**The Impact of the Oil and Gas Industries on Sustainable Development in Nigeria’s Niger Delta Region**

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**Abstract**

The activities of the oil and gas industry which commenced in the Niger Delta Region (NDR) of Nigeria in 1956 with the discovery of petroleum in commercial quantities at Oloibiri have had tremendous and irreversible impact on the culture, socio-economics and livelihoods of the inhabitants of the region. These activities have altered lifestyles, settlement patterns and social structures adversely, decimated bioresources and biodiversity, dislocated people from their livelihood sources, created an unprecedented wave of insecurity and new health challenges and ultimately impoverished the inhabitants of the region. These issues and the failings of the transnational corporations (TNCs) to meet their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and that of the Nigerian government at the three tiers to fulfil their obligations in the social contract to their citizens is explored. In addition, the changes urgently needed in the polity and governance in order to create sustainable livelihoods, improve living standards and increase life expectancy have been critically analysed.

**Key words**: Oil and gas industry, socio-economics, livelihoods, Niger Delta

**Introduction**

The Niger Delta Region (NDR) lies between latitudes 5013′ N and 6000′N and between longitudes 504′E and 6025′E (Fregene, 2000; FMNDA, 2013). It is located in the southern part of Nigeria and bordered to the south by the Atlantic Ocean and to the east by Cameroon. With a population of 31.2 million by 2006 (Table 1) and an estimated population of 34 million in 2009 with an annual growth rate of 3.1 million, the NDR is expected to harbour 45 million people by 2020 (Onakuse and Eamon, 2008; Oboreh and Aghalino, 2010; Akpomuvie, 2011).

This deltaic triangle criss-crossed by rivers, rivulets, creeks, tributaries and distributaries provides the natural bases for the economic activities of the people in the region. The NDR has diverse vegetation belts and other natural endowments ranging from the largest rain forests in Nigeria to mangrove swamps, savannas, mountains and waterfalls with rare animals, including endangered species and unusual plant species and families, making it one of the world’s richest biodiversity centres attracting scientists as well as tourists (Oboreh and Aghalino, 2010; FMNDA, 2013). The region consists of saline mangrove swamps which stretch through the coastal areas with 504,800 hectares in the core Niger Delta area and 95,000 hectares in Cross River State (FOS, 2004). With a total area of about 15,000 km2 of mangrove swamp, the region is the third largest delta in the world and the largest in Africa (Onakuse and Eamon, 2007a; Oboreh and Aghalino, 2010; FMNDA, 2013).

**Table 1: States in the Niger Delta Region, Land Area and Population**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **State** | **Land Area (km2)** | **Population** |
| Abia | 4,877 | 2.833,999 |
| Akwa Ibom | 6,806 | 3,920,208 |
| Bayelsa | 11,007 | 1,703,358 |
| Cross River | 21,930 | 2,888,966 |
| Delta | 17,163 | 4,098,391 |
| Edo | 19,698 | 3,218,332 |
| Imo | 5,165 | 3,934,899 |
| Ondo | 15,086 | 3,441,014 |
| Rivers | 10,378 | 5,185,420 |
| Total | 112,110 | 31,224,587 |

**Source: National Population Commission (2006)**

The rich alluvial soil of the delta with its copious web of fresh-and salt-water bodies dictates the nature of economic activities that the people of the NDR can possibly engage in. The inhabitants of historical resettlements in the NDR are consequently predominantly farmers and fishers; their livelihoods are derived from crop cultivation and animal husbandry and fisheries activities. Mangrove wood provides multipurpose resource for fish stakes, fish traps, boat building, boat paddles, yam stakes, carvings, building timber and fuel (Zabbey, 2009). In this peculiar region, 65% of the population depend on the natural environment for their livelihood while the other 35% depend on remittances (CASS, 2003; Onakuse and Eamon, 2007b).

The pattern of settlement across the delta has been shaped largely by the availability of dry land and the nature of the terrain along with navigable limits of the coastal rivers or estuaries with small and scattered hamlets (FOS, 2004; NPC, 2006; Akpomuvie, 2011). According to Kashi and Watts (2005), there are at least 40 different ethnic groups occupying the NDR and speaking perhaps 250 languages and dialects. The Riverine Ijaws are undoubtedly the most numerous, but the general picture is one of extraordinary diversity, a mosaic of heterogeneous and often fractious communities held together by a robust sense of being “delta people” (Akpomuvie, 2011). The overwhelming proportion of the population of the region is rural and poor. The presence of a large number of oil and gas multinational corporations in the region has precipitated an unprecedented rate of influx of people into some of its major towns and cities thus compounding the emerging concept of the urban poor. This is also a region that is witnessing one of the worst forms of rural-urban migration in the world. For instance, it has been reported that sustained population growth and high rate of rural unemployment are partly responsible for driving one of the highest rates of rural-urban migration in the world, a huge relentless movement of humanity to the vast slum worlds of Port Harcourt and Warri, two modern oil cities with very poor state of infrastructural development (Kashi and Watts, 2008).

