

Unemployment and Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta Region: Interrogating Governments' Management Strategies.

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Abstract

Unemployment is an unwanted social trend and its effects on the aggrieved youth are geared towards crime. This chronic sense of grievance was created by the highly unequal distribution of resources to and within the Niger Delta region exacerbated by negligence on the part of oil multinational companies and government with respect to environmental protection and a failure on the multinational companies to create local employment as well as support local entrepreneurship. This has resulted to the levels of violence driven by criminality, impunity and corruption in the Niger Delta. Despite the attempts made by successive administrations to manage unemployment and youth restiveness in the region, the issue is generating more attention as never before. The social indicators used as a measuring rod of unemployment are crime types that were not existing in the region before now such as kidnapping and hostage taking, pipeline vandalization, youth restiveness to mention a few. The research aimed at determining whether government strategies on amelioration of unemployment and youth restiveness achieved the expected results. The researcher adopts Relative deprivation theory to explain the relationship between unemployment and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. It adopted quantitative method. The findings among others established that youth restiveness has led to the intervention of government in addressing some of the problems in Niger Delta region through the creation of Ministry of Niger delta, establishment of Niger Delta Development Commission and establishment of National Amnesty Programme. Also, those government strategies such as implementation of National Amnesty Programme have not achieved the expected results. Hence the researcher recommended among others that government in order to strengthen her interventionist programme in the Niger Delta region should ensure proper implementation of United Nation Environmental Programme (UNEP) report, government should collaborate with relevant stakeholders in the Niger Delta region to ensure that there is strict compliance with the laws and policies aimed at reducing unemployment and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta region.

Key Words: Unemployment; Youth Restiveness; Government; Niger Delta; Oil Productions.

Introduction

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is made up of; Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo Ondo and Rivers States. They constitute the third largest wetland in the world (UNDP, 2006). The ecological status of the region is characterized by; rivers, creeks, estuaries and swamps, as well as other natural resources like; palm oil and kernel, fish, oil and gas. The economic pre-occupation of the people of this region has been farming and fishing, salt making, hand-dug boat making and distillation of local gin. The availability of oil and gas in this region attracted several oil and gas Multinational Companies such as Chevron, Shell and Mobil producing (Exxon Mobil) to its major cities like; Port Harcourt, Warri, Yanagoa and the rest.

Precisely, the oil and gas deposit in the Niger Delta region constitutes 97% of Nigeria's mineral exploitation and exploration (Iyayi, 2004). The region, due to its coastal location, and the exploration and exploitation activities carried out there, is highly vulnerable to both natural and man-made environmental hazards such as, flooding due to rise in sea level, land degradation, water pollution, desertification, fire disasters and frequent oil spill. In fact, the activities of oil and gas multinational companies in the Niger Delta is largely viewed to be a curse rather than a blessing as nature intended it to be (Turner and Brown hill, 2004). As a result of the identified factors viz; oil spillage, gas flaring, oil erosion and land degradation, all occasioned by the exploration and exploitation activities of the oil and gas companies, the environment has been generally rendered hostile and unconducive for economic activities such as: fishing, farming, salt making, distillation of local gin. It is imperative and informative to stress that these economic and agricultural activities were hitherto the main stay of the Niger Delta economy, before the commencement of the exploitation and exploration activities in the region in the seventies. In other words, the commencement and increase in the oil and gas exploitation and exploration activities, with its attendant environmental consequences, is directly and wholly responsible for the collapse of the hitherto viable economy of the Niger Delta people. The resultant effect of these economic and agricultural setback or collapse include; poverty, unemployment, underemployment, underdevelopment and general insecurity.

Oil was discovered in commercial quantity in 1956 at Oloibiri in the present Bayelsa State in the Niger Delta by Shell-BP (Amino, 2013). After that discovery, many more oil wells have been discovered in various parts of the Niger Delta and their explorations have continued ever since. Reflecting on the oil in the Niger Delta, Abu (2000) observed that contrary to the assumption of the imposing British colonial authorities, the amount and variety of oil found in the area is of commercial value and the finest in the world. The oil and gas exploration and exploitation activities by the oil multinational and Nigerian government have resulted to the destruction of the Niger Delta region agricultural lands and environmental resources. Ekin (2000) opined that Niger Delta region has become an ecological disaster zone, thereby exposing people to unsafe environment. To that effect, Kirwan (1999) holds that environmental degradation has negative effect on socio economic development, employment and food production in Niger Delta region. The most devastating effect is that the traditional occupation (fishing and crop cultivation) of the Niger Delta has been destroyed due to constant environmental pollution by the activities of the oil companies and government

Jhingan (2008) suggests that unemployment is one of the most sensitive and disturbing problem fighting against the development of the contemporary Nigerian society. However, from the foregoing, it is clear that the problem of unemployment in Nigeria is alarming and that explains why the pace of youth restiveness is very high in the Niger Delta region. Unemployment has become chronic and intractable and it is the brain behind youth restiveness in the region. This is because of a common saying that "an idle man is the devils workshop". The acquisition of a certificate or degree was considered a sure passport to a paid employment either in the private or public sectors of the economy. Gloomy labour market situation has now been the case as young school leavers and university graduates that were expected to get employed easily are stranded and taken to crime. Youths have taken to crime as a means of getting their own share of the National cake, giving rise to chrome cases of youth restiveness in virtually the entire Niger delta region.

Momba (1983), Anyanwu (1992) and Angaye (1995) are of the view that:

“... youths take to crime and restiveness as the last resort after seeing corrupt politicians looting the nation’s wealth with impunity. Youths graduate and stay at home as much as five, six or even several years without jobs. Therefore, they see criminality as the only way to break the vicious circle of poverty in their families”.

