

**MANAGING ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT IN THE OIL PRODUCING
AREAS OF THE NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA**

Abosede Babatunde

PhD Candidate, Peace and Conflict Studies Programme,
Institute of African Studies,
University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Email: bose_babatunde@yahoo.co.uk

Phone: +234 8028268035

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ABSTRACT

In the process of extracting oil in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta, Nigeria in the past four decades, ecological devastation on the one hand and neglect arising from crude oil production on the other hand has left much of the Niger Delta desolate, uninhabitable and poor. This study critically examines the Nigerian Federal Government management of the Niger Delta crisis through its interventionist agencies in order to determine whether they have succeeded in reducing the level of poverty, thereby improving the living and environmental conditions in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta, Nigeria.

Key Words: Environmental Degradation, Conflict Management, Development Agencies, Niger Delta, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION: DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES IN THE OIL PRODUCING AREAS

The oil producing areas of the Niger Delta have witnessed a number of attempts since pre-independence times to influence the pace and thrust of development in the area in order to bring about an improved quality of life for the people. The Nigerian government has created several development interventionist agencies. However the legacy of these attempts mostly translates into a picture of missed opportunities and enormous disappointment for communities in the Niger Delta whose hopes and aspiration have been raised and then repeatedly shattered. The Niger Delta remains pervasively poor and underdeveloped, lacking virtually all physical infrastructures such as electricity, portable water supply, educational facilities, medical facilities, road, shelter and so on.

These government initiatives have not succeeded in reducing the level of poverty in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta, inspite of the huge revenue derived from oil. Rather, they focused on just physical infrastructural development, which in most cases were unsuitable for the communities where they were provided. For development to be sustained, emphasis should be shifted to participatory and people centred development.

Government has not invested in the people, in infrastructures that will make life meaningful. As a result, the government has created a situation of violence called structural

violence of the state, which create the pocket of violence witnessed in the Niger Delta areas. A region where so much revenues have been derived, but, without much to show in terms of development. Consequently, the youth are aggrieved and radicalized by the activities of government as well as the oil companies.

The Nigerian government first major attempt to address the grievance of the ethnic minority in the Niger Delta was in 1957, the twilight year marking the end of colonial administration and the dawn of independence in Nigeria. The ethnic minority agitation for greater recognition necessitated the setting up of the Willink commission of inquiry to investigate the fear of the minorities and how to allay them. The commission reported in 1958 that the needs of those who live in the creeks and swamps of the Niger delta are inequities in the allocation of resource from oil and gas and the degradation of the Niger Delta environment by pollution arising from oil industry activities, which adversely affect human developmental condition very differently from those in the interiors. The commission concluded that “a feeling of neglect and a lack of understanding was widespread.” As a result of this, case has been made out for special treatment of the area which would requires special effort because the area is poor, backward and neglected. The Willink commission report of 1958 led to the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) in 1961 to manage the developmental needs and challenges of the Niger Delta region. The areas of focus include the Yenagoa province, Degema Province, the Ogoni division of Port Harcourt and the Western Ijaw Division of Delta province. The board main responsibility was to advice the federal and regional government in the Eastern and Western Nigerian (later Mid-Western) on how best to develop the area. In order to demonstrate the development potential of the area, the board carried out extensive survey and established pilot projects. The Willink commission’s expectation that the various governments

will readily implement development projects suggested by the Board did not come to fruition (Ikporupko, 2001).

Apparently learning from the failure of NDDB, bodies that were subsequently set up for the development of the Niger Delta had functions that were executive rather than advisory. Another development effort, thereafter the NDDB was the establishment of the Niger Delta Basic and Rural Development Authority (NDBDA). The NDBDA also could not solve the problem of the Niger Delta. Organizational problem bedevilled it from inception. None of the board member appointed by the federal government to run the authority came from the Niger Delta. Later, a presidential task force was set up in 1980 in the face of growing agitation and youth restiveness, for a special focus on the development of the region. The task force was allocated 1.5 percent of the Federation Account for the development of the Niger Delta region. This also failed woefully to make any impact on the developmental needs of the Niger Delta region. Subsequent renamed agencies are the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) which was established after the presidential task force in 1992 and the present Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) established in 2000. Therefore, the impact of these two agencies on the study area will be fully explored. One fundamental factor in the state of development in the Niger Delta areas is the perception and reality of the terrain as an impediment. The area is seen as a difficult region where spatial interaction is largely impeded. The reality is that the provision of socio-economic infrastructure is several times more costly in the mangrove and freshwater swamps in the Niger Delta region than in other part of the country. However, be the environmental impediment as it may, the area should have been developed if there were a commitment particularly on the part of government. An area that is the backbone of

