federal Republic of Nigeria from sales of crude oil. The Niger Delta produces the oil wealth which accounts for the bulk of Nigeria’s foreign earnings.

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is one of the most blessed deltas in the world, in both human and material resources. Suffice to add that the unfavourable manner, in which these resources have been harnessed over time, is the nuisance of the regions dilemma today.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the Marxist Political Economy Approach as captured by Ake (1981). The political economy approach is based on dialectical materialism, which places primacy on material or economic conditions of society. It is premised on the belief that man is dominantly motivated by economic needs. Labour is the essence of material existence hence; economic activity is man's primary concern.

To Marx, every political system corresponds and reflects the kind of economic structure in the society. He places emphasis and premium on the production base (i.e. the substructure) since this determines the politics, ideology and culture of the society (i.e., superstructure). Thus, from the substructure one can easily understand the nature of internal relations, how a society organizes, manages and reproduces itself, the causes of tension, conflicts or contradiction in any given society and the bearing or direction of social change.

Marx further contends that, there occurs in the capitalist mode of production an economic surplus for which different interest groups in the society scramble. That scramble usually generates conflict. Political conflict is therefore an extension of economic conflict into the realm of politics. The conflict takes place between classes which are themselves the products of the mode of economic production. Each class tries to dominate and exploit one another. The differences in economic conditions therefore define both the parameters and the nature of politics in a society.

In the case of the Nigerian society (which is a peripheral capitalist society), it is clear that the class divisions, class consciousness and class struggle of classical Marxism have not yet materialized. Quoting Rodney, Hembé (1999:26) confirms that colonialism did not create a capital or factory owning class of Africans anywhere nor did it create any urbanized proletariat of any significance. The type of capitalism established was the dependent (periphery) type. Such systems often display, as the Nigerian type does, evidence of uneven development, distortion or disarticulation in economic development, social inequalities, leading to the situation where different modes of production co-exist. Under such conditions, what might be regarded as national progress tends to affect certain groups adversely. In the Nigerian case, such uneven development with its adverse effect came to be perceived along regional lines.

As a characteristic nature of the Nigerian capitalist society, the economic surplus takes the form of state resources. It is often called 'the National Cake'. Thus, every ethnic group tries to have a better share of the 'Cake' and this in turn strengthens regional agitations. The feelings of relative deprivations are swiftly translated into antagonistic regional rivalry.

Therefore, a process which would have taken the form of inter-class struggle is construed as an inter-regional struggle (Hembe, 1999).

4.0 Background To The Niger Delta Crisis

The history of protests and conflicts of acrimony by the Niger Delta peoples against forced union and exploitation dates back to the period before 1957 when testimonies were made in respect thereof before the Willink Commission of Inquiry into Minority Fears.

The grave implications of continued conflict in the Niger Delta may be better appreciated against the background of the fact that, from historical experience, the Nigerian nation and especially the Niger Delta have had a prolonged familiarity with social struggle against colonial rule. The Niger Delta militants are drawing from this experience in prosecuting the current phase of confrontation with the Nigerian State. Like the struggle against colonialism, the present phase of the crisis has incubated over long periods of unaddressed grievances and disenchantments among communities in the region. (Afinotan and Ojkorotu, 2009: 6)

Subsequently, several protests and clamors for justice have been registered to no avail. Characteristically, both military and civilian governments have ignored clamors for equitable remedy and forcibly smothered protests through use of overwhelming military might and other documented *acts of state sanctioned political violence*.

The existing concept of federalism in Nigeria today falls short of prospects in both definition and practice. To the extent that it is being practiced as quasi-federalism, there has been an overly concentrated control of resources by the Federal Government. This abnormality continues to generate continual conflict with indigenous rights; hence, it has become a main cause of conflict in the Niger Delta region especially from dishonorable Derivation Principles for revenue allocation to the States in the region.

