

**NIGER DELTA CRISIS:
DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS**

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1 Introduction

It is now no longer in doubt that there is a crisis of monumental proportions in the Niger Delta and that this crisis needs to be resolved urgently because of its implications for development and socio-cultural relations in the Niger Delta in particular and in Nigeria in general. However to understand and manage the development and social cultural implications of the crisis and how therefore the crisis needs to be resolved, there is need to agree on the nature of the crisis. I want to suggest that this is where the problem begins. In the past and as at now, failure to agree on the nature of the crisis between the parties involved have provoked different reactions and led to the observed consequences. If we can reach agreement on the essence of the crisis, we will be in a position to analyse its causes and effects and therefore agree on ways as to how the crisis should be resolved. The greatest problem today in the way of resolving the crisis is the lack of agreement between the interests involved as to the essence of the crisis. For this reason, I shall start by presenting the existing positions on the crisis before proceeding to what I consider to be the real essence of the crisis. This will then pave the way to the analysis of cause and effect relations and suggestions on the way forward.

2 The positions on the essence of the crisis in the Niger Delta

There are three major interest groups involved in the crisis in the Niger Delta: the Nigerian state, the oil companies and the communities in the Niger Delta. Each of these interest groups has a position on the essence of the crisis in the Niger Delta.

2.1 The essence of the Niger Delta crisis: the position of the Nigerian state

Over the years the Nigerian State has maintained that the crisis in the Niger Delta is a security crisis. The essence of the crisis is seen to lie in the breakdown of law and order in the Niger Delta in relation to oil extraction activities. This year, for example, the Nigerian government defined the N444 billion funds appropriated for the Niger Delta in the 2008 Budget as for the security rather than development of the Niger Delta. In the second week of June, 2008, it was again reported that the government had created a new and special military task force on the Niger Delta. To support the view that the crisis in the Niger Delta is security crisis, the Nigerian state draws attention to:

- communal activities against oil companies
- the activities of militants
- the murder of state security personnel
- attacks on and destruction of oil facilities and vandalism of pipelines by armed gangs,
- hostage taking and murder of oil workers.

The UNDP in its 2006 Report on the Niger Delta has also adopted this position and suggested that the people in the Niger Delta have always been characterised by war and conflict; in effect, a security problem has always existed in the Niger Delta.

On the basis of this understanding of the essence of the crisis, the Nigerian state adopted from 1985 onwards a programme of garrisoning the Niger Delta. The highlights of this programme have included:

- ◆ The military occupation of the Niger Delta with active and continuous military engagement of villages, groups and individuals. During this period, the villages of Umuechem, Odi and Odioma among others were attacked and razed to the ground. The whole of Ogoniland was subjected to earth scorching activities under the command of one Major Okuntimu.

The detention and / or murder of the leaders of environmental rights and nationality and self determination movements in the Niger Delta. Thus Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight of his compatriots in MOSOP were murdered by the Nigerian state in November 1997. The

evidence relating to the deaths and destruction in the Niger Delta is abundant and has of recent been richly documented in the literature

- ◆ The criminalization of the Niger Delta peoples. The activists and community leaders in the Niger Delta who oppose the ecologically devastating activities of the Nigerian state and the global oil companies in the Niger Delta are often referred to as ‘vandals’, ‘saboteurs’, ‘criminals’, and ‘murderers’. In order to set the state for the military operation by the Nigerian state, which wiped out Odi village and its inhabitants in 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo wrote a letter to the Governor of Bayelsa state on 20th November 1999, where he declared that:

“Recent events of kidnapping and subsequent willful murder of seven policemen are clear demonstrations that you have lost grip of the security situation in the state. It is significant that after the National Security Council of 9th November 1999 had deliberated upon and condemned the killing of seven policemen in your State, you seemed to take no effective measure to arrest the culprits. These killings from reports reaching me were committed in broad daylight. It should be quite easy, therefore, to arrest the killers with whom it is reported that your government was holding negotiations before the killing of the policemen and those with whom your government had negotiated in the past. They are criminals.”

As can be seen, the President made no distinction between those responsible for the actual abduction of the state security operatives in the area and those with whom the governor of the state ‘was holding negotiations’. They were, as all the rest of the Odi villagers, children and women who were subsequently massacred shortly after, **criminals**.