the country's economy should not continue to be underdeveloped. The lack of a political will was very clear from the failure of these development commissions (Ikporupkpo, 2001).

From the foregoing, palliative measures by the government from the NDDDB to the NDDC have not sufficiently addressed the problem in the Niger Delta. Efforts to assuage the anger of the people of the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta through these development interventionist agencies have not yielded the desired result. Instead of development, the grim reality for the people of the Niger Delta is still a life of deprivation, poverty, environmental dislocation and increasing rate of crime. Acknowledging the fact that attempt by successive government to ameliorate the deplorable condition in the Niger Delta has been based on different criteria depending on the objective of the administration in power. However, the effect of these anti-poverty programmes have been limited or have had only marginal impact as their core rationale is income-based rather than human based. This assertion suggests a shift of focus from project centred initiative to integrated rural and human capacity development initiative which will provide employment and empowerment as well as improve the income and standard of living of the people in the Niger Delta region. These are the primary reasons why the region's development projects launched by successive government without first consulting the local people before making considerable expenditure on grandiose project and technological innovation have turned out to be inappropriate and did little to improve the wellbeing of the people living in the rural oil producing communities. Therefore, the crisis that have engulfed the Niger Delta is traceable not only to the many years of neglect by various administration of the region but also to the failure of development projects by both government and the multinational oil companies in the region. The failure of the development projects and misplaced priorities in the selection of projects which have nothing to do with the needs of the people have

been adduced as the major cause of political agitation which has degenerated into kidnapping and hostage taking by the youth militants of the Niger Delta.

Evidence clearly revealed that many of the projects executed by these development interventionist agencies did not put into consideration the strategic needs of the oil producing communities in the Niger Delta before they were carried out. This observation found justification in Imobighe (2004) assertion of the development effort of these commissions which he opined as merely cosmetic having failed to significantly improve the lot of the Niger Delta people.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Oil impact

According to Ikein (1990:49) this refers to changes in patterns of interaction and social structures: depersonalization, invasion, unwanted mobility and loss of property. There are also economic changes revealed in the levels of industrial output, employment, unemployment and gross receipts. In addition, there are the biological and environmental consequences of the resultant pollution, posing hazards to health and to the ecology of the area.

Poverty

In the World Development Report of 1990, the World Bank defines poverty as the inability to reach a minimum standard of living such as low per capita income, inadequate food supply and medical care. However, economically oriented concepts of poverty are generally applied by establishing absolute and relative thresholds, which can be seen from a micro and macro-economic perspective. In micro-economic terms, poverty refers to a situation in which individual persons or households are not able to satisfy their basic needs, or can satisfy them only to an inadequate degree. In macro-economic sense, however, poverty exists when the

‘average inhabitants’ of a country live below the minimum subsistence level or not far enough above it (Schubert, 1994:17)

People-centred development

UNDP (2006:27) states that meaningful development must be people based or human-centred, since development entails the full utilization of a nation’ s human and material resources for the satisfaction of various (human) needs.

Participatory development

This is a process by which people take an active and influential part in shaping decisions that affect their lives (OECD, 1995:8). Development has to be designed to capture what the people themselves perceive to be their interest and needs. It is interchangeably called popular participation. People or communities that enjoy active participation in decision-making over issues that concern their livelihood and interests should be able to realize their human potential, bold, self-confidence and lead lives of dignity and fulfilment.

Environmental sustainability

This seeks to reduce environmental degradation arising from natural and man-made causes as well as inefficient use of resources and to improve environmental management through private sector participation and environmentally friendly technologies. Environmental sustainability is fundamental to the overall well-being and development of many rural and urban populations (UNDP, 2006:175)

Conflict management

This refers to the art of transforming the violent conflict into something less damaging or searching for solutions that can check conflict escalation. In other words, it refers to dealing with conflict using any means that could prevent conflict escalation.