The struggles of the Niger Deltans, which have assumed a violent dimension in our recent history, are explained to be an expression of the people's grievances over neglects and deprivations by the government. As Biakpara (2010:3) puts it, "what the people of the Delta

are asking for is equity and justice and due recognition of their rights as citizens. These issues are contained in the Ogoni Bill of Rights, the Kaiama Declaration, and similar declarations by other groups in the Niger Delta. Sound, the people are insisting on a cessation of destructive oil exploration activities which destroy the Niger Delta ecology and human lives”.

Biakpara (2010) reports further that, the Niger Deltans want the abrogation of all laws which dispossesses them of their rights as a federating unit within Nigeria. They want the crisis of poverty in the Niger Delta to be addressed. According to him, although the general poverty index of Nigeria has risen sharply, the worse poverty situations are found in the Niger Delta. The people also want Nigerians to pay attention to their message and treat them with respect as equal partners in the Nigerian nation.

The situation in the Niger Delta is both curious and is an annoying paradox. The people live in difficult coastal areas surrounded by water, and yet, do not have enough water to drink. Their creeks are littered with pipelines bearing petroleum products to other parts of the country, but in Niger Delta fuel is scarce and expensive. For example, fuel is costlier in Yenogoa than in Kano. The Niger Deltans have also lamented that, before their very eyes, revenue from crude oil sales is taken away to provide infrastructure in other parts of the country (beautiful roads in Abuja, Skyscrapers and Flyovers in Lagos etc), while many communities in the Niger Delta are cutoff from civilization because there are no roads or bridges to get to them (Biakpara 2010 and Mamkaa, 2010).

In another development, the Niger Delta youths in their thousands, if not millions, are largely unemployed. The qualified ones among them have to struggle with other Nigerians to get positions in the oil companies. The oil companies have their headquarters in Lagos and Abuja, not in the Niger Delta. The people feel neglected as illiterates and minorities that can be manipulated. Youths, adults, women and children grow up and die in the region without much hope and chance of a better future, while people from other parts of Nigeria, enjoy the benefits that oil wells wealth brings. Consequently, the militants among them feel they have reached a point where the only choice they find attractive is violence (Mamkaa, 2010 and Biakpara, 2010).

The precedence was set when in 1966, Isaac Adaka Boro and Nottingham Dick, two Ijaw young men, set up the Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS). They were concerned with the rising poverty levels of their people and also perceived that the domineering tendencies of the major tribes in Nigeria were to blame. It was on the platform of the NDVS

that they declared an independent Niger Delta Republic in February 1966. This first secessionist bid in the history of Nigeria failed (Tell, June 25, 2009:6).

The passage of Isaac Adaka Boro and his lieutenant, Nottingham Dick only marked the beginning of history. Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, Kenule Saro Wiwa led the movement for the survival of the Ogoni people (MOSOP) and brought the plight of the people of the Niger Delta to International attention. This led to the declaration of the Ogoni Bill of Rights. This was followed shortly by the emergence of militant groups and warlords in the creeks (Biakpara, 2010).

By 2007, the situation in the Niger Delta had degenerated into full anarchy. Series of armed youth gangs had emerged fighting for the control of oil resources in their localities. These happened in the midst of pure criminality: kidnapping, oil bunkering and pipeline vandalism. The militants were armed with superior weapons and very defiant. They issue ultimatums both to government and oil installations and their actions were carried out with little reprisals from government forces (Tell, June 25, 2009:64).

As Ruben Abati Captured the Situation,

They attack oil installations, kidnap oil company officials. Seeing that crude oil is stolen openly by state officials, and that a whole ship, bearing oil cargo can disappear from Nigerian shores and the Navy and everyone else could claim ignorance, the militants have also begun to engage in illegal oil bunkering (Biakpara, 2010:2).

An elder statement and spokesman of the Niger Delta, Edwin Kiagbodo Clerk corroborated this position when he asserts that,

The Boys are fighting for their own survival. They are fighting unemployment, criminal negligence of the area, the dehumanization of our own people and lack of education for them (Newswatch, August 4, 2005:15).

In the same vein, Itse Sagay, explains that militancy in the Niger Delta region has assumed an alarming proportion because of the continued oppression and gross underdevelopment of the area that produces virtually the entire wealth of the nation (Newswatch, August 4, 2008:16).