- ◆ Enlisting the support of the American military. To appreciate the seriousness of this point, it is important to draw attention to the results of the investigation reported in the February (2001:6) edition of the CRYSTAL Magazine:

“The government of President Olusegun Obasanjo has entered a military pact with the United States of America. Code-named Operation Focus Relief, the agreement grants concessions to the United States Army to engage in activities that no foreign army has undertaken in Nigeria since the country became independent in 1960... CRYSTAL magazine gathered that the American soldiers currently stationed at NICON Hilton and Sheraton Hotels are also engaged in espionage activities on Nigeria’s military capabilities.

- Providing a weak and porous regime of laws and regulations for oil extraction activities. It is well known that the regime of laws that govern oil extraction are heavily skewed against the communities in the Niger Delta. These laws virtually legitimise gas flaring, oil spillages and other forms of abuses of the environment and communities. The express intent of the regulatory framework is to give the state and the oil companies unfettered control not only over the oil and gas resources but to ensure maximum extraction of surplus value at the least cost and without regards for the environmental and natural rights of the peoples of the Niger Delta.

For the Nigerian state therefore, the truth about the crisis in the Niger Delta is the refusal of individuals, groups and communities in the Niger Delta to accept its definition of the situation and engage in acts of resistance.

How correct is this position?

2.2 The essence of the Niger Delta crisis: the position of the oil companies

Although there are six global major oil companies operating in the Niger Delta, Shell enjoys an unquestioned position of pre-eminence (Table 1). For Shell and these oil companies, the truth about the crisis in the Niger Delta is largely the result of the unwarranted opposition of groups and individuals in the Niger Delta to their legitimate activities. To support the view that the crisis

in the Niger Delta is the result of the opposition to their legitimate activities, the oil companies like the Nigerian state draw attention to:

- communal activities against them
- the activities of militants
- attacks on and destruction of oil facilities and vandalisation of pipelines by armed gangs
- hostage taking and murder of oil workers
- their rights to conduct legitimate business once they have reached agreement with government

To deal with this opposition and end the crisis, the oil companies have adopted a variety of means including:

- the arrest and detention of community activists opposed to their policies and activities; promotion of inter-ethnic and inter-nationality conflicts and wars in the area;
- deployment of massive propaganda;
- cooptation and incorporation of various levels and sections of local elites in the Niger Delta into the process of sharing the profits from the looting and plundering of the Niger Delta; flagrant human rights abuses;
- payment of little or no compensation for massive ecological damage;
- massive bribery of officials of the Nigerian state;
- procurement of uniforms and firearms for Nigerian troops deployed to the area for use against community activists;
- relocating their corporate headquarters to places far away from the crisis, temporarily shutting down operations,
- blaming the victims when they complain or protest about ecological disasters caused by the activities of TNCs;
- adoption and deployment of various community relations strategies that involve denial, silence, blaming the victim, defiance and a ‘wallpaper factory mentality’ (Iyayi, 2000:159-167); and
- development and submission of proposals for national legislation.

These measures have been deployed with the support of the Nigerian government to deal with the crisis. But we must again ask: how correct is the view of oil companies about the essence of the crisis?

Table 1: The Major Transnational Oil Companies in the Niger Delta

No	Oil Company	Shareholders	Operators	Share of National Production
1	Shell Petroleum Development (SPDC)	NNPC – 55% Shell – 30% Elf – 10% Agip – 5%	Shell	42.0%
2	Mobil Producing Nigeria	NNPC – 50% Mobil – 42%	Mobil	21.0%
3	Chevron Nigeria	NNPC – 60% Chevron – 40%	Chevron	19.0%
4	Nigeria Agip Oil	NNPC – 60% Agip – 40%	Agip	7.5%
5	Elf Petroleum Nigeria	NNPC – 60% Elf – 40%	Elf	2.6%
6	Texaco Overseas (Nigeria) Petroleum	NNPC – 60% Texaco – 20% Chevron – 20%	Texaco	1.7%
TOTAL				93.8%

Source: Iyayi (2000)

2.3 The essence of the crisis: The position of the Niger Delta communities

Those who have taken up the cause of the Niger Delta as the purpose of their lives have insisted that the injustice in the relations formed around oil extraction activities and appropriation of the huge oil revenues lies at the heart of the Niger Delta crisis. To support their definition of the essence of the crisis, they point to:

- The methods of oil extraction of the transnational oil companies
- the weak regime of rules and regulations that govern oil extraction
- the environment tragedies in the Niger Delta
- the military occupation and militarization of the Niger Delta
- the murder of rights and nationality leaders,
- the paradox between the source of oil revenues and the passive poverty of their areas
- subversion of the principles of federalism
- massive poverty in the Niger Delta: As the 2006 UNDP Report on the Niger Delta concluded:

“Some amazing paradoxes have come from the development of the Niger Delta region. Ordinarily, the Niger Delta should be a gigantic economic reservoir of national and international importance. Its rich endowments of oil and gas resources feed methodically into the international economic system, in exchange for massive revenues that carry the promise of rapid socio-economic transformation within the delta itself. In reality, the Niger Delta is a region suffering from administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor, and endemic conflict. Enormous possibilities for industrial development abound in terms of the abundance of raw materials in the region, but these remain unrealized. Beyond vast oil and gas deposits, the delta is blessed with good agricultural land, extensive forests, excellent fisheries, and a large labour force. But juxtaposed against the potential for economic growth and sustainable development are deteriorating economic and social conditions that have been largely ignored by contemporary policies and actions. With local inhabitants subjected to abject poverty and suffering in the midst of plenty, some view the oil and gas endowments as a curse and a double-edged sword.” (UNDP, 2006:25)

Earlier, a report compiled for the World Bank Report by Singh, Moffat and Linden (1995) also concluded that:

“Despite its vast oil resources, the (Niger Delta) region remains poor. GNP per capita is below the national average of US\$280. Unemployment in Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State, is 30 percent and is believed to be equally high in the rural areas. The rural population commonly fish or practice subsistence agriculture, and supplement their diet and income with a wide variety of forest products. Education levels are below the national average and are particularly low for women. While 76% of Nigerian children attend primary school, this level drops to 30-40 percent in some parts of the Niger Delta. The poverty level in the Niger Delta is exacerbated by the high cost of living. In the urban areas of Rivers State, the cost of living index is the highest in Nigeria.

Following this understanding of the essence of the crisis, the peoples of the Niger Delta have been involved in:

- Demonstrations
- Petition writing
- Armed struggle (Adaka Boro, MEND, etc)
- Formation of youth and nationality groups for national and international agitation (MOSOP)
- Shutting down of oil production activities (e.g., Shell in Ogoniland)
- Legal action against oil companies and the Nigerian state
- Demands for true federalism
- Demands for resource control
- Agitations for change in the revenue allocation formula
- Agitations for end to gas flaring
- Agitations for change in the regime of laws governing oil extraction
- Agitations for cleaning up the environment
- Agitations for compensation for ecological damage
- Agitations for more states or separate national identities

Again, we also need to ask and answer the question: how correct is this view of the essence of the crisis in the Niger Delta?

3 The evidence: opening the graves

David Thoreau has noted that when there is a dispute between points of view that threaten the foundations of society, the graves must be opened so that the disputants can see the direction in which the evidence of history points. The graves in this instance are constituted by the history of social, political and economic relations in the Niger Delta before and during colonial rule. This history indicates that while the peoples of the Niger Delta may have been involved in inter-communal competition and, sometimes conflict during the period, the area was not only largely characterised by peace but was developing along a path no different from many areas in present day Nigeria. As the elder Saro-Wiwa, father of the murdered Ken Saro-Wiwa (2002: viii) has succinctly pointed out, the various communities in the Niger Delta: **“...were living in peace before Shell came. We were sharing our forest with animals and monkeys but when Shell came, they started setting one community against the other. They started with Andoni and Ogoni and before you knew it, they had started killing our people.”**

The history of ‘setting one community against the other’ and how, ‘before you knew it, they had started killing our people’ is the history of oil exploitation activities, of the assumptions of the Nigerian state about development and the role of ‘foreigners and foreign interests’ in the development of Nigeria, of the methods of oil extraction by the oil companies, the consequences of oil extraction activities, and how the revenues from oil are appropriated.

3.1 The assumptions of the Nigerian state about development

The assumptions of the Nigerian state about development derive from the nature and character of the state. The roots and character of the modern Nigerian state were planted in the colonial state, which related to the indigenous peoples as natives, subjects and a conquered people to be civilised. Civilising the natives meant of course exploiting them and treating them with disdain, disgust and distrust; in short, as inferiors. Resource exploitation activities were conducted on the basis that the resources belonged to the colonial power and that, in any case left with or to the natives, they would not be able to use such resources for productive purposes. The managers of the modern Nigerian state not only inherited and internalized these attitudes; over time, they deepened and expanded them. These characteristics of the Nigerian state have been reproduced in a set of assumptions that it deploys in relating with the Niger Delta. The assumptions are that:

- Oil is a national resource that belongs to the Nigerian state rather than the Nigerian people in general or oil – owning communities in particular
- Agitations for resource control or change in the derivation formula are either politically motivated, lack merit or orchestrated by trouble makers and criminals
- Force or a military solution rather than a political or an economic solution is what is needed to deal with the demands and agitations of the Niger Delta communities.
- That the Nigerian indigenous ruling class, the Nigerian state, and the Nigerian people cannot develop Nigeria; only the ruling classes, states, peoples and agencies of the advanced imperialist countries can. As a consequence, the Nigerian indigenous ruling class, the Nigerian state, and the Nigerian people must always be in partnership, albeit as inferiors and subordinates with the ruling classes, states, peoples and agencies of the advanced imperialist countries in their efforts to develop Nigeria;
- That nothing must be done by the Nigerian indigenous ruling class, the Nigerian state, and the Nigerian people to oppose, contradict, criticize or fight against the development strategies, efforts, ideas and processes advanced by the ruling classes, states, peoples and agencies of the advanced imperialist countries to develop Nigeria;

- That the Nigerian indigenous ruling class and the Nigerian state have a responsibility to provide ‘an enabling environment’ by whatever means, (including the use of force, repression and abrogation of the rights of the Nigerian people) for the implementation of the development strategies advanced by the ruling classes, states, peoples and agencies of the advanced imperialist countries;
- That whatever is done in the country (including the dumping of toxic waste, gas flaring and the pollution of soils and rivers) by the ruling classes, states, peoples, agencies and transnational companies of the advanced imperialist countries amount to efforts to develop Nigeria.

On the basis of these assumptions, the Nigerian state defines the attempts of communities in the Niger Delta to ensure more just and equitable relations in the extraction and appropriation of oil resources and revenues as ‘security threats’ that undermine not only the efforts of the ruling classes, states, peoples, agencies and transnational companies of the advanced imperialist countries to develop Nigeria but also the primitive accumulation practices of members of the indigenous class.

3.2 Methods of oil extraction

The methods of oil extraction of the major oil companies have been very well documented (Olorode, 1989; Ashton – Jones, 1998; ERA/FoEN, 1999; Human Rights Watch: The Price of Oil, 1998; Iyayi, 1999; Okonta, 1998, ‘Where Vultures Feast: 40 Years of Shell in the Niger Delta’ Okonta and Douglas, 2001). The methods of the global oil companies have included gas flaring, oil spillage, indiscriminate construction of canals and waste dumping; embarking upon major oil and gas exploitation activities without conducting Environmental Impact Assessments; the application of continuous pressure on the Nigerian state through their home governments for the adoption and maintenance of weak policy regimes on oil and gas exploitation; and development and submission of proposals for national legislation.

These methods of oil extraction by oil companies are supported by and derive from an ideology of relating with native peoples that an observer (Korten, 1996:131, 70-71) has described as follows:

- “The world’s money, technology, and markets should be controlled and managed by gigantic global corporations;
- Corporations should be free to act solely on the basis of profitability without regard to national or local consequences;
- There should be no loyalties to place and community;
- People are motivated primarily by greed;
- The relentless pursuit of greed and acquisition leads to socially optimal outcomes.”

Ashton – Jones, (1998:130) has also pointed out that the activities of global oil companies are framed within an entrenched oil industry culture that is founded on five assumptions:

- “That profit maximization is the only basis upon which a company can run, so that any expenditure beyond what is required to get out the oil is resisted;
- That a deal can be made with governments only, regardless of the government’s legality or morality;
- That once an arrangement has been made with a government, a mining company can do what it likes, in fact, to act as if it is a government agency;
- That the “market”, (that is, the industrialized world) has a right to have the resources it wants, at the lowest price, and regardless of the costs to local people who are obliged to play host to mining companies; and
- That “we”, the mining companies, know best and are acting responsibly...”

Continuing, Ashton – Jones, (1998:31) says:

“Generally, neither the companies nor the governments with whom they associate, (from both first and third worlds) are willing to accept any divergence from this culture which is reinforced with a mixture of cynical public relations and intimidation. It is fair to say that the adverse impacts of mining upon the lives of host communities (and, for that matter, the extravagant use of mineral resources by the industrialized world) arise more from this immoral culture (this wickedness) than from anything else.”

At the level of the state and multilateral structures that support the activities of oil TNCs, the ideology is even more specific, supremacist and even racist. Economic Justice (2000:4) has documented that when Lawrence Summers was chief economist of the World Bank, he authored an internal World Bank memorandum in 1991 which argued that:

“the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable...Under-populated countries in Africa are vastly under-polluted, their air quality is vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City. Only the lamentable facts that so much pollution is generated by non-tradable industries (transport, electrical generation) and that the unit transport costs of solid waste are so high prevent world welfare enhancing trade in air pollution and waste.”