Beginning from 1965 as was observed by Aghaliono (2002), the people of the Niger Delta region began peaceful agitations to draw the attention of the government to their plight and sought remediation, first through legal actions to compel the beneficiary Multinational Oil Companies (MNOCs) to pay compensation to the host communities. Burden (2009) opined that the first significant group in the Niger Delta occurred in 1966, when Isaac Adaka Boro formed an Ijaw group (Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF)), and declared a republic. His uprising was crushed by the federal government within days, but his demands for greater autonomy for the people of the region inspired later activists such as Ken Saro Wiwa and “Mujahid” Dokubo-Asari. Saro Wiwa raised awareness about the environmental pollution caused by the oil industry and highlighted the lack of representation of the Niger Delta people, especially the Ogonis. He formed the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which in 1990 published an Ogoni Bill of Rights (Okwu-Okafor, 1994). From 1990 to 2007 groups such as Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Chikoko Ijaw National Congress, Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Ijaw Peace Movement (IPM), Isoko National Youth Movement (INYM), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) were formed.

The activities of these aggressive youth groups initially appeared to reflect a pursuit of a genuine philosophy of redressing the injustice and marginalization of the region by the Nigerian State. It took a negative dimension when events emanating from the region indicate disagreement in the activities and modus operandi of pursuing their aims and objectives (Paul, 2012). However, various administrations have tried to find solutions and legal framework to guide the activities of oil companies also to solve problems caused by environmental challenges and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta region. Some of the legal framework includes; the Oil Pipelines Act 1956 (amended in 1965); Mineral Oils (Safety) Regulations (1963); Oil in Navigable Waters acts (1968); Petroleum Acts (1969); Associated Gas Re-injection Act (1979); the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) Act (1988); the National Policy on the Environment, 1989 (revised in 1999); National Environmental Protection (Effluent Limitations) Regulations (1991); Environmental Protection (Pollution Abatement in Industries Generating Wastes) Regulations (1991); Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act (1992), and Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) Environmental Guidelines and Standard for the Petroleum Industry in Nigeria (EGASPIN) (2002). Following the Willink report of 1958, the Niger Delta Board (NDDB) was created in 1960, this was followed by Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) of 1976, Oil and Mineral Producing Agency Development Commission (OMPADEC) of 1992, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) of 2001, creation of Ministry of Niger Delta in 2008 and Niger Delta Amnesty Programme of 2009.

While the oil in the Niger Delta has been a blessing to the Nigerian state, its discovery has more or less created a nightmare to the Niger Delta people. Aware of the enormous contributions of oil to national wealth, the people of the Niger Delta have continually complained that the discovery and exploration of oil in their land has not impacted positively on their living

standards as the basic things of life have continually eluded them, while their means of livelihood like farming and fishing have been destroyed by environmental degradation caused by oil exploration (Ibodje, 2008; Ojeifa, 2000; Onosode, 2000 and Saliu, 2008). Environmental degradation has resulted to increase in poverty and youth unemployment in the Niger Delta region. Poverty in the midst of wealth contributed to youth restiveness that has engulfed the region. The activities of restive youths have manifested to increase in violence, arson and lawlessness epitomized by high incidence of kidnapping of oil workers, occupation of oil sites and seizure of facilities, vandalization of oil installations, bearing of arms against the state and the emergence of militia groups.

However, to arrive at the expected results, the following objectives shall guide this study: to examine the relationship between unemployment and youth restiveness in the Niger delta Region, to analyze the strategies government has adopted in managing youth restiveness in the Niger Delta region and to explain why the strategies so adopted by government to manage youth restiveness failed.

Theoretical Framework

This research will be situated within the ambit of the Relative Deprivation theory. Relative Deprivation theory was propounded by a sociologist, Samuel A Stouffer in 1949. The theory relates to the idea that feelings of deprivation are related to a desired point of reference. Feeling of deprivation arises when desires become a legitimate expectation and those desires are blocked by society. Social Satisfaction is the opposite of relative deprivation.

The relative deprivation emphasized the lack of resources to sustain diet, lifestyle and amenities that an individual or group are accustomed to or that are widely approved or encouraged in the society to which they belong. Measuring relative deprivation allows an objective comparison between the situation of individual or group compared to the rest of society. It also emphasized individual experience or discontent when being deprived of something to which one believes one is entitled to. However, emphasizing the perspective of the individual makes objective measurement problematic.

The theory is used in social science to describe the feelings or measures of economic, political or social deprivation that are relative. It is extricably link to social exclusion. It has important consequences for both behaviour or attitudes, including feelings of stress, political attitude and participation in social action.

The Assumption of the deprivation theory is that people who are deprived of things deemed valuable in society, whether money, justice, status or privileges join social movement with the hope of redressing grievances. Improved conditions fuels human desires for even better conditions, and thus sparks revolution. It is important to look at relative deprivation based on the evaluation of what they think they should have compare to what they actually have. Relative deprivation is what people think they should have relative to what is given to them, or even compared with their own past and perceived future. Feeling of deprivation is relative as they come from a comparison of social norms that are not absolute but differ from time to time. It may be temporal, i.e, it can be experienced by people that experience expansion of right or wealth, followed by stagnation or reversal of those gains. Such conditions are also known as unfulfilled rising expectation.