**The Oil and Gas Industry and the Niger Delta**

Oil and gas exploration, prospecting and exploitation began in the nineteen fifties and commercial production began in Oloibiri (Bayelsa State) in 1956. Ever since, the Nigerian oil and gas industry has grown rapidly in scale and complexity and has had a tremendous and irreversible impact on various aspects of the culture and socio-economics of the people of the NDR. According to the UNDP (2006), the NDR produces the oil wealth that accounts for the bulk of Nigeria’s foreign earnings. Although reliable figures are hardly available, the contributions of oil and gas from the NDR to the country’s GDP are often well over 80%; figures in the literature totter around 90-95% (Zabbey, 2009; FMNDA, 2013).

There are enormous possibilities for industrial development in the region in terms of abundance of raw materials. Besides the huge oil and gas deposits, the delta is endowed with forests, excellent fisheries and a large labour force. Despite these great potentials for economic growth and sustainable development, there are deteriorating economic, social and environmental conditions created largely by oil and gas exploration and exploitation activities in the region, policy ineptitude and what appears to the people of the region as deliberate formulation and application of unworkable policies and action plans to serious human development challenges in such a critical region. This is the attitude of successive Nigerian governments that Aaron and George (2010) described as, “*placebo as medicine.*”

The ecological peculiarities and development challenges of the region have been understood since the colonial era and this knowledge culminated in the setting up of Willink’s Commission of Inquiry in 1957 by the colonial administration. The major mandate of this Commission was to recommend the best strategies for the development of the region which has the most difficult terrain in the country (Akpomuvie, 2011). Willink’s Commission recommended among other things that owing to the fragile ecology and peculiar development challenges facing the Niger Delta region, special focus and considerations should be given to facilitate the development of the area. As Akpomuvie (2011) reported from a Daily Times Publication, the Commission concluded that “a feeling of neglect and a lack of understanding was widespread a case has been made out for special treatment of the area. This is a matter that requires special effort because the region is poor, backward and neglected.” That conclusion is as true in the Niger Delta today as it was in 1957 (UNDP, 2006).

The response of successive post-colonial governments to Willink’s Report has been that of virtual cynicism, deceit and rhetoric and this has left the people of the region in a worse state despite the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) in 1960 and the products of its metamorphosis – Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) in 1976, Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992 and finally Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 1999. The deep seated frustration and discontentment in the region stem from the absence of opportunities for self actualization, exclusiveness, lack of basic necessities of life, environmental degradation, food shortages, health hazards, loss of farmlands, pollution, forced migration and unemployment (Ismail, 1994).

**The Niger Delta Environment, Agriculture, Livelihoods and Education**

An intricate nexus exists between the environment, agriculture and livelihood in the NDR and this represents an important variable in the survival strategies adopted by the people of the region. According to Farrington *et al*. (1999), the environment (land/soil, water and air) is a natural asset and livelihood building block and is essential for agricultural production and related activities. The environment is particularly important to people living in poverty in the NDR because their existence almost exclusively relies on subsistence endeavours, which depend on natural resources and also because they realize their well-being is tied to their environment in terms of livelihoods, health, vulnerability and the ability to control their lives (Onakuse and Eamon, 2007a). Poorer people are more vulnerable to changes in the environment, to a greater extent because social, political and economic exclusion means they almost always have fewer choices about where they live. As Onakuse and Eamon (2007a) concluded, they bear the brunt of natural hazards, biodiversity loss and the depletion of forests, pollution (air, water and soil) and the negative impacts of industrial activities on-and off-shore.