Government had to cope with all these embarrassments arising from the lawlessness in the Niger Delta – oil theft, the kidnapping of innocent children, the abduction of men, married women and open warfare. This crisis brought untold hardship and instability to the Nigerian

polity. For instance, in 2008, about \$ 20.7 billion revenue due to the government was lost. National electricity supply was down to amount 800 MW because of the disruption of the supply of gas from the Niger Delta. This greatly affected both public and private sector businesses in Nigeria (Mamkaa, 2010).

The foregoing analysis confirms Marx's assertion that all history is the history of class struggle between a ruling group and an opposing group, from which came a new economic, political and social system (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 1990:225). The Niger Deltans have articulated their points, advancing reasons why they took arms against the Nigerian government, which is the ruling group in this struggle. But how have successive governments responded to these threats? This forms the discussion in the next segment of the paper.

5.0 Government Efforts At Addressing The Niger Delta Problem

The quest for addressing the Niger Delta question started during the pre-independence days. Precisely, in 1958, the Willinks Commission was set up to address the minority question. In its report, the commission observed that the needs of those who live in the creeks and swamps of the Niger Delta are very different from those of the interior, noting that, a feeling of neglect and a lack of understanding was widespread. A case was therefore made for the special treatment of this area. Specifically, the commission recommended the setting up of a Niger Delta Development Board (Biakpara, 2010). As a response, the indigenous government that succeeded the colonialists established River Basin development Authorities, but there was hardly any political will to drive these authorities towards development.

Where there are government efforts at resolution, such efforts have been limited in representation, haphazardly coordinated, repetitive and incomplete. All efforts at conflict resolution have been generated by the Federal government and imposed upon all stakeholders. For example, the Niger Delta Development Act 2000 recently adopted is a variation of the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) Decree enabled by General Sanni Abacha in 1995. It is known that both structures and scope of the OMPADEC could not resolve entrenched causes of conflict in the region and its variation in the NDDC Act 2000 is not estimated to prove better in addressing insufficiency of the OMPADEC decree.

The OMPADEC or its descendants - the NDDC Act 2000, assuming it shall be properly managed according to its charter of creation - by self-merit, are partly authentic means to an ultimate resolution of conflicts. Despite their inevitability, neither can one singularly resolve crises as a stand-alone model nor is surrounding enough in representation

of indigenous peoples and their varied interests. Both represent unbalanced creations of the majority stakeholder - the Federal government - that considerably favors already protected multinational corporations and without equity to indigenous peoples and their interests. Historically, Commissions so created by the Federal government are scandalously challenged in management styles while personifying as breeding ground of corruption and extreme government bureaucracy. It is, as a result, made according to pattern that present Niger Delta Commission has no satisfactorily delineated purpose, scope and structures expected of such important roles and offices it is created to implement.

Another reason that challenges the well-intentioned NDDC is traced to similar retrogressive laws that are shades in present regional conflicts. These laws represent another replica handed down by previous governments and law makers toward resolving conflicts through revenue allocation. These authors are inclined to indicate unreasonableness in most sections of such laws and suggest immediate legislative and judicial reviews.

Against these inherent natures of self-service, ineffectiveness and limitations that characterize earlier Commissions created by Federal governments for regional resource control and developments, it cannot be overemphasized the desirability for an Equilateral Resource Control model – created to provide checks and balances while ensuring equity for all stakeholders.

In 1992, the Babangida administration set up the Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC). This agency was reportedly starved of necessary funds to operate optimally and make a difference, and on the other hand, the OMPADEC officials misappropriated the resources placed at their disposal. In 1999, the Obasanjo's administration set up the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) as a new approach towards fact tracking the development of the Niger Delta. This agency has its own challenges. For instance the scenario of its operation makes it look as if it is more of political patronage, and opportunities for awarding contracts rather than the serious development objectives it was created to address (Newswatch, May 4, 2009). This does not however mean that the agency has nothing good to its credit.