The researcher adopted relative deprivation theory as the framework which is most suitable in this study. The assumption of the Relative Deprivation theory is that denial of expected goal creates frustration, which in turn, leads to aggressive response usually directed against those

reputed to be causing the frustration. According to proponents of this theory, where expectation does not meet attainment, the tendency is for people to confront those they hold responsible for frustrating their ambitions. Relative Deprivation theory therefore, sees conflict as the outcome of deprivation and frustration of groups in society vis-à-vis other groups; that is, what one should get relative to what others whom one identifies as one's peers or equal are getting. It is obvious that the basic assumptions of Relative Deprivation theory are similar to that of Frustration – Aggression and Human Need Theories. Some of the scholars who have written on Relative Deprivation theory are Gurr (1970), Feierabends et al (1969), Davies (1962), Berkowitz (1962), Yates (1962), Dowse and Hughes (1972), Lupsha (1971), Skocpol (1971), Anifowose (1982), Faleti (2005) among others.

The main explanation that Relative Deprivation theory provides is that aggression is not just undertaken as a natural reaction or instinct as realists and biological theories assume, but that it is the outcome of deprivation and that in a situation where the legitimate desires of an individual is denied either directly or indirect consequence of the way the society is structured, the feeling of disappointment may lead such a person to express his anger through violence that will be directed at those he holds responsible or people who are directly or indirectly related to them (Faleti, 2005). This is why Ted Robert Gurr who is regarded as the founding father of Relative Deprivation Theory argued that “the greater the discrepancy, however marginal, between what is sought and what seem attainable, the greater will be the chances that anger and violence will result” (Gurr, 1970:24).

Conceptual clarification

Youth Restiveness

Youth restiveness is defined as a sustained protest embarked upon to enforce desired outcome from a constituted authority by an organized body of youths. Youth restiveness is marked by violence and disruption of lawful activities in which ever society it occurs. Corroborating this definition, Institute of Conflict and Peace Resolution (2003) added that to be restive means the inability to stay still or unwillingness to be controlled, especially because one is bored or not satisfied with certain decisions, changes and or existing laws considered to be unfavourable.

The Advocates for the Advancement of Youth Development Initiatives” (AAYDI), best defined anti-social activities of the youth as, “a sustained protestation embarked upon to enforce a desired outcome from a constituted authority by a structured or unstructured body of youths.” This fits the label of “youth restiveness.” It is also “a combination of any action or conduct that constitutes unwholesome, socially unacceptable activities engaged in by the youths in any community.” “... it is a phenomenon which in practice has led to: a near breakdown of law and order, low productivity due to disruption of production activities, increasing crime rate, intra-ethnic hostilities, and harassment of prospective developers and other criminal tendencies” (Administrator, 2012).

Unemployment.

Unemployment is “a situation in which persons capable and willing to work are unable to find suitable paid employment”. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defined unemployed workers as those who are currently not working but are willing and able to work for pay, currently available to work and have actively searched for work. These include the facts of a number of people not having a job; the number of people without a job; and the state of not having a job. Same unemployment was operationalized to include the underemployed.

Unemployment occurs when people who are able and willing to work are without jobs, or cannot find work that is effective and productive. It also occurs when people undertake jobs that are contrary or lower than their academic qualifications or areas of specialization. For instance, a first or second degree holder that enrolls as a recruit into any of the armed forces or paramilitary or a degree holder working as a clerk in an office is greatly underutilized and as such could be termed as unemployed even when such person is on a job (Asaju, Arome, and Anyio, 2014). However, the Federal Government over the years has been claiming strong real GDP growth rate measuring at 6% or 6.5% since 2005 till date. This is apparently a paradox. A situation whereby, there is a decade of strong real GDP of 6.5% economic growth, and in the same period, unemployment rate continues to rise annually from 11.9% in 2005 to 19.7% in 2009, and over 37% in 2013%. The apparent economic growth has not led to economic development. The rate of poverty is still very high, the industries are still in shambles, technological development is still at rudimentary stage, income inequality is high, mortality rate and child mortality rate is high, and in fact, Nigeria development index is still very low (Asaju, Arome, and Anyio, 2014). Unemployment according to ILO, is among the biggest threats to social stability in many countries (including Nigeria), putting the global rate at 12.6% (ILO, 2012). The recent statistics by the World Bank has put the unemployment rate in Nigeria at 22 percent, while the youth unemployment rate is 38 percent. It has been shown that the bracket age of 15-35 years olds account for close to 60 percent of the Nigeria's population and 30 percent of the work force, and approximately 4 million people entered into the labour market every year.

Causes of Unemployment and Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta.

1. Environmental Degradation.

According to the World Bank, "there are five (5) great plagues of mankind: war, famine, pestilence, environmental pollution and death. The Niger-Delta is in the throes of becoming an environmental wastebasket. From the oil-spills to the round-the-clock gas flares and effluents from industrial wastes, the fragile ecosystem of the Niger-Delta is under constant assault. The unbridled exploitation of crude oil and natural gas beneath the lands of the Niger-Delta has caused indescribable and irredeemable ecological devastation of the Niger-Delta land. Environmental impact of the oil industry in the Niger-Delta of Nigeria results to land deprivation, soil quality alteration, destruction of aquatic ecosystem and air pollution lead to the formation of various ethnic groups that exist in Niger Delta.

2. Marginalization and Abject Poverty

The Niger-Delta communities have remained grossly socio-economically underdeveloped and pauperized amidst the immense oil wealth owing to systematic disequilibrium in the production exchange relationship between the state, the transnational companies and the people. Enormous money had been derived from oil exports but the area has been subjected to severe land degradation, socio-economic disorganization, increasing poverty, misery, military occupation and bloody violence. Oil extraction has impacted most disastrously on the socio-physical environment of the Niger-Delta oil-bearing communities massively, threatening the fragile subsistent peasant economy and bio-diversity, and hence, their entire social livelihood and very survival. The oil-producing communities have basically remained dependent and underdeveloped, persistently disempowered, socio-culturally marginalized and psychologically alienated. The wealth derived from oil resource exploitation and exports benefits directly only the operators of the oil industry and the bureaucrats in the government. The discovery of oil in the Niger-Delta region in 1957 triggered a chain of events that has led to the political and economic marginalization of the inhabitants. Despite over forty (40) years of oil production in Nigeria and

hundreds of billions of dollars of oil revenue, the inhabitants of the Niger-Delta region, especially the riverine (creeks), remain in abject poverty (Fidelis 2013). “Poverty level is about 80% while unemployment level is about 70%. They live without even the most basic amenities such as pipe-borne water and electricity” (Ibaba, 2001).