OMPADEC INITIATIVE IN THE OIL PRODUCING AREAS OF THE NIGER DELTA-THE CASE OF ILAJE, ONDO STATE.

OMPADEC was the first development interventionist agencies to actually execute any development project in ilaje oil producing areas. OMPADEC was established after the presidential task fund known as 1.5 percent fund in 1992 by the General Babangida Administration as a result of growing restiveness and agitation by the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta against the injustice perpetuated by the ruling elite of the major ethnic group. As a result of the threat posed by the minority group in the oil producing areas to oil production, the government increased the revenue of the oil producing areas to 3 percent in 1999. The increment is believed to be the first policy acknowledgment in many years, of how unjustly the oil producing areas had been treated in revenue allocation. The administration also created the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) to manage the fund on behalf of the oil producing areas (Akinwumi, 2004).OMPADEC was given the mandate of turning around the situation in the Niger Delta region.

Specifically, OMPADEC was given the statutory responsibility to receive and administer, in accordance with the confirmed ratio of oil production in each state the monthly allocation of the Federation account. This was set aside for the rehabilitation and development of the oil mineral producing areas and for tackling ecological problem that have arisen from the exploration of oil mineral. Between 1993 and 1997, OMPADEC collected about N17. 42 billion. The three percent initially allocated to OMPADEC in 1992 was increased to 6 percent in 1995.

There was considerable expectation in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta that OMPADEC would transform the development landscape of the region. The main objective of the

body as specified in Decree No 23 of 1992 are: to have and administer the monthly sum from the allocation of the federation Account in accordance with confirmed ratio of oil production in each state-

(i) For the rehabilitation and development of oil mineral producing areas.

(ii) For tackling ecological problems that have arisen from the exploration of oil mineral

(iii) To determine and identify through the commission and respective oil mineral producing state, the actual oil mineral producing areas and embark on the development of projects properly agreed upon with the local communities or the oil mineral producing areas.

OMPADEC set out its major development goals in two categories – Inter-community projects and specific producing community projects. For inter-community projects, the major goals included provision of portable water, electricity, all-season network of link roads and canalization, shore protection and land reclamation. The economic development of the individual and cooperative were also listed under this category. Under the second category of projects, the goal included provision of health services, communication facilities, markets for conducive business transactions, improvement and support of farming and fishing methods, transportation, encouraging private entrepreneurship, provision of specialized education and (other) educational facilities and creating understanding between oil companies and the communities in which they operate. Overall, OMPADEC also had the duty to inspect oil spillages sites for the purpose of taking appropriate necessary action itself or getting relevant agencies to do so.

However, OMPADEC could not make any noticeable impact until it was scrapped in 1998. In the study area, OMPADEC was the first development agencies to execute any development project in the areas after Ondo state was admitted into the league of oil producing

state in mid 1992. Ilaje oil producing areas was principally offshore producer but entitled to all rights and privileges of membership of the club of oil producing states. OMPADEC claimed to have distributed 87 projects in the Ilaje oil producing areas ranging from landing jetties, dredging and reclamation, footbridges, housing units, hospital centres, school buildings and staff quarters, electricity and portable water. (Robert, 1998)

However, in the study area, fieldwork evidence showed that most of these projects were never executed. The few ill-conceived projects executed were mostly left uncompleted and abandoned. Hardly could a project executed by OMPADEC be found in the study area. The commission was routinely criticised and accused of executing “phantom” projects by which large sign boards were used to indicate projects which in reality did not exist. OMPADEC was also accused of mismanagement of funds. Funds meant for the development of the oil producing areas went into the pocket of emergency contractors and consultants and for the maintenance of the commissions’ bloated bureaucracy. While individual contractors and OMPADEC commissioners made fortunes from OMPADEC’s transaction, the people of the oil producing areas remained retarded and impoverished. The few projects the commission executed in the areas were condemned for not suitable for community needs and preferences. The people of the oil communities were unanimous in their opinion that OMPADEC did not make any impact on their area. Rather, they complained that the few projects the commission executed did not represent their needs but were imposed on them. Also these projects were left uncompleted. The impact assessment of OMPADEC by popular perceptions was based on the pervasive complaint of marginalization. It was accused of preferential treatment of certain oil producing states to the detriment of others in project distribution. Almost all the oil producing communities, local government areas and states with the probable exception of River state at one time or the other

have claimed to be marginalized in the affairs of OMPADEC. This particular criticism eroded the credibility of OMPADEC and generated a crisis of confidence, which affected its internal solidarity and therefore made the commission quite vulnerable to external pressure. (Table 1)