Agriculture, fishing and related activities remain the most dominant economic activity in the NDR with crop farming and fishing activities accounting for about 90% of all forms of activities in the area (Federal of Statistics, 2004; Okoro and Odebode, 2009). The agricultural system remains that of land rotation or bush fallow with land and labour being the principal inputs of production. While agriculture, fishing and related activities form the pivot of the livelihood systems of the inhabitants of the NDR, many also engage in non-agricultural activities to enhance their livelihood (Okoro and Odebode, 2009). Farmland pollution has long been identified as a major cause of the decline in soil and marine resources, land degradation, regular displacement without resettlement during oil spills, fall in output of agricultural products, intensive exploitation of other fertile lands leading to increased livelihood insecurity. This has led to massive unemployment, food insufficiency, abject poverty and a dependence on remittances. Reliance on remittances have grave social consequences because the remitters comprise street hawkers, prostitutes, casual workers and diverse people without visible and well defined means of livelihoods themselves many of whom slip into criminalities in the cities and towns within the region. The issues of kidnapping and hostage taking, for example, have been an insalubrious phenomenon of the Niger Delta society. This ill wind has already blown into many other parts of the country. Today, most parts of the country especially the south-eastern parts, have been grossly terrorized by kidnappers.

Cheru (2002a & b) noted that without a well articulated plan of investment in agriculture, poverty alleviation and eradication programmes in the region remain unrealistic especially because a vast majority of the rural people in this region derive their income and general well being from agriculture. As Onakuse and Eamon (2007a) have pointed out, the general impact of oil exploration and exploitation in the NDR could be identified under three key dimensions of human poverty – insufficient livelihoods, poor health and vulnerability. FAO (2002) defined vulnerability as, “the full range of factors that place people at risk of becoming food insecure. The degree of vulnerability of an individual, household or group of persons is determined by their exposure to the risk factors and their ability to cope with or withstand stressful situations.”

Crude oil exploration, exploitation and increased pressure on the environment for related uses and urbanization programmes deplete the ability of the NDR environment to support sustainable agriculture thus threatening the livelihood security of the inhabitants of the region. Women are the most affected, as they constitute the bulk of the marginalized, landless and resource poor members of the Niger Delta communities (Okoro and Odebode, 2009). A ready example of the damage to the ecology occasioned by oil and gas activities in the region is provided by Onakuse and Eamon (2007a); gas flare kills vegetation, suppresses the growth and flowering of some plants, and diminishes agricultural production. They further reported that plants, animals and humans in the region are continuously exposed to the negative effects of the flare. At least 70% of the gas associated with oil and gas exploration and exploitation in the region is flared and this forms a notorious record of 25% of all gas flared in the world whereas the average rate of gas flaring in the world is about 4%.

**Environmental Degradation and the People**

When oil spills occur, the oil spreads over a wide area affecting terrestrial and marine resources. Some past spills have necessitated the complete relocation of some communities, loss of ancestral homes, pollution of fresh water, loss of forest and agricultural land, destruction of fishing grounds and reduction of fish population, which is the major source of income for the Niger Delta people. All of these constitute massive unquantifiable losses to farmers, fishermen and hunters (Ukoli, 2005). The pollution exposes people also to new risk of diseases**.** The heat generated from gas flaring kills vegetation around flaring area, destroys mangrove swamps and salt marshes, suppresses the growth and flowering of some plants, induces soil degradation and diminishes agricultural productivity (UNDP, 2006; Mba, 2000). A study by Salau (1993) and Adeyemo (2002) about the impact of gas flaring on agriculture showed a direct relationship between gas flaring and productivity decline in agriculture as shown below in Table 2.

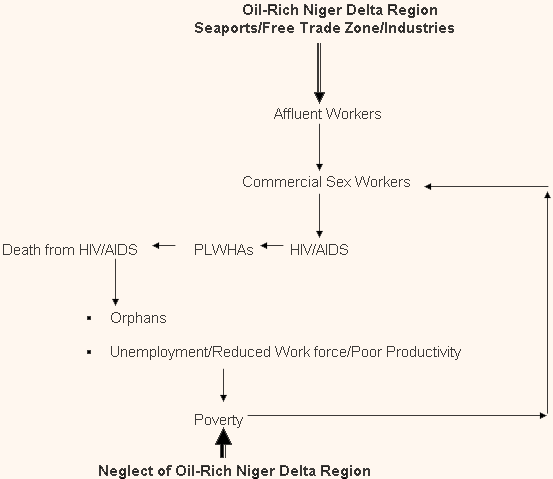
**Table 2: Impact of Gas Flaring on Agricultural Output**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Distance of Farmland from flare site (meters)** | **Loss in yield of crops (%)** |
| 200 | 100 |
| 600 | 45 |
| 1000 | 10 |