3. Destruction of Aquatic Ecosystem

A major environmental tragedy in the Niger-Delta is the waste of aquatic ecosystem. This aspect is quite significant to the people, being that it constitutes a grave threat to a hitherto economic hub of their lives and fishing. “It is a common sight that in the process of oil-exploration and production materials such as drill-cuttings, drill-mud and other fluids that are used to stimulate production are discharged into the environment and mostly end up in the streams and rivers” (Nwaomah, 2009a). “These chemicals are not easily degradable and the skimming of oil on the water surface hardly solves the problem since most of the oil might have sunk to the bottom of the water-surface leaving grave consequences such as surface and ground water quality deterioration in terms of portability, aesthetic and recreation; destruction and reduction of fish life and fishery production of the waters; destruction by acute and sublethal toxicity of aquatic flora and fauna of spills on water and benthic macro” (Okaba, 2005).

4. Soil Quality Alteration

Soil quality alteration is another environmental problem that the Niger-Deltans contend with as a result of the oil industry. “It is an environmental condition that is caused by a collection of oil-exploration and exploitation activities such as construction of flow-lines and trunk-line networks, terminals, digging of location waste-pits and barrow-pits, oil spillage either from equipment failure, human error, corrosion of pipes due to age and sabotage” (Nwaomah, 2009b). “It is estimated that as at 2002, about eight thousand, five hundred and eighty one (8,581) oil-spills involving nearly twenty-eight (28) million barrels of oil have occurred in the Niger-Delta” (Okaba, 2005). Other factors responsible for the soil quality alteration are the unceasing gas flares, drill-cuttings, drill-mud and refinery waste. “The harmful effects of these elements on the soil are unquestionable” (Nwaomah, 2009a). Owabukeruye (2010) argued that “the compounds from the numerous petroleum wastes contain organic chemicals such as phenol-cyanide, sulphide suspended solids, chromium and biological oxygen that leave destructive effects on the land and water”.

Government Position in Addressing Unemployment and Youth Restiveness in Niger Delta

The Nigerian state has not been too passive to the incidence of unemployment and the youth militia in the Niger Delta. Successive regimes have taken steps to address the crisis. However, the responses of the state and the oil companies to the agitation and demands of the oil producing communities have always ranged from double talk, unfulfilled promises and arm-twisting strategy (Ovwasa, 1999). Nigerian state has responded abysmally and has not handled the matter with the tact and finesse it required. For instance, Omotola (2006:3) contends that:

State response to the contradictions surrounding oil exploration and the development challenges in the oil bearing region has for long been a mixture of carrot and stick strategies through policy measures and coercion

State repression and violence have been a prominent strategy deployed mainly by military regimes in quelling the crisis in the region. Such repressive acts often involve the drafting of mobile police and the armed forces to the region, with the mandate to put such uprising under control to facilitate the smooth operations of the oil companies.

Fasure (2009,p.7):

The response of the military government to rights agitation, especially post Ibrahim Babangida regime, was military occupation and repression. By the time the military retreated in 1999, environmental rights and ethnic nationalism in the Niger Delta escalated and coalesced into violent agitation and protests against oil companies, usually manifested in oil platform storming, oil workers kidnapping for ransom and other acts of extortion from multinational oil corporation

The 1969 petroleum Act of General Yakubu Gowon allowed the transfer of all oil revenue on need basis but there was no special provision for the need of the minority of the people of Niger Delta in which the is oil generated from. Several other decrees by subsequent military regime increased the hopelessness of the people. The promulgation of 1978 Land Use Act vested the ownership and control of the entire land mass of the Niger Delta in the military governors who were representatives of the federal military government: at a time when Niger Delta oil fields were accounting for about 82% of the entire revenue of the nation. Not only that the people were excluded, the 1978 Land Use Act was a continuation of the damage to derivation principle and the second republic of Shehu Shagari slashed it to 5% before Ibrahim Babangida handed over to an interim government in 1993. The derivation principle had gross fallen to 3% as benefit to the oil producing countries.

So it was not surprising that by 1999 when Olusegun Obasanjo assumed office as the president of Nigeria, the Niger Delta was practically on the boil. The people were not happy. Values and infrastructures had deteriorated; the people had become restive and desired immediate intervention in their lives and the life of the region. The rate of poverty was scary. The people of the region had little or nothing to show for playing host to a multi-billion dollar a year industry. Worst still, environmental remediation measures were limited and negligible. Farms, streams and the whole environment were constantly under the threat of pollution. All these led to the springing up of ethnic groups, formed largely by the Ijaw and Ogoni, championing confrontations with the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies. The youths of the Niger Delta decided to take their destiny in their own hands (Olukorede, 2007). The gory yet gloomy picture painted above was what confronted Olusegun Obasanjo when he assumed power. Definitely, this nightmare could not be wished away.