The memorandum further insisted that:

“the death of an African due to toxic pollution is less costly in economic terms than the death of a Northern citizen because the forgone earnings from increased mortality are less per capita...Concern for environmental quality rises with income. Transferring polluting industries to low-income countries would be welfare enhancing since it would augment their money incomes.”

Under this ideology, the people in the Niger Delta are expected to count themselves lucky because ‘polluting’ the Niger Delta is ‘welfare enhancing since it would augment their money incomes’. Resistance on the part of the Niger Delta to environmental disasters is easily interpreted from this point of view as ‘subversive’ ‘inimical to progress’ and therefore deserving to be crushed.

3.3 Appropriating oil revenues

The evidence of the appropriation of oil revenues shows that the revenue sharing formula established in the early sixties changed dramatically with the discovery of huge quantities of crude oil and gas in the Niger Delta area (Table 4).

Table 4: Federal – State Percentage share in Petroleum Proceeds (1960- 2002)

Year	Share of Producing State (%)	Share of Federal Government (%)	Distribution Pool (%)
1967	50	20	30
1967 – 1969	50	50	-
1971	45	55	-
1975	45 minus off-shore proceeds	55 plus off-shore proceeds	-
1979	20 minus off-shore proceeds	80 plus off-shore proceeds	-
1981	-	100	-
1992	1.5 minus off-shore proceeds	98 and half plus off-shore proceeds	-
1999	3% minus off-shore proceeds	97 plus off-shore	-
1999	13% minus off-shore proceeds	87 plus off-shore proceeds	-

Source: Sagay (2001)

In the 1960s, the producing states received 50% of the revenues derived from their states. By 1981, they received no share whatsoever; in 1999, they were summarily allocated 13%. Efforts to negotiate this formula by the people of the Niger Delta at the state sponsored constitutional reform conference were also summarily rejected by the Nigerian state. Sagay (2001) has suggested that the underlying dynamic to the change in revenue allocation from 1975 onwards resides in the relationship between the majority and the minority nationality groups in Nigeria:

“...Even a superficial political analysis of the situation, will reveal that the fate of the mineral resources of the Niger-Delta minorities, particularly the trend from derivation to Federal Government absolutism, is itself a function of majority control of the Federal Government apparatus. In 1960, there were no petroleum resources of any significance. The main income earning exports were cocoa (Yoruba, West) groundnuts, cotton, and hides and skin (Hausa/Fulani, North) and palm oil (Ibo, East). Therefore, it was convenient for these majority groups usually in control of the Federal Government to emphasize derivation, hence its strong showing in the 1960/63 Constitutions.

4 Reinterpreting the essence of the crisis in the Niger Delta

The above analysis provides us with the basis for distilling the essence of the crisis in the Niger Delta. On the basis of available evidence, it would be correct to say that the position of the communities in the Niger Delta on the essence of the crisis is the most appropriate one: the crisis in the Niger Delta arises from the injustice in the relations formed around oil extraction activities and injustice in the appropriation of the huge oil revenues from the area. It is thus a crisis of underdevelopment. Underdevelopment expresses a particular relationship of exploitation between two social groups in which one group can be said to be developing at the expense of the other. The exploitation is *particular* because the benefits that flow from exploiting the resources that belong to one group are appropriated by other groups thus leaving the owners of the resources with all the negative costs that are associated with the exploitation of the resources. Underdevelopment thus has not just an economic character (the benefits that flow from exploiting the resources that belong to one group are appropriated by other groups) but also a political and social character. Underdevelopment has a political character because economic allocation decisions derive from, are supported by and made possible by unequal power relations: indeed, one group is able to appropriate the resources of the other group because the underdeveloped group is politically subordinated and under the power of the group appropriating the resources that do not belong to it. Underdevelopment also has a social character because the thought forms and methods of organisation of the appropriating group are imposed upon and internalized by segments of the subordinated groups.