Several factors were attributed to the failure of OMPADEC. They included inefficiency, lack of focus, inadequate and irregular funding, official profligacy, corruption, excessive political interference, lack of transparency and accountability and high overhead expenditure in the organization. However, the chief executive of OMPADEC identified three pressing problems of the commission. First, there were no available data for planning purpose such as the crude oil production quota by state. The most daunting problem the commission had was inadequate funding to cope with the volume of demand given decades of physical neglect and deprivation. Lastly, the decrees establishing OMPADEC stipulated that it should receive three percent of the federation account, but the commission claimed that what it actually got was three percent of net revenues from the federation account. By 1999, when OMPADEC folded up, it admittedly completed several projects. But it equally left scores of abandoned project all over the Niger Delta. The commission was apparently overwhelmed with pressure that it lost its focus and went on a contract awarding spree with advanced payment to contractors for jobs that were not eventually done. By the first quarter of 1996, three years after it commenced operation, OMPADEC had committed itself to project worth ₦53 billion. (Okonta et al., 2001). It also left behind huge debts running into billion of Naira to its contractors and left the Niger Delta littered with abandoned project that had no direct leaning on poverty reduction, considered a major challenge in the region.

According to Okonta et al., (2001) the World Bank team that studied OMPADEC activities in the Niger Delta communities in 1995 concluded that it would be difficult for the

commission to effectively fulfil its roles as a development agency for the following reasons: there was no emphasis on environmental sustainable development, the commission did not have the requisite personnel to meet its ecological mandate, there was absence of long term planning, there was little or no project assessment and where project were initiated, maintenance requirements were not built into them and lastly there was no integrated approach to development planning which should involve the local communities and other government agencies in the areas.

NDDC DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN THE OIL PRODUCING AREAS OF ILAJE.

Another major step taken by the Federal government to deal with the Niger Delta crisis was the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission, set up by the Obasanjo administration in December 2000 to replace the ineffective oil mineral producing Areas Development Commission. NDDC was mandated to take over the assets and liabilities of OMPADEC with a view to improving on OMPADEC performance. The mandate of the commission as enshrined in the act of the National Assembly that established it in July 2000 was essentially to coordinate development efforts of various stakeholders in the region in a sustainable manner. NDDC is the ad-hoc structure, which is supposed to facilitate development in the Niger Delta by identifying and addressing the urgent needs of the people as a complement to the efforts of the state government and the corporate social responsibility contributions of the oil multinational. The commission began operation in 2001 with the following responsibilities:

Conceive, plan and implement in accordance with set rules and regulations, projects and programmes for the sustainable

development of the Niger Delta in the field of transportation, including roads, jetties and waterways, health, education, employment, industrialization, agriculture and fisheries, housing and urban development, water supply, electricity and telecommunication.

With its other function, NDDC was charged to midwife a development master plan for the region to ensure a framework of a coordinated action on development projects and initiatives. At its inception, there was high expectation that NDDC has the potential to offer a lasting solution to the socio-economic difficulties of the Niger Delta, which successive governments have grappled with even before independence. To achieve its mandate, the NDDC board identified three core areas of focus, which included social and physical development, human development and lastly the pursuit of a peaceful environment that allows tourism to thrive and supports a buoyant culture. The NDDC board elaborated a plan involving the construction of roads, shoreline protection, rural and urban water supply schemes and the rehabilitation of schools and health centre, in addition to human capacity development in new centres that help people acquire skills and build sustainable livelihood. NDDC also developed a regional development master plan as part of its overall strategy, which was provisionally named consolidated council on socio-economic development of the coastal states of the Niger Delta, otherwise known as the Niger Delta Marshall plan. The master plan is to serve as a pathway and harmonization framework for different interventionist agencies and tiers of government to ensure purposely and even spread of developmental project among the coastal states. It consists of a robust package of policies and strategies for the development of the region (ICG, 2006).