*Sources: Salau, 1993: 19-22, Adeyemo, 2002: 69*

**Health Impact of Oil Exploration**

In one fundamental way, the free disposal of natural gas through flaring demonstrates the marginality of the health interests of the oil producing communities in particular and Nigerians in general. The Nigeria Conservation Foundation reveals that in 1994 alone, Nigeria emitted 34 million tonnes of carbon dioxide and 12 million tonnes of methane. This means that Nigerian oil fields contribute more to global warming than the rest of the world (National Concord, 1996). Gas flaring generates tremendous heat causing thermal pollution. Alakpodia (1990), for example, carried out measurements around several flare sites and found out that temperatures were as high as 40oC. Indeed the high temperatures around the gas flare sites are an indication that a distinct microclimate has been created by gas flaring. Researchers have shown that the pollution caused by oil spillage does not end with the mopping up of the spilled oil. It is now known that health risk is not averted by abstinence from fish killed by spilled oil. Some of the fishes and animals that escape instant death from pollution are known to have taken in some of the toxic substances, which in turn get into human beings that eat them. This will in turn cause infections in man coupled with other side effects in the form of genetic mutations. When the health implications of the activities of commercial sex workers are factored into the social cost equation of oil and gas exploration and exploitation in the NDR, the impact of the oil and gas industries and its operations within the region are much better appreciated (see Fig. 1).

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**Figure 1: The social and economic cost of the oil and gas industry on the health of the people of the Niger Delta Region.**

**Education in the Niger Delta Region**

No nation or region has ever survived in the course of human civilization and none would ever survive without a virile system of education. Education is therefore a critical element in any discourse in respect of the socio-economic development of Nigeria or of any other nation-state for that matter. Nigeria’s education suffers three principal challenges - inadequate enrolment, poor infrastructure and inadequately trained teachers; these problems cut across all the six geo-political zones though with varying intensities depending on environmental specificities, culture and governance. At the level of the Universal Primary Education (UBE), it is estimated that only 22.3 million of the 42.1 million eligible children are in school, clearly indicating that access remains a major problem (Nigeria Vision 2020, 2010). In a recent report by the United Nations, Nigeria is among the countries of the world with the highest number of children of school age that are out of school. Nigeria Vision 2020 (2010) also recognized that infrastructure in schools, including that in the higher institutions is dilapidated. The adverse learning conditions in schools include paucity of teaching and instructional materials, absence of adequate infrastructure as well as over-crowded classrooms. This Implementation Plan document also recognized that there is a dearth of qualified and competent teachers in schools and institutions thereby adversely affecting the quality of education across the country. The meagre enrolment in the secondary schools is a major concern. Statistics from the Nigeria’s Vision 2020 (2010) Implementation Plan document shows that less than 30% of eligible children in the 14-17 age bracket are enrolled nationwide. Effective youth empowerment and harnessing the enormous potential of this segment of the population cannot be realized without proper education and skills acquisition.

Nigeria, no doubt, has some of the finest, well-crafted policies on education around the world, but it probably has some of the worst records on implementation: educational standards and gross enrolments into schools at all levels continue to dwindle because of the lack-lustre commitment to actualization of policies, manifest corruption, poor governance and the system of appointing the leaders of our educational institutions on the basis of political patronage rather than on the basis of proven competence and meritocracy. According to the UNDP Human Development Report on education in Nigeria 2008-2009, the adult literacy rate is 64.2% which indicates that about 50 million Nigerians are unable to read and write (Nigeria Vision 2020, 2010).

The equivalent figures for these educational indices in the NDR where oil and gas exploration and exploitation, environmental degradation and poor governance have negatively altered people’s livelihoods, life styles, self-motivation and collective aspiration radically and virtually irretrievably are likely to be much worse. States in the region have universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture, and other monotechnics but many children of school age have turned their backs on these institutions for various reasons. This is a major part of why three states – Bayelsa, Cross River and Rivers – have maintained the status of educationally less developed states on the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB) classification till date since JAMB began operations in 1978.

The girl-child education has suffered much more because many girls of school age have become professional sex workers providing illicit consortium especially to the wealthy and to the *nouveaux riches* - oil and gas workers, top bureaucrats, political and business magnates - that abound in the region; this poses great danger to public health. Their male counterparts are engaged in petty jobs as street hawkers, pimps, thugs, casual labourers, and also as gigolos to rich women married to busy or older husbands who are unable to meet their conjugal obligations; these sources are hardly able to provide enough income for their upkeep and advancement in life. The more fortunate are the army of youths who serve as attendants to politicians under various descriptions as special assistants, personal assistants, etc. The high rate of graduate unemployment and the poor remuneration of graduates in the public service and the pitiable lives they live have taken a toll on the motivation and ambition of these youths to work hard at earning good grades in the secondary school to enable them to aspire for higher education. Although some of the schools in the region are now adorned with beautiful classrooms and other buildings which qualify them to be described as “model schools”, the quality of teachers, their remuneration, motivation and governance in these institutions have remained poor. The current high rate of kidnapping and militancy are only manifestations of the frustration that the youths are experiencing in a region that harbours some of the wealthiest people in the world who brazenly display and celebrate their often ill-gotten wealth, most of which derive from crude oil mined from their land (Akpomuvie, 2011).