Thus, when the Olusegun Obasanjo administration was inaugurated, one of its major actions was to see how to alleviate the crisis in the oil- producing communities of the Niger Delta. In 2000, the President implemented the 13 percent derivation as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution. In what seemed to be a major frontal attack on the festering Niger Delta problem, the federal government under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo initiated a bill to the National Assembly on the development of the Niger Delta. The National Assembly in accordance with section 58 (a) and 5 of the 1999 Constitution subsequently passed the bill establishing the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), after the president refused to assent to the bill. As it were, there was disagreement between the Presidency and the National Assembly on the funding of the Commission. The National Assembly claimed to have acted in the national interest by overriding the president in passing the bill. The remit of the Commission is to accelerate economic development and provide the much needed social infrastructures in the area (CDD. Org/resources/working papers/niger_deltaeng.htm). Indeed, the NDDC is charged with a clear mission: 'to facilitate the rapid, even and sustainable development of the Niger Delta into a region that is economically prosperous, socially stable, ecologically regenerative and politically

peaceful' (NDDC Act, 2000). Possibly to guard against the weakness of the OMPADEC, the NDDC Act provides for special bodies to supervise the activities of the Commission in order to avoid waste and corruption.

These bodies include the management committee made up of eight directors (a managing director) and a governing council, to give general direction to the management committee, an advisory committee made up of governors of member states of the Commission, to advise and monitor its activities (See NDDC Act especially section 2,3,4,9,11 and 19). The Commission is to be at the forefront in facilitating interaction among all development stakeholders and identifying priorities and approaches for Niger Delta development. Its responsibility for the sustainable development of the area confers on it, the onerous task of mobilizing resources, effort and initiatives to ensure effective coordination, and coherence. Implicitly, the NDDC also has monitoring functions to ensure that regulations and policies are observed and, it is its task to ensure that the process involved in its function is participatory and inclusive. Since inception the NDDC has embarked on systematic efforts to put in place enduring institutions and operational mechanisms which will consolidate its take-off, in order to prevent the mistakes of the past. A pointer to the failure of the NDDC could be seen in the caustic remark about the Niger Delta in 2006 Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) when it noted that:

“The Niger Delta is a region suffering from administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and service, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth, squalor, and endemic conflict”, (UNDP, 2006).

The Olusegun Obasanjo's government also responded to the quest for resource control in oil-bearing enclave of the Niger Delta in a number of ways. These include attempting to whittle down the agitation through constitutional arrangement. For example, to appear responsive to the yearning of the people in the Niger Delta, the Federal Government played safe and struck a compromise in the constitution. This was done by virtue of section 162(2) of the 1999 constitution, which gives back 13 percent of the monies generated from all resources to the various state governments in the oil producing areas. The reason for this concession derives not out of sympathy for the people in the Niger Delta, but possibly because of the ferociousness with which the youths in the Niger Delta were advancing their course. The federal Government has also responded to the crisis by way of blackmail, and by churning out misleading information to the public on the issues in contention. For example, the Authorities in Abuja portray the agitation and restiveness in the Niger Delta as synonymous to secessionist movement and that it is a threat to the corporate existence of Nigeria. Furthermore, legislators of the Niger Delta extraction are said to have been approached and advised to drop the issue of resource control if they want to be re-nominated for political offices they hold currently. While this claim is difficult to substantiate, suffice it to say that the *volte* face of some legislators from the Niger Delta on the issue would seem to support this contention. Remarkably, the onshore-offshore dichotomy imbroglio – a fall out from the resource control debate, remains to date an acrimonious subject.

This possibly explains why the federal government elected to use the legal approach as a response to the quest for resource control. As it were, the federal government filed a suit against the States on 6th February, 2001 for a determination of the seaward boundary of a littoral state within the federal republic for the purpose of calculating the amount accruing to the federation accounts directly from the state pursuant to the provision of Section 162 (2) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. As expected, the states at the forefront of the

agitation for state control of resources responded adequately by marshalling out their argument. In spite of the optimism of the state Governors, the Federal Government won the case. In their judgment, the judges opined that:

The seaward boundary of a littoral state within the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the purpose of calculating the amount of revenue accruing to the federation account directly from any natural resources derived from that state pursuant to section 162(2) is the low-watermark of the land surface thereof (if in the case of areas as in the Cross River State with an archipelago of islands) the seaward limits of inland waters within the state (Dafinone & Edewvie, 2001).

The implication of this judgment is that the littoral states are no more entitled to revenue from offshore oil exploration. The Supreme Court judgment was not totally a zero-sum one. Before the judgment, natural gas was excluded from the derivation principle – an action that has now been deemed unconstitutional. It is relevant to add that the judgment of the Federal Government control of offshore oil and gas revenue without any compromise and negotiation can only heat up the polity and further complicate matters. Ordinarily, it is expected that the devolution of power to the state in form of the control of their resources could facilitate ultimate deepening of democratic culture.

Possibly, according to Aghalino (2006), having regard to the impact of the Supreme Court judgment on some of the littoral states, especially those without onshore oil wells, and increase in tension in the region, a Committee headed by Chief Tony Anenih was set up to find a ‘political solution’ to the lingering issue. The Committee recommended a legislative intervention through the enactment of another law that would explicitly state that natural resources found offshore will be deemed to be found within the territory of the adjoining littoral state for the purpose of the application of the derivation principle. The Committee’s report must have prompted Obasanjo to send a bill to the National Assembly. In the new bill however, the President inserted a time bomb by including an ambiguous term- contiguous zone, which meant that the derivation principle would apply only to revenue from natural resources found in the contiguous zone of a state. But the National Assembly rose to the occasion by replacing contiguous zone with continental shelf and exclusive economic zone. This caused a stalemate as the President refused to assent to the bill.