However, it took the commission about three years to prepare this developmental blueprint for the Niger Delta. It is hoped that its implementation will not take that long. If, however, faithfully implemented, it will fundamentally address the seemingly daunting developmental challenges of rural poverty, falling educational standards, inadequate infrastructural development and inadequate power supply among others in the Niger Delta. The master plan is thus designed to address poverty through the development of human capacity. As a fundamental principle, it aims at growing a robust economy, care for the environment and the provision of physical infrastructure.

The NDDC funding structure includes contributions from the Federal Government, the oil companies operating in the region, the ecological fund and member states of the Delta. The NDDC received from the federal government 15 percent of the 13 percent oil revenue allocation to the nine states, oil companies contributed 3 percent of their annual budget to the NDDC fund and the State governments gave 5 percent of funds due to the member states from the ecological fund. The commission has developed a formula whereby 60 percent of its funds are spent in proportion to the amount of oil produced in each state. The commission budget for 2001 and 2002 was N10 billion and N14 billion respectively. However, the National Assembly only allocated N15 million of its 2002 budgets (ANEEJ, 2004; HRW, 2002). The federal government accounted for 78.03 percent of the N44 billion or US \$341.1 million that was disbursed to the commission between 2001 and 2004. From the foregoing, it is clear that NDDC is facing the same problem with funding that plagued OMPADEC, even though it is better funded compared to previous commission, this has not translated into any concrete difference. It is saddled with an assignment that covers nine states, over 300 communities each with its own peculiar and costly needs, lack of adequate funding limits its capacity. The oil companies are not contributing their

own shares regularly. They claimed they have their own community development projects to execute.

Moreover, findings revealed that the people of the oil producing areas perceived the NDDC as an imposition from the federal government and a top-down approach to development planning and implementation. The inhabitants of the oil producing areas were sidelined in determining its composition, which primarily comprises appointees of the federal government. Since its commissioners are political appointees representing different states and interest, NDDC is further hobbled by the placement of politics before the development agenda.

Further, the general view of the people is that NDDC has made little progress in the area. Layers of distrust have accumulated over decade of strife in the Niger Delta, impeding the piecemeal efforts being made to address the lack of development in the region. Years of neglect, inequity and deep-seated contempt make whatever is done for the people of the oil producing areas appear too little too late.

Several factors have been attributed to the lack of success of NDDC. First, it is acknowledged that its capacity is limited by inadequate funding as NDDC is grossly underfunded. The second factor is that NDDC operate in utter neglect of the important provision of the law establishing it which stipulates the usage of quota of production in sharing projects, contracts and employment in the development of the oil producing areas. The result is that while the producing communities are being starved of projects and the people from the area are getting poorer, persons from non-producing areas are getting richer. The third factor is that most of the projects executed in the oil producing communities are imposed on the people without regard to their peculiar needs. In other word, there was lack of community consultation in project identified for execution in these communities.

NDDC is claiming that it has completed about 700 projects out of which 50% or more are borehole project. Others included roads, bridges, jetties, schools, clinics, provision of portable drinking water and electricity, supported local fishery and trained youths in various vocations. All these, they claimed have positively impacted on the living standards of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta. Within two and a half year of its existence, NDDC claimed to have recorded some progress in infrastructural development. Three hundred and fifty-eight projects have been completed across the region. These included forty major roads, forty-one landing jetties and ninety-three water schemes (ANEEJ, 2004). Also, eighty-one electricity projects and one hundred and ninety building construction works for schools and health centres have been completed. The breakdown of completed projects by State is Abia 40, Akwa Ibom 53, Bayelsa 47, Cross River 4, Delta 97, Edo 38, Imo 31, Ondo 31 and River 17. A total of 714 infrastructural projects have been awarded so far. The NDDC is said to have awarded projects worth over N11 billion in different areas of the region. However, no positive impact has yet been felt by the people, so there are now calls for its dissolution.