**Tourism and Development**

Tourism is any activity that takes a person away from his or her usual abode, voluntarily and temporarily, for pleasure, relaxation or sightseeing. It involves travelling away from home and, in most cases, lodging, feeding and purchase of souvenirs in the course of the visits. Tourism is a socio-economic activity that is demanded globally, and in many countries, is a very important sector that contributes substantially to the income of citizens and to foreign exchange earnings. For example, the tourism industry is the second largest source of foreign exchange earnings in Kenya, Egypt, Senegal and Morocco (BGL Group, undated; Ijeoma and Aiyeloja, 2010). The revenue generated in Kenya in 2007 was US $130.5 million (Anon, 2013b). As an important and growing sector of the economies of Egypt and Brazil, it yielded nearly US $11 billion in Egypt in 2008 (Anon, 2013c), and US $5.9 billion in Brazil in 2010 from international tourists alone (Anon, 2013d). Available data on revenues from tourism in Nigeria compared with four other African countries (Table 3) indicate that Nigeria realized the least revenues of US $29 million, $55 million, and $142 million in 1975, 1981 and 1998 respectively, the industry was growing in terms of its revenue contributions, with Tunisia and Morocco having the highest revenues of US $1.577 billion and US $1.712 billion, respectively, in 1998.

**Table 3: Revenue from tourism in four African countries for selected years (US $)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Country** | **Years** |  |  |
|  | **1975\*** | **1981\*\*** | **1998\*** |
| Tunisia | 190m | 581 | 1.577b |
| Morocco | 298m | 440m | 1.712b |
| Kenya | NA | 240m | 290m |
| Nigeria | 29m | 55m | 142m |

Sources: \*Atlas of Nigeria (2002); \*\* BGL Group (undated)

Apart from foreign exchange earnings, tourism provides employment and is an important vehicle for curbing unemployment and thus, reducing poverty. The numerous activities and services such as provision of transportation, accommodation, feeding, souvenirs, and tour guides required by tourists are potential avenues for the people to be gainfully employed. Thus, peoples’ income would increase and the standard of living consequently improves. It, therefore, facilitates diversification of the economy by providing alternative sources of income and foreign exchange earnings. This is crucial to Nigeria which virtually depends on oil for driving the economy.

Tourism is also a tool for rural and peri-urban development as the need to provide infrastructural facilities such as electricity, roads, hotels and water will ensure development, improve social welfare and check rural-urban drift. It is a tool for regional, international and inter-cultural integration, as well as for relaxation and recreation. Tourism derives its existence and demand from the natural and man-made resources in a given area. These resources may be the attractive geographic features of an area such as the landscape, hills, rocky outcrops, beaches, creeks, pristine forests and wildlife resources, or heritage and historical features and items such as cultural dances and festivals, historical monuments, handicrafts and artefacts. Countries that are able to derive lots of revenue and create jobs for the people through tourism are those that are not only blessed with such resources, but also have the political will to develop and tap the resources. For example, Brazil is reputed for ecotourism with leisure and recreation, mainly sun and beach, and adventure travel, historic and cultural tourism, the Amazon rain forest and dunes (Anon, 2013d). Kenya’s tourism attractions include national parks and game reserves, the Rift Valley, coffee plantations, Kilimanjaro Mountain and the beaches along the Indian Ocean (Anon, 2013b), while Egypt depends on her pyramids (Anon, 2013c).

The Niger Delta states have enormous natural, geographical and historical endowments that can boost tourism and help to diversify the economy. States like Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers are particularly blessed with a stretch of coast with sand beaches and creeks which can be developed for tourism. A summary of potential tourist attractions in the Niger Delta is given in Table 4.