The Yar'adua-led administration in 2007 created the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs to demonstrate government's determination to squarely address the plights of the Niger Delta people. This is a fully fledged Federal government's Ministry charged with the responsibility of planning and administering development programmes in the Niger Delta region. This Ministry has been engaged in physical infrastructures development in the area and recently, it

has anchored the implementation of the Yar'adua's amnesty programme for the ex-militants in the region.

Apart from the above, other efforts in the past include: 1998, Maj. Gen. Popoola Committee formed by Head of State gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar to look into the problems of the Niger delta Report was not implemented. Some other efforts as identified by Mangut and Egbefo (2010) include:

- Government at different fora encourages oil companies to improve the infrastructure of their hosting communities.
- The establishment of the Niger Delta University and the Federal University of petroleum Resources as instrument for appreciating and collectively adopting ways of ameliorating the problems associated with oil exploration.
- Encouragement of companies to give scholarship schemes to Niger Delta students studying specified courses in tertiary institutions.
- Utilisation of the Educational Trust Fund proceeds for developing infrastructure in the educational institutions and for given internal and overseas scholarship awards to the indigenes of Niger Delta.

6.0 Challenges Of The Niger Delta: Implications For Democracy And Development

No meaningful development can take place in a restive environment. The unrests in the Niger delta came at such a huge social and economic cost to the nation. Oil rich nations like United Arab Emirate are doing well from their oil resources and are spared the horrors of militants holding the country to ransom (Biakpara, 2010).

A chaotic atmosphere is no doubt a threat to democracy and development, here; people live in perpetual fear and have no thought of a genuinely democratic way of life. It is everyone for himself and God for all. This by extension hampers development efforts. For instance, in the case of the Niger Delta, attacks on oil exploration facilities and the kidnapping of expatriate workers as it were affected oil production on the one hand and scared new investors on the other.

In a related development, a continuing environmental degradation of the region poses another major threat of devastation to local indigenous communities. Oil corporations deposit wastes of varying toxic levels with impunity and are un-checked by an inactive environmental protection agency. According to the Niger Delta Environmental Survey (NDES), "Corporations have adopted the pile exploration methods that consistently threaten bio-

diversity and ecological stabilization of the region. These have translated into continuing decline in hitherto dependent on riverine land farming” (Newswatch, September 12, 2008).

This scenario does not support development of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta. In any case development as Rodney (2009) puts it is human centered must be seen to improve the skills, freedom and total wellbeing of the people.

The predicament of democracy in Nigeria in general and the Niger-delta in particular emanate from the fact that the leaders and the lead did not share the same vision of the post colonial society (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2000). Ajayi (1982) posits that in addition to looking for independence from the capricious rule of the Whiteman, ordinary Nigerians, particularly Niger-Deltans wanted better paid jobs, education and health care, other amenities of modern living such as pipe borne water, electricity and durable houses, and above all a better future for their children.

Nzongola-Ntalaja (2000), further asserts that although democracy has to do with the right of individuals to choose who will rule them, ordinary people have never fought ideas or things in some-one’s head. They have always fought and made sacrifices in order to: win material benefits; live better and in peace; see their lives go forward; and guarantee the future of their children.

Consequently, as far as the people of Niger-Delta are involved, it is the wider view of democracy that is germane. This goes beyond folks gaining the power to decide by means of a competition for the people’s vote. It includes democratic self-rule that calls for a high degree of accountability of the state and substantial direct participation of the people in their community’s institutions. It requires the creation of equal opportunity for participation including social and economic rights.

From the abundant literature on democracy, what came out clearly is that there is no fixed model of democracy as the meaning is contextual. What is clear is that democracy is brought about by individuals and groups and by social actors who fight for it. And, as argued by Adebo (2005), it is not possible for the poor section of the population to fully enjoy their political rights without a welfare state that prevents perceived extreme material poverty and steep socio-economic inequalities that are the ingredients for conflict situations in the communities.

7.0 Conclusion

From the above, one cannot but posit that the first decade of democratic governance in Nigeria's fourth republic held out promises of gloom and doom for the future. This is especially so with the aspect of the resolution of the Niger delta problem. The people of the Niger delta who constitute a minority group in the polity are victims of the politics of resource controlled by the dominant majority ethnic group who are at the helm of affairs (Anugwom, 2005). The Nigerian federal system is responsible for the rising violence at various times and location, that threatens to destabilize the polity.