Direct observation of NDDC activities in the study area revealed that NDDC has not made any significant progress in improving the living conditions of the people, nor the environmental conditions of the area. Further, project executed in a few scattered communities included rehabilitation works like building of blocks of classrooms, dispensaries and health centres, provision of books and science equipment most of which are usually given out with little or no consideration for their end use or sustenance.

However, the commissioner representing NDDC in Ondo State, Dr. Ibukun Omotehinse claimed that despite the difficult terrain and developmental challenges confronting the oil producing areas of Ilaje, NDDC was determined to improve the well being of the people of the

areas. According to him, since its inception, NDDC has initiated 302 physical infrastructural projects in the area. The projects as highlighted by him included the building of roads, footbridges and jetties, construction and renovation of classrooms, hostel blocks, staff quarters, health centres, hospital and doctor's quarters. NDDC has also undertaken electrification, erosion control, shore protection and water projects in the area. In addition, NDDC has implemented various human development programmes. These programmes designed for the welfare of the youth and people of the oil producing areas included the computer literacy programme, skills acquisition programme, NDDC Assisted Mass Transit Scheme, NDDC Solid Waste Disposal Scheme and NDDC Globacom self employment business scheme. All these projects cut across all the oil producing communities. Jetties and shorelines protection were provided in communities such as Ilowo, Igbokoda, Ode-Ugbo, Ugbo-nla and Idi-Ogba. NDDC has also undertaken the dredging and re-alignment of Araromi-Ogboye canal, the construction of Ode-Irele-Sabomi-Igbotu road, the 16 kilometers canalization of Ayetoro to Oberebiminu, provision of wooden footbridge linking 6 classroom blocks at LA Primary Schools in Orotu, Ilowo and Ilepete. A technical college at Ayetoro and construction of primary schools at Igbotu, Mahin and Idi-Ogba. A community secondary school at Ilepete. A comprehensive health centre at Igbokoda, equipped with Doctors and Nurses quarters. It also embarked on rural electrification through the donation of electricity, transformers and electricity generating sets in some communities such as Orereara, Ilowo/Ilepete and Igbotu/Ikpoke electricity projects. In addition, 29 water projects have been implemented in the oil producing areas, out of which 10 have been commissioned. (Table 2)

However, the people of the oil producing areas were unanimous in their responses that NDDC has not made any significance impact on their communities. Their comments indicated

that NDDC is viewed as a top-down approach to development planning and implementation. NDDC has not made any positive impression on the people. It is quite revealing that officials of the commission admitted that the projects they have executed cannot compensate for the negative effects of oil exploitation because the negative impact cannot be quantified in the sense that the whole of the National budget cannot compensate for it. The people bitterly complained about the lack of appreciable development in their communities.

In general, the available social development indicators in the Niger Delta region point to inadequate, unavailable and poor quality infrastructure and social services, from water to telecommunication, the historical neglect of the region's development poses a steep barrier to attaining socio-economic transformation and poverty alleviation (UNDP, 2006). Direct observation of physical projects in these communities revealed that most of the projects have not been completed. Also, they are very few in comparison to NDDC claims. These projects are scattered in these communities and not all of them have benefited from NDDC.

Data from the federal office of statistics, now the National Bureau of Statistics revealed that water in the majority of Niger Delta States came from unsafe supply facilities including rivers, lakes or ponds, unprotected wells and boreholes. Ondo State is ranked among the Niger Delta States that has very acute water problems (UNDP, 2006). Findings revealed that the borehole provided by NDDC in the oil producing areas of Ilaje is not drinkable. The NDDC water supply scheme has remained uncompleted even when it has been commissioned.

Inadequate water supply in the oil producing areas made the people to depend on the polluted water, which leads to health problems from water borne diseases. It was estimated that only 20 to 24 percent of rural oil producing communities have access to safe drinking water

(UNDP, 2006). This has serious implications for the general health, environment, economic activity and sustainable livelihood in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta region.

Evidence showed that majority of the people travel far into the rivers on canoes to source for drinkable water since the river has been polluted, not just from oil but also because it is used as refuge and faeces disposal. The people also depend on rain for potable water. However, insufficient rain water harvesting system also made the people to rely on toxic waste water from Chevron facilities for drinking.