**Table 4: Potential Tourist Attraction Sites in the Niger Delta Region**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **State** | **Attraction** |
| Abia | Arochukwu Caves, National War Museum, Akwette Weaving Centre, Long Juju of Arochukwu, Azumini Blue River Tourist Village and Museum of Colonial History |
| Akwa Ibom | Ibeno Sand Beach/Mobil Oil, Treatment Plant Ekpo Masquerade Festival, Mary Slessor House/Tomb, Ibom Golf Course and Oron Museum |
| Bayelsa | Oloibiri Oil Museum, Brass Beach, Slave Transit Hall, Akassa and Sea Turtle Breeding Ground, Akassa |
| Cross River | Kwa Falls, Agbokim Falls, Obudu Cattle Ranch, Cercopan, Cross River National Park, Drill Ranch, Tinapa, Ekpe Masquerade, National Museum and Rock with foot prints |
| Delta | Chief Nana’s Palace, Koko Port, Escravos Beach, Ethiope River, and Forcados Beach |
| Edo | Fugar Caves, Okomu Wildlife Sanctuary, Igwe Festival, Igun Bronze Casting, Oba’s Palace, Ramat Park, Sakpoba Holiday Resort, Asoro Shrine and Samorikal Hills |
| Imo | Oguta Lake Holiday Resort, Ikeji Festival, Arondizogu, Palm Beach Holiday Resort, Zoological and Botanical Garden, and Amusement Park |
| Ondo | Idanre Hills, Owo Museum, and Opale Iloro Water Falls |
| Rivers | Isaac Boro Park, Monument of King Jaja of Opobo, Port Harcourt Tourist Beach, Ifoko Beach and Okrika Aquatic Stadium |

Source: Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2006

There are potentials for ecotourism, leisure and heritage/historical tourism based on the types of potential tourist attractions listed. For example, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers states have potentials for leisure, ecological and heritage tourism, while Abia and Ondo are particularly endowed with heritage/historical and ecological tourism, respectively. The yearly one-month carnival in Calabar is yet another aspect of tourism that draws tourists from around the country to Cross River State. The socio-economic impacts should be well studied to find out the strengths and weaknesses and improve on its contributions to the people’s well-being and the economy.

A basic problem of the tourism industry in Nigeria and the Niger Delta in particular is that the available tourism resources and their potentials are underutilized because they are not well developed, there are poor infrastructural facilities to support the industry, and there is lack of awareness about these resources and their potentials. Federal and State Governments, in realization of this problem, had at various times made some efforts to develop the resources and the industry, but the promises and efforts have not yielded much fruits. For example, the Federal and State governments had, respectively, created the Federal Ministry of Culture, Tourism and National Orientation, and State Ministries of Culture and Tourism to regulate and develop the sector. In addition, there are State Tourism Boards directly charged with the responsibilities of creating awareness and enabling environment for both domestic and international tourism to thrive. However, emphasis seems to be placed on the hospitality aspects – development of hotels, with no sufficient attention to the development of identified tourist attractions to acceptable standards. Issues which were raised from state level briefings and consultations and meant for guiding the prioritization and development of the Niger Delta Development Plan included the development of tourist potentials in Bayelsa, Rivers, Cross River, Edo and Ondo States, but development of infrastructure was an issue in all the states except Rivers State (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2006).

Other problems that work against the development of tourism in the region are poor funding, governments’ lack of political will to develop the sector, insecurity and the perception and attitudes of the people towards tourism, particularly as leisure. Moreover, some Nigerians who can afford it, prefer spending their income on tourism abroad to the extent that Nigerians, for instance, contribute 40 per cent of the 70 per cent of South Africa’s tourism revenue annually (Anon, 2013a).

For tourism to thrive in the Niger Delta, the identified centres of attraction must be developed and basic infrastructure put in place to facilitate and support it. There must be favourable economic, social, legal and political environment. Sound economic policies that would attract investors as well as political stability and security of the region and investments are inevitable. Government must have the political will to develop the sector and support it with adequate funding; establishment of a functional Tourism Fund by both Federal and State governments is one way out of the problem. For success, it is important to involve the private sector, non-governmental and international organizations including oil companies operating in the country. In particular, the rural communities that own the resources should be involved right from the planning stage through the development and management of the tourism facilities to gain their confidence and cooperation and ensure the security of the projects.

**Gender Issues**

The World Bank (2001) defines gender as ‘socially constructed roles and socially acquired behaviours and expectations associated with men and women.’ According to Akiyode (2010), it is widely believed that there is gender disparity in policy formulation and development worldwide. Gender discrimination is generally a traditional way of life not only in the Niger Delta but in Nigeria as a whole. In fact, it has both traditional and religious roots. There are strict gender ideologies that define appropriate male and female behaviour and these norms vary within and between ethnic groups in the Niger Delta region (PIND, 2012). Traditionally, preference is given to the male child in education, inheritance, financial assistance in terms of loans, and assignments of responsibilities with the woman confined to domestic and farm work. According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (2006), headship of households is predominantly male (93%) and female (7%). Generally, the social status of women is poor because they dominate the lower income levels as well as lower levels of decision-making socially and politically. Alao and Shuaibu (2011) have, for instance, attributed the low participation of women in forestry development to cultural barriers, traditional, social, economic, religious and psychological factors and suggested that, to abate the barriers, women should have access to land, training and credit facilities.