But he made a detour because he wanted a second term in office and he desperately wanted the support of the Niger-Delta. According to Ojameruaye (2006):

Having an eye on the 2003 elections, Former President Obasanjo reached a compromise with the National Assembly by substituting ‘200 metres water depth isobaths’ in place of contiguous zone and re-submitted the bill to the National Assembly. The people of the Niger Delta had their reservation about the 200 meters depth isobaths, but the national assembly consented to the compromise

The Obasanjo administration in some rare instances waved the olive branch to the agitators in the Niger Delta. This was done by putting in place a number of committees to keep the peace in the region. These include: constitution of the Major General Ogomudia Security Committee on the Oil Producing Areas; constitution of the Governor James Ibori Presidential Committee on the Niger Delta, 2004; constitution of the Major General Muhammed Abdullahi led Presidential

Committee on Peace and Reconciliation in the Niger Delta with a special sub-committee to resolve the conflict in Rivers State; and the Niger Delta Peace and Security Strategy allegedly inspired by oil firms in the region (Ebiri 2006). It is difficult to assess the achievements of the plethora of committees aimed at tackling the restiveness in the region. What perhaps is not in doubt is that intentions by government are not in short supply. The multiple knee-jerk responses and proliferation of committees is a pointer to the fact that the government is yet to get its bearing right in taming the crisis in the region. Nevertheless, it may not be out of place to posit that the fire-brigade responses of the government so far to the issues in contention in the region is a manifestation of the little premium place on the region despite its economic importance to Nigeria. To ensure the sustainable empowerment of the people, the Calabar Export Processing Zone and the Onne oil and gas zone were established. This was possibly done by the government in anticipation of their multiplier effects in terms of employment generation and capacity building of local industries.

According to the Academic Associate Peace Work and Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (2004), to encourage indigenous participation, marginal oil fields were farmed out to state governments in the Niger Delta. The point was made earlier that the oil wealth of the Niger Delta would seem to be antithetical to the aspirations of the people. For one, it is more or less a curse. Again, any attempt to endanger the flow of it has always been met with brute force. Consequently, to the Federal Government, the advocates of resource control are viewed with suspicion and hatred – unnecessary distraction that must be crushed. Indeed, without any convincing evidence, the call for the resource control is seen as a call to break up Nigeria as it smacks of separatist tendency.

There has been a quantum leap in the national resources being devoted to the Niger Delta region. Recent distribution of revenue allocation to the state governments is most revealing. Based on derivation alone, in 2005, Bayelsa state received N6.4 billion, Rivers, N8 billion, Delta state, N15 billion, Akwa Ibom, N4.6 billion. However, the issue seems not to be how much as it is how much of a trickle down there is to the grassroots and its impact on the local communities in these states. It needs to be acknowledged that while the government has taken some remedial measures, including new revenue sharing criteria based strictly on derivation, the government is still flunking the litmus test of tackling the restiveness in the Niger Delta. The Obasanjo administration also tried to combat the Niger Delta crisis through the National Political Reforms Conference in early 2005. Some proponents of resource control decided to take the opportunity of the conference to address the issue. After a bitter and divisive debate, the conference ended on July 11, 2005. Among other things, the conference made the following recommendation on the Niger Delta issue:

An increase in the level of derivation from the present 13 per cent to 50 per cent. Cognizant of the need for national unity, peace and stability, they agreed to accept in the interim, 25 per cent derivation with a gradual increase to attain the 50 per cent over a period of five years. When it became clear that the president was not in a hurry to implement the recommendation, the militants resumed and intensified their attacks on oil installations and outright kidnapping of oil workers (Tanto, 2002).

The militants raised the stake of their agitation possibly because of the arrest and detention of Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, the leader of the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteers Force (NDPVF) and the impeachment of Dipriye Solomon Peter Alamieyesegha, the governor of

Bayelsa state in early 2005. The Obasanjo administration also initiated the Council for the Social Economic Development of the Niger Delta. The Council, which was likened to the United States of America's post World War II Marshall Plan for Europe entails several far reaching measures and is reportedly valued at over N20 trillion, most of which will come from the oil industry (This Day, Lagos, 18 April 2006; International Crisis Group, 2006). The programme, it is envisaged, will also create some 20, 000 new jobs for the locals. Another facet of the plan is the pledge by Former President Obasanjo to flag off the N230 billion (\$1.75 billion) highway- the long abandoned East-West road; the dredging of the River Niger; upgrading of the Petroleum Training Institute, (PTI), Effurun, Warri to a degree-awarding institution; establishment of a Federal Polytechnic in Bayelsa State by September 2006: rural electrification of 396 communities; water supply for over 600 communities, and appointment of an officer in the office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation to coordinate the various intervention programmes by all tiers of government and those of the oil companies and development partners. The idea of converting the Petroleum Training Institute to a Federal University generated a lot of controversy as people of the region failed to see the utility of the conversion when in reality they are clamoring for more federal presence in the region.

Due to vociferous opposition to the scheme, the Obasanjo administration jettisoned the idea and established full-fledged Federal University of Petroleum resources which have taken off at the PTI premises. The nuts and bolts of the Council initiative span nine core areas. It calls for addressing employment generation, transport, education, health, telecom, environment, agriculture, power and water resources. Of these, the employment component is the most critical and strategic since it puts money directly into the hands of the people. The plan also initiated a process by which the Nigerian military will absorb some 500 men and women from the region, up to the mandated 1,000 persons as from May 2006. Though not spelt out, it seems the spread is aimed at absorbing elements from the cadre of the various ethnic militias. In the light of the widespread concerns and acknowledgement that addressing youth's unemployment would be vital given its trickled down income generation capacity, the decision to immediately lift the embargo on police recruitment, thus facilitating the intake of 10,000 new recruits, is a salient one.