However, it is crucial to emphasise that exploitation by itself does not produce a crisis. Exploitation must be resisted *in certain ways* for a crisis to occur. This means that not all forms of resisting exploitation can lead to a crisis. For example, as long as the peoples of the Niger Delta resorted to petition writing and legal action, (which were within the perimeters of the existing social and political order and could therefore be processed within them) there was no crisis. It was only when the resistance went outside of these boundaries and took the form of armed struggle (Isaac Adaka Boro) that the situation assumed the character of a crisis. It assumed the character of a crisis because as often happens with all such struggles, it challenged the existing political order which maintained the situation of underdevelopment; by the same token the existing political order then defined the resistance as ‘subversive’, ‘treasonable’, ‘led by terrorists’, that is, in strictly security terms. The crisis in the Niger Delta can thus be further categorized as one of a disturbed-reactive underdevelopment with a political core.

The crisis in the Niger Delta has now also assumed a circular and reinforcing character. First, injustice in the relations formed around oil exploitation leads to resistance and conflict. As the resistance confronts the injustice, a crisis emerges. The crisis then feeds the injustice which leads to further resistance and thence, more conflict. This process is then compounded by the entrance of conflict merchants, criminal syndicates and gangs, illegal but armed oil bunkerers and related criminals. The entrance of crime syndicates also fuels further the position of the Nigerian state and the oil companies that the Niger Delta crisis is a security crisis which then leads to more security responses from the state and the oil companies and then more resistance from communities and groups in the Niger Delta.

5 Development and socio-cultural implications of the crisis

Whatever position we adopt, one fact is clear; the crisis has had major implications for development and socio-cultural relations in the Niger Delta in particular and in Nigeria as a whole. As a general principle, it is a fact that development and crisis cannot go hand in hand. This means that the generalised crisis in the Niger Delta has severe negative implications for the development of the area and Nigeria as a whole. More specifically, we can also observe the following development and socio-cultural consequences.

- The crisis has fractured relations within and between communities and various social groups in the Niger Delta.
- The crisis has fractured relations between the communities in the Niger Delta and the Nigerian state

- The crisis has fractured relations between the communities in the Niger Delta and the oil companies
- The crisis has affected jobs and job creation in the Niger Delta as oil companies withdraw from areas of operation and shut down production activities and new businesses consider the area one of high risk
- The crisis has affected the safety of oil workers, members of their families and areas of work activities
- The crisis has resulted in huge revenue losses for the country (shut down of production activities, vandalism and damage of oil facilities, bunkering, etc)
- The crisis has provided opportunities for syndicated crime to operate
- The crisis has been used to sponsor other types of crisis, especially at the political level where as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Rivers State has shown, politicians hide under the general crisis in the Niger Delta to settle personal scores
- The crisis has also affected the image of the people of the area; (they are seen as crisis and conflict prone)
- The crisis has contributed to global increase in fuel prices

In effect, the Nigerian state, the oil companies, communities in the Niger Delta and the international community have all been affected by the crisis.

6 Responding to the Crisis and its consequences

Given the major negative implications of the crisis for all interests involved, it is not surprising to find that a number of initiatives have been adopted by the Nigerian state and the oil companies to assuage the ‘anger’ (Oronto Douglas) of the communities in the Niger Delta. Among the initiatives, the following have been popular:

- ❖ The projects approach (undertaking such projects as building hospitals, schools, etc)
- ❖ The agency approach (establishing development agencies such as NDE, OMPADEC and NDDC)
- ❖ The political empowerment approach (creation of local governments, States and geo-political zones; appointment of prominent individuals from the Niger Delta to positions of national leadership)
- ❖ Providing development frameworks (establishing Plans for development such as Master Plans, National / State Economic Empowerment Development Strategies – NEEDS, SEEDS, LEEDS, or enunciating national policies as in the National Policy on Poverty Eradication which are then passed on to other state institutions and agencies to implement)
- ❖ The financial empowerment approach (giving cash or block grants to states and communities, providing micro credits to community members through third parties, etc)
- ❖ The rule making approach (as in the Revenue Derivation Formula, making laws and regulations for the ‘development’ of the Niger Delta or as part of some general legislation on property rights, environmental, etc.)
- ❖ The talk-shop approach (convening National Summits on the Niger Delta; inviting leaders recognised by the state and the oil companies for discussions / consultations, etc)

Unfortunately, these initiatives have not and cannot work because they share individually and collectively some common weaknesses. The first and most fundamental weakness is that they are based upon a wrong understanding of the essence of the crisis and hence challenge of development in the Niger Delta. A second weakness which they all share is that the adopted solutions are at best not sincere and at worst, constructed to maintain the status quo. This explains the deliberate subversion of the development programmes by the very state officials who approve them. Thirdly, it is also clear that there is no clear pattern to the process of development in the adopted programmes. What activities occur are disjointed and usually have an emergency character. More often than not, they are varied responses to intense agitations by the people of the Niger Delta. The responses are thus abandoned as soon as the agitations die or are put down. Fourthly, they are usually commandist in nature. They are the ideas of those who are responsible for the crisis in the Niger Delta, rather than those of the people of the Niger Delta. While attempts are often made to incorporate and co-opt certain sections and levels of the elite of the Niger Delta into the decision making process, these attempts and their results in terms of the nature of the elements co-opted usually further undermine in a fundamental sense the past and current achievements of those forces that are genuinely committed to the resolution of the problem in the Niger Delta. Finally and very importantly, the initiatives are pursued within the framework of an invigorated garrisoning agenda.