Through women emancipation pressure groups, enlightenment and government’s involvement, some progress has been made in certain areas, particularly women education. One of the Millennium Development Goals of the Federal Government of Nigeria has been to promote gender equality and empower women with the target of eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and at all levels of education not later than 2015 as well as increasing the percentage of women holding political offices to 30 percent by 2015 (UNDP, 2006). There has been significant improvement in gender parity in the Niger Delta in terms of the proportion of girls enrolled in primary and secondary schools though the target is not met because there are still fewer girls than boys in school with signs of backsliding in the number of women in tertiary education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010a). However, the economic and political empowerment of women is still very low as very few women still hold political offices. There were 9 female Senators and 26 female members in the House of Representatives after the 2007 elections as against 4 and 23, respectively, in 2003 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010a). More women have been appointed directors-general in state public services than before, but in political positions, many states in the Niger Delta as in other geopolitical zones in the country, do not have a single female representative in the National Assembly. Although the number of women in political offices has risen from 1% in 1990 to 7.5% in 2009, Nigeria is still far from the 30% expected to be attained by 2015 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010a).

Akiyode (2010) observed that the policy thrust guiding development in the Niger Delta region is far from being gender sensitive. This observation can be explained by the findings of a study by Akiyode-Afolabi *et al.* (2008) which showed that the Niger Delta regional development master plan did not adequately reflect gender issues, cultural barriers which marginalize women were not considered in policy formulation and implementation, and gender desk officers were not available in most government organizations and offices in the Niger Delta region.

Two strategies adopted by government to promote women affairs are the creation of the Ministry of Women Affairs and the development of National Gender Data Bank to provide disaggregated data to support relevant programmes and projects (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010b). According to the 2010 to 2015 MDG Countdown Strategy, the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment is the joint responsibility of the federal, state and local governments, national and state assemblies, civil society, private sector and international organizations and companies. Some non-governmental organizations involved in gender mainstreaming include Niger Delta Women Movement, Gender and Development Action (GADA) Nigeria, and Leadership Initiative for Transformation and Empowerment (LITE-Africa) formally known as the Niger Delta Professionals for Development (NIDPRODEV).

**The Vulnerable Group**

UNDP (2006) identifies the vulnerable groups primarily as women, children and the poor who suffer from crises, disasters and loss of livelihood sources. Such crises may be communal, inter-ethnic, intra-ethnic and inter-state, while the loss of livelihood sources may arise from crises, over-exploitation of natural resources, pollution, deforestation, environmental problems, all of which are common in the Niger Delta region. Thus, vulnerability in this context is in respect of risks or events such as conflicts, wars, violence, natural and man-made disasters, poor governance, poor economy, environmental hazards, diseases, poverty, gender, unemployment, and death (NPC, 2004). It generally has to do with dependence due to lack of social, economic and political empowerment related to age, gender and social status. According to UNDP (2006), the elites may plan, strategize and fund crises for their selfish aims, but the poor, women and the youths may be induced to implement the plan at their own risk due to lack of economic empowerment.

National Planning Commission (2004) in its report on National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) gave a more elaborate classification of the vulnerable groups with the instruments and interventions for tackling their vulnerability problems. The groups are the rural poor, urban poor, women, youth, children, and rural communities. Generally, the requirements are economic empowerment for the poor, gender equality for women, infrastructural development for rural communities, education, health education and facilities for children, and empowerment through education, skill acquisition and entrepreneurship for the youth. The Federal government has also encouraged state and local governments to develop and implement their own economic empowerment and development strategies – SEEDS and LEEDS, respectively (UNDP, 2006).

One of the problems militating against the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) which could check unemployment and inequality that are the main roots of poverty and unrest in the Niger Delta is funding. Funding of MDG projects have been substantially improved through the Conditional Grant Scheme (CGS) introduced in 2007 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2010a). A financing agreement was signed in 2008 with a budgetary allocation of €71.5 million of which the European Union (EU) was to provide €45.5 million and the remaining €26 million by the benefiting states for EU-Federal Government intervention programmes in the Niger Delta. The programmes cover nine states in the region and are aimed at reducing poverty in the rural and sub-urban communities in the region by promoting gender equality, participation in local governance and development (Anon, 2013e). There is, however, nothing on ground in the region to suggest that this programme has impacted in any significant way oh the targeted vulnerable groups.