In the area of housing, direct observation revealed that most of the housing structures in the oil producing areas are predominantly of poor quality, especially in the swamps and creeks where dwelling are made up largely of stilt or strip foundation.

In term of education, most of the school facilities are inadequate. Direct observation showed that most of the staff quarters in communities like Awoye, Molutehin, Ugbo-nla, Igo, and Ikorigho are uncompleted. The secondary school system in particular has been seriously afflicted by shortages of qualified teachers. Many of the youth of these communities complained about the lack of teachers to teach core subjects. According to one of the focus group discussant in Ayetoro community, there are only four teachers teaching in the secondary school. There are no teachers for Yoruba, English Language, Christian Religious Knowledge and Literature. Ilaje oil producing areas is ranked among those areas in the Niger Delta with oil facilities and a low educational index (UNDP, 2006).

In the area of health care delivery, there is dearth of quality health care services in the oil producing communities. UNDP (2006) alluded to the dismal health and health care delivery in the oil producing areas, which manifests in poor hygiene. Further, there is little or no health information and education, a grossly inadequate capacity for service delivery, inadequate

provision of hospitals, clinics and primary health centres, and a lack of effective operational plans for holistic health management. The inhabitant of the oil producing areas provided corroborative evidence on the status of health care in the oil producing communities, affirming that modern health care facilities are largely absent. The few existing public health care centres lacked qualified doctors, nurses and critical supplies such as drugs, syringes and sterilizers. The people of the oil producing communities have to resort to local and traditional remedies to deal with their poor health conditions.

In the oil producing areas, all the sampled communities are not even linked to the natural electric power grid. Those they were linked have been damaged for years without any effort by the government to repair it. For example, at Molutehin community, the researcher was shown the damaged electric power grid that has not been repaired for the past 10 years. These communities depend on generator for those that can afford it, or oil lamp.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the government development commissions have made little progress in the oil producing areas. From the interviews conducted with community leaders, it was adduced that projects that are unsuitable to their needs were imposed on the people, and such projects were executed without input from the oil producing communities. In the period under review, there was no evidence of NDDC spending on human development. In terms of projects distribution among the oil producing communities, which the people perceived as unfair, the NDDC commissioner in Ondo State explained that as politicians, they cannot ensure that projects are evenly distributed because of placement of politics before the development agenda.

The commissioner of NDDC in Ondo State also stated that there are a lot of challenges facing the commission. Dr. Omotehinse explained that the commission has not sufficiently

compensated the people for the adverse effect of oil exploitation. Further, he stated that the negative effect of oil activities is not quantifiable because even the whole of the national budget cannot compensate for it. However, he identified ways in which the commission can be improved. He indicated suggestions that included proper funding of the commission through increase in the derivation fund to the oil producing states, cooperation and trust by host communities, adequate information should be provided to the people, transparency and accountability on the part of the commission and assistance from the international communities.

It seems however that the scale of developmental needs in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta is beyond what NDDC alone can handle, even if all its budget are released to it regularly. In the light of this observation, a more effective institutional framework should be created in the oil-producing states, which would more transparently utilize accruals from oil derivation allocation. In the period under review, NDDC has not been seen to make any meaningful impact on the oil producing areas.

Further, it must be emphasized that the issue of sustainability of NDDC projects, which has to do with project maintenance seem not to have been adequately addressed. The staff of NDDC explained that they are not responsible for the maintenance of project as interventionist agencies. Projects maintenance, according to them is the responsibility of government. It is the view of the researcher that the issue of sustainability should therefore be addressed in the Niger Delta regional master plan.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Attempt by successive Nigerian government to ameliorate the deplorable condition in the Niger Delta region have been based on different criteria depending on the objective of the

administration in power. The effect of these anti-poverty programme have been limited or have had only marginal impact as their core rationale is income-based rather than human-based. This assertion suggests a shift of focus from project-centred initiative to integrated rural and human capacity development initiatives, which will provide employment and empowerment as well as improve the income and standard of living of the people in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta region. These are the primary reasons why the region development projects lauded by successive government without first consulting the local people before making considerable expenditure on grandiose project and technological innovation have turned out to be inappropriate and did little to improve the well being of the people living in these communities.