7 The Alternative Framework: What is to be done?

Based upon the acknowledged inadequacies of existing approaches 'to develop' the Niger Delta, a number of recent works have sought to provide alternative models.

One of the most influential of these is the UNDP Report on the Niger Delta. This report is comprehensive and, using the MDG framework, goes as far as indicating what could be done at the local government and even community levels.

Outside of the framework of solutions provided in the UNDP Report, there are also views in the Niger Delta about how to develop the Niger Delta. Some of these views indicate that development will only occur in the Niger Delta when there is true federalism, when the communities exercise control over their resources or when the Niger Delta becomes an independent political entity.

While we agree with the need for true federalism, we believe that the issues of self determination and resource control can be addressed within a framework that meets the development challenge in the Niger Delta. That challenge is how to reverse underdevelopment in the Niger Delta; how to ensure that the benefits that flow from exploiting the oil and gas resources that are located in the Niger Delta are appropriated in ways that lead to development in the Niger Delta; that the negative consequences of oil and gas extraction are tackled through a process that restores the environment; that historical wrongs are righted and a basis for sustainable peace and good governance provided in the Niger Delta.

On the whole, we can organise these solutions into three categories: the political, the economic and the social.

7.1 The political elements in the framework

The political elements in the framework are those that need to address the relations of power formed around oil extraction and appropriation activities in the Niger Delta. Critical aspects of the power relations are (i) the relation of conflict within and between communities in the Niger Delta (ii) the ongoing process of implementing the garrisoning agenda of the Nigerian state and the oil companies (iii) the legislative framework for mediating relations formed around oil and gas extraction (iv) the revenue allocation rules and (v) relations of autonomy between the federating states in Nigeria. These problems will need to be tackled through steps that right historical wrongs and encourage trust between all the parties involved. In effect, the resolution of these problems must involve negotiations between the parties involved.

For this reason, the first step in this process must be a National Summit on the Niger Delta that involves the genuine leaders and representatives of the people in the Niger Delta. To ensure the success of the

National Summit, which is different from a ‘sovereign conference’, the representatives of the Niger Delta people must be chosen by a transparent and credible process that lends credibility to the results. The representatives will have to include the leaders of the various nationality movements in the Niger Delta as well as individual leaders of the clans within the nationalities. The process of selecting this class of leaders may involve elections, nominations by the clans following a process that uses consensus or some other related method. The important point is that the process will have to be inclusive and driven by the peoples and movements themselves rather than by the Nigerian state. It is important in this regard not to treat the various individuals in the national and state assemblies of the states as the genuine representatives of their peoples.

The National Summit on the Niger Delta will have power to discuss and agree on the process and measures for ending conflicts within and between communities in the Niger Delta, the changes needed in the legislative framework for mediating relations formed around oil and gas extraction, the desired change in the revenue allocation rules and how to provide for autonomy between the federating states in Nigeria. It will also have power to ensure that individuals and groups who have been violated in the past are healed through a system of justice that provides relief to the victim and clear punishment for persecutors. Thus part of the work of the National Summit on the Niger Delta will be to recommend all cases of human rights violations, such as those of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other MOSOP leaders who were murdered, in the Niger Delta to a Panel of Inquiry.

The National Summit will also need to be preceded by the declaration of a ceasefire in the Niger Delta that involves the groups engaged in armed struggle for the emancipation of the Niger Delta on the one hand and the Nigerian State and the oil companies on the other hand.

A major question that will need to be answered, however, is: who should call the National Summit? We suggest that the initiative will need to be exercised by third parties such as reputable **Nigerian, rather than foreign NGOs and civil society organisations**. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and NGOs like ActionAid (Nigeria), CDD, ERA and others are well positioned to play this role. We expect that this process will take time to get under way but it is one that is essential. It must be implemented with a high degree of patience; it must be facilitated by Nigerians and not by foreign ‘conflict resolution experts’; it must also flow from a change in the mindset of the managers of the Nigerian state who must show their independence of the global oil and gas companies operating in the Niger Delta and their home governments. Finally, the process needs to start now.