The creation of 1000 new positions by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), and recruitment of 7,300 National Certificate of Education (NCE) and University graduate teachers by the end of 2006, will go a long way in lifting the present unemployment pressure. The process by which the government arrived at the new policy remains suspect for now. It is noteworthy that the leading militia group in the Niger Delta, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), has rejected the initiative, thus leading one to suspect that the government took a quick approach without adequate consultation of all stakeholders concerned. Requiring serving State Governors to nominate the members seems senseless, given that it would be used as a patronage system (Hank, 2007). It took almost seven years before Former President Obasanjo launched the promised "Comprehensive Development for the Niger Delta". When he launched the plan on March 27 2007, two months to the end of his 8 -years rule," because of its timing or its doubtful motive, or both, the Niger Delta Regional Master Plan recently launched by the Olusegun Obasanjo administration did not attract the expected enthusiasm both from its target beneficiaries and their compatriots in other parts of the country" (ThisDay, Lagos, April 16, 2007). It would appear that, increasingly, it became clear that Obasanjo administration in its untidy succession plan could not but include the South- South in

its calculations if he was to bequeath a Nigeria that would be minimally governable (Amuta 2008: 56).

But the foregoing review notwithstanding, past approaches towards developing the oil region and resolving the issue of youth militia, according to Isumonah (2003)

“Bordered more on appeasement than any fundamental and systemic attempt at resolving the development contradictions facing the region. Attempts at managing the challenges of development through state policy have mainly been through the setting up of development commissions”.

This approach is what Ibaba (2008) refers to as “Management through the ideology of development commission”. Indeed, the setting up of Development Commissions on the Niger Delta dated back to 1958 when the departing colonial government set up the Willinks Commission to enquire into the fears of Minorities groups and the means of allaying them. A major recommendation of the commission was that a development commission should be set up for the riverine areas (Willink Commission, 1958).

Since the setting up of the Niger Delta Development Board, the idea of a development commission has become a recurring institutional policy measure for resolving the development challenges in the river line region. While the setting up of development commission remains an important policy measure yet successive regimes have put in place other policy measures directed at managing environmental and other development crisis in the oil bearing region.

President Umar' Yar'Adua assumed office in May 29, 2007 as the president of the federal republic of Nigeria and this offered fresh initiatives for the resolution of the Niger Delta crisis. It should be recalled that by 1998, there was a worst case scenario as epitomized by 92 attacks on the oil industry, which resulted in the fall of crude oil exports down to 1.6 million barrels per day. As noted by International Crisis Group, Shell was most affected by the militants attack on oil installations and confrontation with the military. The country lost at least \$23.7 billion to oil theft, sabotage and shut down in production in the first nine months of 1998 and about 1,000 people were killed within the same period (Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, Vol. 1, Nov. 2008: 9). By March 2009, production from its offshore business had plunged to 300,000 barrels per day (bpd) down from one million before the crisis in the region in 2004. The attack on Bonga, a 43.6 billion floating, production, storage and offloading vessel and deep water subsea facility, 120 kilometre off the coast and the attack on Atlas Cove woke the government to the frightening dimension of the crisis. The point to note is that within twenty four hours of the Bonga attack a major oil pipeline near Escravos in Delta State, belonging to Chevron, was also hit by the rampaging militants, it was clear that the conflict had gone beyond the *elbow*. Indeed, both incidents, which resulted in the loss of production of 225,000 and 125,000 barrels per day, respectively reduced the country's crude oil output by 345,000 barrels per day with dire consequences on the economy (Eni, 2008). Statistics compiled by the International Maritime Bureau for 2008 show 40 reported incidents on piracy in the Delta including 27 vessels boarded, five hijackings, 39 crew members kidnapped (International Crisis Group, 2009: 5). This situation threatened to place Nigerian waters second only to Somalia as the world's most dangerous. When in January 2009, gunmen attacked the M.T. Meredith, a tanker carrying 4,000 tons of diesel fuel, it was clear to the Nigerian state that the region was becoming the next Gulf. The Bonga attack coupled with these suggests that pirates 'have an increasing ocean going ability to threaten maritime energy assets' (Nincic, 2009).

To Yar'Adua, this deplorable situation was unacceptable and he appointed committees to take certain confidence-building measures to tame the Niger Delta monster. This thinking, as it were, was aimed at involving the insurgent groups in a dialogue with constituted authority. The main purpose for seeking this accommodation with insurgents is effectively economic rather than political, because the impact of continued instability and conflict in that region on the rest of the nation was becoming searing. As noted by WANEP (2008), the creation of the Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee, which mediated in peace agreements with militants in core states of the Niger Delta in December 2007, a visit to the creeks by members of the Senate and a huge budget allocation to the region in 2009 were some of the confidence-building measures (WANEP, 2008: It must be added also that the release of Asari Dokubo, the leader of the Niger Delta Volunteers Force, the 'Governor General' of the Ijaw ethnic nationality, the then Governor of Bayelsa state, D.S.P Alamiyesegha and Henry Okah, the supposed leader of the MEND were aimed at responding to some of the conditions set down by the militants (*Stephen, 2014*). The Yar'Adua administration donated 10 speed boats to some of the militants groups that participated in the signing of the peace agreement through the Bayelsa chapter of the Niger Delta Conflict Resolution Committee in December 2007. These boats were meant to be used for surveillance and monitoring of activities of criminals in the waterways. It is believed that making the militants part of the efforts to secure the Niger Delta waterways would ensure effectiveness as they understood the terrain better (WANEP, 2008). One other way the administration tackled the restiveness was to constructively engage the militants. In this direction, there was the desire by government to persuade the militants to form and register private companies that would be hired to provide security for pipelines and other oil industry facilities (Lewu and Salem, 2008). Although this initiative was heavily criticized, there is strong reason to believe that the use of militants as pipeline guards will guarantee security of the pipelines, put an end to armed conflict and provide jobs for the militants.