Government must do away with the half hearted and top-down public policies of the past and embraces more participatory and people-oriented choices. Therefore, the imperative for a new development agenda arises from the fact that development planning efforts have failed to adequately address the region needs. The result has been disillusionment and frustration among the people about their increasing deprivation. They have seen one government agency after another without any significant changes, instead their physical environment has been deteriorating at an alarming rate which hinders economic prospects and harm human well being. Misdirected resources, inappropriate policy framework and a poor visioning of what development should look have contributed to a destabilization of the societies and stroked deep and proliferating concerns. If not addressed, these do not bode well for the future of Nigeria or an oil hungry world.

Such a fundamental shift in the attitude of government toward the oil producing areas would go a long way to determine the future or otherwise of the development commission. For the government interventionist agencies to wipe out the bitter experiences of today, the

commissions have to embark first and foremost on programmes that will regenerate the environment and that are capable of sustainable development. Instead of only dealing with shortage of income, the strategy should also deal with what people can achieve with the resources in their possession. Providing the excluded people of the Niger Delta with income generating activities may solve their poverty problem but it does not overcome exclusion. A basis for the integrated development of the Niger Delta oil communities should be created. The commission must first see itself as a partner in progress with oil communities, rather than another elaborate pre-bendel institution for siphoning huge government resources. The commission must give greater attention to development project that will economically empower the people and alleviate the socio-economic problem facing these communities.

These commissions should also embark on a new social policy to fight exclusion aimed at increasing individual's capabilities and to empower the poor and excluded. It means a shift from reactive to proactive policies in the fields of education, providing adequate capabilities for employment and building on what people can achieve with the resources in their possession.

These commissions must also ensure that community projects are evenly spread across the oil producing communities. The most important revision in strategy may be in laying the political and legal basis for inclusive development, tackling discriminatory resource policies and creating public policies that foster growth with equity. In this regard, the commissions' developmental projects must involve a local process including not only the economic targets but also the political and the psychological aspects of life.

The implementation of governments' structural reform and the commissions programme should focus on three broad objectives: improving the coverage and quality of basic services targeted to the Niger Delta, supporting public sector reforms and institutional strengthening as

the government embarks on the redefinition of its role, and creating the necessary conditions for private sector and NGO-led growth in the region.

The bottom up approach that could make the development of the region relevant to the need and aspiration of the people of the Niger Delta is paramount. In this respect, dialogue is imperative. The people are the best architects of their own development, as they are the best architect of their lives, thus holding the greatest prospects for efficacy and sustainability. The people must therefore, own, lead and manage their own development. The special circumstances in which the people of the Niger Delta find themselves requires programmes that recognize that poverty eradication and successful rural development depend on the involvement of local communities. There must be a strong focus on strengthening grassroots organization and on making resources available for community development activities. The programme for addressing rural poverty must identify and target the most vulnerable, empowering them to participate effectively in development activities.

The central government should ensure equity and provide adequate access to quality education, affordable health care and a reliable policy for environmental protection. Government must abandon what presently amounts to a “patch-patch” approach to the development of the Niger Delta. Also, the government should monitor these commissions in order to ensure that it is not politicized, over-bureaucratized, under-funded or hijacked by the elite for sectarian ends. All these would in the short and long term help to avert the bitter acrimonies of the recent past.

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Table 1: OMPADEC PROJECT DISTRIBUTION FEBRUARY 1996.

States	No of project
Rivers	357
Delta	359
Edo	79
Akwa Ibom	248
Ondo	87
Imo	31
Abia	31
Cross River	Non availability

Sources: *The Guardian (Lagos)*, 8 March 1996 p.11

Table 2: NDDC Project summaries in the oil producing areas of Ilaje, Ondo

State									
Project Type	2002 Awards	2003 Awards	2004 Awards	Above 90%	Completed	Commissionable	Commissioned	As at May 2003	Total Award
Bridge	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Building	100	-	-	86	80	5	59	99	100
Canalization	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Electrification	5	2	-	8	6	-	5	5	7
Flood Control	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Jetties	8	-	-	8	8	1	6	8	8
Road	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Water	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sub-Total	113	2	-	102	94	6	70	112	115

Source: Niger Delta Development Commission – 2005 Annual Report