7.2 The economic elements in the framework

The economic elements in the framework will seek to deal with ecological disaster in the Niger Delta, the poverty of the peoples, the poverty of infrastructures and the high level of unemployment in the area. It will also seek to achieve the relevant MDG goals in the areas of maternal and child health, HIV / AIDS and malaria, and gender equity and empowerment.

To deal with the fact of the ecological disaster in the area, we suggest the setting up of an Ecological Restoration Fund (ERF) that will be responsible for correcting the history of environmental abuse in the Niger Delta. The funds for the ERF will need to be provided from payment of ecological debts by the global oil and gas companies in the area, the oil and gas companies owned by the Nigerian state and the Nigerian state.

The poverty of the people can be addressed by a variety of measures. One of these would be providing a specific economic role to each of the states in the Niger Delta as has happened in the case of Cross River. The fulfillment of such a role would then be massively supported by the Federal Government. The specific role would derive not only from considerations about the comparative advantage of the state in relation to other states in the country but more from what could trigger the industrial development of the state as an integral part of the Niger Delta. For example, Edo State could be designated the Silicon Valley of the country while Delta State could be designated the Steel Processing Zone of the country. The poverty of

infrastructures would need to be addressed through a comprehensive and massive programme of road construction. The existence of these different measures would provide hundreds of thousands of jobs. These measures would need to be integrated into a series of 5-year Development Plans whose implementation would be driven by the different state governments in the area. The Niger Delta Development Commission would provide technical and evaluation services to the state governments and operate with a mandate, structure and staffing that are totally different from its current ones.

7.3 The social elements in the framework

One major social element that needs to change is the language used by the state in describing the people and events in the Niger Delta. Today, that language speaks of the people of the Niger Delta as criminals and terrorists. In this sense, the acts of criminals must be separated from the acts of political activists who are 'angry' and have embarked upon various forms of protest, including hostage taking, as result of the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta. 'Militants' rather than 'criminals' or 'terrorists' may more correctly express the role and functions of these individuals.

Other components of the social project would deal with the need for a programme of orientation that seeks to change the mindsets and attitudes of different groups about means-ends and cause – effect relationships.

Finally major measures would need to be developed and deployed to address the fractured social life of the people. In this regard, we expect the Nigerian state to issue an apology to specific groups in the Niger Delta, such as the people of Odi, Ogoni, Umuechem and various other communities that have been horrifically abused. This apology must then be accompanied by measures on the part of government that specifically seek to right historical wrongs; for example, proper burial and national honour for Ken Saro Wiwa and the other Ogoni who were executed with him; and payment of financial compensation to surviving members of families in Odi and elsewhere who were violated by Obasanjo's internal military campaigns.

8 Pre-requisites for success

A number of pre-requisites are needed for success of the above framework.

One of these is the need to restore the confidence of the peoples of the Niger Delta in the Nigerian state; that the Nigerian state can be a partner, rather than an enemy, in the development of the Niger Delta. A good confidence building measure in this regard would be the decision by the Nigerian government to implement from October 1, 2008 an increased revenue derivation formula of 20% for the Niger Delta with the objective of achieving a 50% allocation by 2010.

Another measure would be an immediate reduction by at least 50% in the number of troops currently involved in the garrisoning of the Niger Delta.

Another pre-requisite relates to the authenticity of elections at all levels. Without credible elections at the Local Government, State and Federal levels, no responsible plan for development can emerge and succeed.

The third pre-requisite is the need to deal with the fact of corruption. As long as corruption continues to function as the primary source for the primitive accumulation of capital in Nigeria, no development agenda no matter how well conceived will succeed. It has been documented that the governments of the Niger Delta received over N1 trillion between 1999 and 2005 from Federal sources. These excluded internally generated revenues and funds provided to NDDC. Yet, these huge receipts did not translate into any tangible development results in the area largely because of the fact of corruption. Measures must be put in place that make stealing of public funds a capital offence in Nigeria.

9 Conclusions

The crisis in the Niger Delta took decades to create and consolidate. But the nation does not have decades within which to deal with the crisis. Solving the crisis must be seen as the same process as reversing the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta. For this to occur, the Nigerian state must change its perception of the problem. A framework that encompasses political, economic and social elements along the lines presented in this paper must be adopted and implemented with the needed level of political will and commitment.

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