Other than the above, the administration established the Ministry of Niger Delta .The Ministry, created in September 2008, had a twin mandate of focusing on infrastructure and youth empowerment (Taiwo, 2008). Indeed, the Ministry possesses a great potential in assisting to address the developmental problem in the area. However, for this to be achieved, it is imperative that the Ministry must be well funded. The allocation of a paltry sum of money to the ministry in the 2009 budget did not portray the government as serious in using the Ministry as a purveyor of development in the region (Obiyan, 2009). If history is anything to go by, there is nothing to suggest that the newly created Ministry would perform any wonders as anticipated by the government. This is so because the bureaucracy in Nigeria has never been an engine of growth and national development. Instead, it has been a study in gross inefficiency, waste, graft, and national stagnation. Given this “making of a ministry as mechanism to addressing the long drawn developmental challenges of the region, at the risk of sounding monotonous, is a voyage of fantasy” (Nwokeoma, 2010).

The creation of the Ministry was received with mixed feelings. While some viewed it as a welcome development, others expressed their reservation over the duplication of institutions (International Crisis Group, 2009; Kogbara, 2008). There was hardly any guarantee that the newly created ministry would now perform the magic, which the NDDC could not do till date having been hamstrung by the twin factors of poor management and funding. President Yar'Adua also set up the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta headed by Ledum Mitee in September 2008 (Aghalino, 2008). The committee was made up of 45 wise men and women with sound knowledge of the terrain of the region, was to collate past reports on the Niger Delta issue and

advise the federal government on the way forward. According to the guidelines, the task ahead of the committee would not attract new research, field trips or lengthy debates but the bulk of the information would be found in existing commission reports, suggestions, recommendations and position papers (See the Report of Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, Vol. 1, November, 2009). At its inaugural meeting, the Committee elected former president of Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Ledun Mitee, as its chairman, while Nkoyo Toyo was elected as secretary. The committee publicized its terms of reference and consulted national and international experts and various important sources. The committee assembled and reviewed over 400 reports, memorandum and other documents from local, national and international stakeholders. Based on its analysis of these reports, it presented its report in three parts comprising compact with stakeholders in the Niger Delta, the second part laid broad themes and roles for stakeholders in a regional transformation agenda and the third part recommended that the federal government creates institution and mechanisms to, implement the compact and other medium term processes (Report on the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta: 52-61). The high point of the report is the recommendation of amnesty for militants within a comprehensive demobilization, disarmament and rehabilitation programme (Adeyemo and Adeyemi 2010). Prior to the establishment of the committee, the federal government had set up a steering committee of the Niger Delta summit and appointed Ibrahim Gambari, UN Under-Secretary as chairman. Gambari's appointment was, however, met with stiff opposition from the Niger Delta leaders, who accused him of expressing anti-Niger Delta views during the late Sanni Abacha regime. Gambari eventually offered to step aside from the summit, saying that he had become the issue as opposed to the issues the summit was to address. Government even changed the nomenclature to dialogue as some people in the Niger Delta were, opposed to the idea; expressing reservations that it was going to be a jamboree (Adeyemi, 2010).

MEND rejected the government's 45-man peace committee saying it is orchestrated and lacks integrity". The group believed that peace in the Niger Delta would be determined from the mangrove creeks and not from air-conditioned rooms in Abuja. It described the exercise as putting a cart before the horse. The rejection of the committee by MEND was further corroborated by the leader of the Niger Delta Youth Peace Movement, who claimed that the exclusion of youths from the committee made nonsense of the whole effort. Many people also believe that despite the criticisms that trailed the creation of the Ministry, the Yar'Adua administration, by bringing into reality a ministry to cater for the long neglected region, has taken what could amount to a giant leap for his administration and the country, if properly executed. The fear of those opposed to the creation was not unfounded if the attitude of government was anything to go by. Nevertheless, the creation of a special purpose ministry to handle the developmental challenges of the region at the ministerial level must be seen as a bold move by Yar'Adua and should be commended. What appeared to be a revolutionary approach to bringing peace to the Niger Delta was the initiation of the amnesty programme by the Yar'Adua's administration.

Conclusion and recommendations

It has been established from the afore outlined discussion that the collapse of the hitherto viable economy of the Niger Delta region was directly induced by the oil and gas exploration and exploitation activities of Multinational Companies, evidenced by the high incidence of poverty, unemployment, insecurity and violence that is easily identifiable in the Niger Delta region. These oil and gas exploitation and exploration activities have rendered the general environment agriculturally and economically unproductively, hence,

compelling an alternative means of livelihood to combat the poverty and unemployment menace.

1. One of such possible alternatives and potent remedy is for the government and oil and gas multinationals to collaborate and embark on an entrepreneurship empowerment scheme and create opportunities for gainful employment for the Niger Delta youths.
1. Government in order to strengthen more her interventionist programme in the Niger Delta region should ensure proper implementation of United Nation Environmental Programme(UNEP) reports which among other includes to create an Ogoniland Restoration Authority distinct from the existing institutions; create an environmental restoration fund; co-ordinate multi-stakeholder efforts; oversee institutional and regulatory reforms and ensuring that oil producing company adhere to the best practices in environmental management.
2. To ensure that government strategies in the amelioration of youth restiveness in the Niger delta region achieve the expected results, federal government should collaborate with relevant authorities in the Niger Delta region to ensure that there is strict compliance with the laws and policies aim at reducing environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and ensuring that there is a total implementation of their mandates.
3. Oil multinationals and host communities should work closely as partners to sustain the rehabilitation and development programmes targeted at the youth displaced or affected by environmental degradations. Before undertaking any developmental project, Oil Multinationals should involve benefiting communities in decision of projects that reflect their needs. Projects should impact on lives of the host community members and should address the damages caused by oil exploration and exploitations in the region.

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