Great efforts have been made by various regimes in Nigeria to resolve the problem in Niger delta but most of these efforts are thwarted by the worm called corruption which has eaten deep into Nigerians. Example can be sighted of the effort at amnesty, majority of the people who are currently benefiting from the programme are not repented militant. This trend is capable of spurring militant group elsewhere in the state in order to dubiously benefit from the federal cake.

Poverty, negligence and frustration breed tension. Tension robs a people of their peace and development. Giving the people a complete sense of belonging, and putting in place a massive infrastructural development, and pursuing a vigorous poverty eradication strategy, capable of creating sustainable employment can assuage the already wounded people.

It is projected that resource control conflicts in Africa shall duplicate with disagreeable cost threatening a number of states and may produce secessionist states. Measures for resolving these issues in Africa should be standardized through continental conventions sponsored by regional organizations such as ECOWAS, SADCC and/or the AU. In the case of Nigeria's Niger Delta region, all stakeholders need to review their positions and take advantage of arbitration and reconciliatory efforts.

8.0 Recommendations

Experiences have shown that the Niger Delta crisis cannot be solved by force. The solution is to be found in the constructive involvement of the Niger Delta peoples themselves in the resolution of the mounting and daunting socio-economic problems of the Niger Delta. The political context of prolonged political alienation, economic deprivation, environmental devastation and physical and psychological brutalisation of the populace and territory revolves quite readily around the choking hunger for jobs, roads, clean water, electricity, shelter, education, healthcare and other similar basic needs for decent and humane living. The constitutional structure of the federation and governmental functionality need to be urgently

renegotiated to enable the people utilize their natural resources for their own development. A patronising federal power is as undemocratic and oppressive as a foreign invader.

Sustenance of the amnesty deal entered into with the erstwhile militants will determine the substance of peace in the Niger Delta region. Most of the youths have surrendered their arms, but that does not translate into lasting peace. Current efforts at training and retraining of the youths should be sustained to give them skills to enable them survive without recourse to violence and criminality. Government must accept the challenge to reassert its authority in the region. It must deal decisively with the criminal gangs that are terrorizing the region after the amnesty to pave way for infrastructural development and constructive engagement with the true representatives of the people. In this regard, many political godfathers who arm and pay cult gangs to terrorize political opponents and rig elections, or intimidate rival ethnic groups must be reined in, by the Federal government

The Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and other development agencies must spend the monies at their disposal in the correct proportion, and do all they can to put in place the necessary infrastructures without leaving any community unattended to. This will further assuage the feelings of the Niger Delta people. The provision of basic infrastructure in the Niger Delta is a sine-qua-non for sustainable development in the region. A single double carriage way running from Lekki peninsula through Ogheye at the mouth of the Benin River and Koko to join the East-West road to Yenagoa and Port-Harcourt will help to open up the region to private investors. This has been done in Epe and Lekki. It can also be done in the Niger Delta. (Afinotan and Ojakorotu, 2009)

The most essential is the provision of affordable food for the people. Government must put in place an accelerated food programme to make food available to those who live in the creeks. These people exist at the bottom of the ladder and feel the real pangs of poverty. They have lost their traditional sources of livelihood to oil pollution. Government must therefore work against all forms of oil pollution that damage the aqua system. This considerably affects fishing activities, which is the traditional profession of the riverine people.

Democratization and anti-corruption are vital to resolve conflict in the Niger Delta. This is so because all the beautiful strategies put in place by the government will amount to nothing if corruption and these strategies are bedfellows. State Governments and public servants in the Niger Delta and elsewhere have been living higher than their salaries. The Nigerian citizens are aware that the flamboyant lifestyles of those in government and their

friends are maintained by ill-gotten wealth. There have been increased cases “kidnapping for ransom” of wealthy individuals and their relatives. This further creates anxiety and distorts peace in the environment. Moreover, the ever rising tide of corruption in high places must be seriously addressed, and effectively checkmated by government at all levels.

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