It is necessary to stress the need for regular assessment and review of government strategies and level of implementation of the programmes for improving the socio-economic wellbeing of the people of the Niger Delta. It is also part of the corporate responsibilities of oil companies and other international organizations operating in the Niger Delta to contribute to the infrastructural and economic development of the region. Finally, the three tiers of government should show more commitment to the strengthening of the economy, security and well being of the citizens of the Niger Delta in view of its strategic role in sustaining the economy of the nation.

**Proposals for Sustainable Development in the Niger Delta**

Addressing the Niger Delta region’s many development challenges begins with using its vast oil wealth to create an environment in which the people can flourish. People of the area should be able to live valued and dignified lives, overcome poverty, enjoy a peaceful atmosphere and expect a sustainable environment.

Diversification of the economy is vital for the transformation of the region. Fishing and agriculture are the major traditional occupations of the Niger Delta peoples. During the colonial era, forestry was introduced as the third major economic activity in the region. Today, agriculture, fishing and forestry still remain the most viable economic activities. All the three economic activities have declined drastically since the ascendancy of the oil industry. Rubber plantations that once covered thousands of hectares of land in Edo and Delta States were cleared as the oil boom took hold while many palm oil and cocoa plantations were abandoned and allowed to revert to bush. One major contemporary challenge facing the region’s economy may be how to revamp the rural economy by optimizing and modernizing agriculture as well as fishing. Oil wealth can be put to good use in this regard as the people of the region would feel they have gained something substantial to make up for all the miseries associated with past neglect.

Individuals and communities in the Niger Delta Region that have suffered environmental damage from oil industry activities have the right to compensation. An injunction restraining the activities of an oil company is unlikely to be granted with any substantial remedy by any court in Nigeria because of the strategic importance of the oil industry. In this regard, the main law appears to be Section 36 of schedule I of the Petroleum Act 1969. It provides for the payment of “fair” and “adequate” compensation. These terms are highly subjective and are not defined within any enactment. Section 36 schedule I of the Act and Regulation 21 refer to unmentioned surface rights and to specified plants. However, so many rights and interests may be affected, such as those pertaining to fish ponds, fish farms, water ways, canals, wild life sanctuaries and so on. In some states, there are edicts dealing with the procedure and quantum of compensation. An example is the Rivers State Minimum Crop Compensation Rates Edict 1973. The process of arriving at compensation figures is predicated on negotiations by the parties affected.

Ways of controlling environmental hazards have been clearly stated in the various laws and decrees of 1967, 1969 and 1969. Efforts should be focused on implementing these laws and decrees as a means of achieving development for the region. Regulation for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Decree No. 86 of 1992, which makes it mandatory for development projects to put in place appropriate mitigating measures, to address identified significant environmental problems which should be monitored by the government and ensure strict compliance. In compliance, the oil prospecting companies should consult with affected communities, to conduct environmental impact assessment to identify significant impacts of its intended operation projects in the area. The idea is to provide mitigating remedial assistance to correct identifiable negative impact.

**Conclusion**

Akpomuvie (2011) has provided the people-centred development paradigm with the following objectives: enable people to realize their potential, build self-confidence and lead lives of dignity and fulfilment; free people from poverty, ignorance, filth, squalor, deprivation and exploitation, recognizing that underdevelopment has social consequences; and correct existing economic, social and political injustice and oppression.

The attainment of these lofty objectives is predicated on good governance. Those mounting the saddle of leadership in Nigeria have not only been almost irredeemably corrupt, but have made corruption and the attendant culture of impunity pervasive in our society. Today, the citizens of the region for whom the so-called leaders superintend over the common wealth in trust have allowed themselves to be subjugated to the point where we “appeal to”, “plead with” and “beg” governors, local government chairmen, etc., to provide needed infrastructure, health care facilities, education, etc., for us their followers. In the civilized climes, the citizens make a demand on their leaders because that is the only reason they were elected in the first place.

Good governance is hinged on free and fair elections, rule of law, quality representation and guaranteed freedom for mass participation by the citizens. Unless and until good governance is firmly entrenched in our polity, the NDR will remain a fertile field in which social scientists, development experts, environmentalists, academics of all shades and international agencies will continue to conduct human development studies for decades on-end. Good governance is only attainable when the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) becomes truly independent. Once instituted, however, it becomes sustainable only when our judicial system is ridden of the scoundrels on the bench and at the bar. These are the minimum requirements needed to produce leaders, not rulers, who would chart the course for real development in all the regions within the country.

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