

FLOOD AND POPULATION DISPLACEMENT IN THE NIGER DELTA

Okoye, Anthony Chukwuebuka

Department of Political Science & Strategic Studies
Federal University, Otuoke, Bayelsa State

Abstract

Over the decades the Niger Delta region, which occupies about 70,000 km² has been one of the most widely researched areas in the world. These scholarly attentions were focused more on such issues like oil spillage, gas flaring, environmental despoliation, resource control, derivation et cetera. Meanwhile, the region and its people had equally suffered neglect, want in midst of plenty, alienation, dehumanization, exploitation, marginality and seeming acts of state-sponsored terrorism that all resulted in militancy and the consequent amnesty deal. However, the region currently, faces another threat, this time in the form of flood disaster. It is therefore this issue and its impacts on the people that this study seeks to interrogate. The study adopts the structural-functionalism theory as its theoretical framework of analysis. In its methodology, the study made use of both the primary and secondary sources of data collection. It also made use of both the quantitative and qualitative descriptive methods of data analysis. The study observed that the incidence of flooding in the area usually leave a soared taste in the mouths of many people through population displacement, destruction of property and means of livelihood, impoverishment and death. The study therefore, recommends for the institutionalization of a proactive flood management regime in the area as well as the proper funding, mobilization and repositioning of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to enable it respond efficiently to incidence of flooding when and wherever it occurs in the region.

Keywords: Flood, Niger Delta, Population Displacement, Governmental Response and Relieve Camp

Introduction

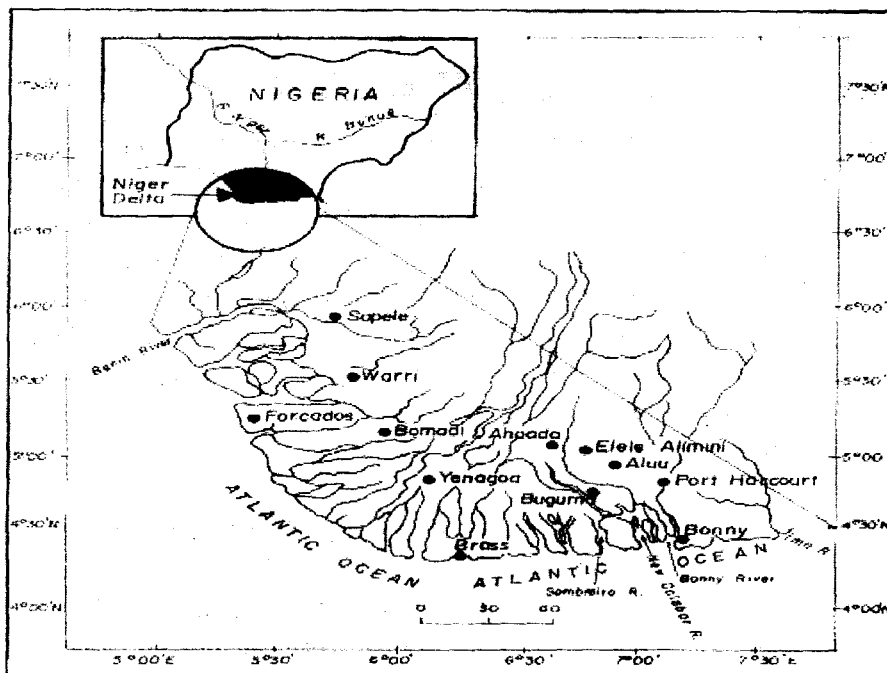
Flooding is the most common of all environmental hazards and it regularly claims over 20, 000 lives per year and adversely affects around 75million people world-wide (Smith, 1996). The reason lies in the widespread geographical distribution of river flood plains and low-lying coasts, together

Moreover, the significance of this study is such that it aims to educate the public on the existential threats posed by flood disaster to the Niger Delta people as well as possibly draw a road of policy actions for the Nigerian government towards mitigating and addressing flood hazards both in the region and beyond.

Area of study

The Niger Delta region lies between latitude 4° and 6° North of the equator and longitude 5° and 7° East of Greenwich. It is located in the Atlantic coast of Southern Nigeria and is the second largest delta in the world (Awosika, 1995). It constitutes one of the world’s largest wetland covering a total land area of approximately 70,000km² (Mmon & Igwe, 2012). Along the coast, the Niger Delta as shown in fig 1 Stretches from the Benin river in the West to Bonny river in the East, while in land, it begins a few miles below Aboh at a point where river Niger bifurcates into river Nun and Forcados into the Atlantic West at the South Stretching over 160 miles (Udo, 1975; Iyalla, 2001).

Fig. 1: Map of the Niger Delta



Source: Mmon & Igwe (2012:126).

defenses by the flowing water or alternatively, discharges by drainage beyond their bankfull capacity.

Imroa (2003) identified the causes of flood to include three atmospheric factors, namely rainfall excesses, snow and ice, and coastal factors. Brown & Cutchen (2000) observed that man is the real cause of flood. They noted that due to man's quest for fast money or his lack of understanding of how nature works, he tries to change the normal course that water follows across the land. Man builds dams, his home and factory in areas that are known to be in danger of flooding.

On their part, Odufuwa, *et al* (2012) observed that flooding is exacerbated by climate change and inadequate preparedness. They however, noted that flooding in most Nigerian cities is a major environmental challenge that has continued to defy solution as more peoples are rendered vulnerable to flood hazards.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the analytic framework of structural-functionalism, which is a derivative of the general systems theory of 'political' analysis. The major proponents of the theory are Almond and Coleman (1960) and Almond and Powell (1996). As an offshoot of the systems theory, the analysis of Structural-functionalism "is a means of explaining what political structures perform what functions in the political system (society) and it is a tool of investigation" (Ball, 1971:14). It characterizes a certain structure, that is, arrangements by which legitimate policy decisions are made, but with an eye to its functions in the whole context of social behaviour (Beer & Ulam, 1968:22).

The basic assumptions and postulations of the structural-functional framework are:

- ❖ It takes the society as a single, inter-connected system, each element of which performs a specific function. The basic feature of such a system is the interaction of its components for the maintenance of its equilibrium.
- ❖ If society is a system as a whole, it has parts that are interrelated. A social system has a dominant tendency towards stability that is maintained by virtue of built-in mechanism. If there are deviations or tensions, they are resolved. Thus, change in a social system is not sudden or revolutionary, but gradual and adjustive.
- ❖ Underlying the whole social structure are broad aims and principles that are observed by the members of the society (Johari, 2005:86-87).

In ex-post-facto designs the test of the hypothesis involves observing the independent and dependent variables at the same time because the effect of the former on the latter has already taken place before the investigation. Kerlinger (1977) defines the ex-post-facto design as a form of descriptive research in which an independent variable has already occurred and in which an investigator starts with the observation of a dependent variable, then studies the independent variable in retrospect for its possible relationship to, and effect on the dependent variable.

The study made use of both the primary and secondary sources of data. These were generated through observation, books, journal articles, official publications, magazines, newspaper and Internet material *et cetera*. The reason for this method is because the event had already occurred and the data (information) already in existence. Basically, the researchers purposefully isolated the three states of Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers for the study due to their high susceptibility to flooding events especially during the 2012 flood disaster.

Meanwhile, the data generated were analysed on the basis of both the qualitative and quantitative descriptive method of data analysis. Hence, we summarized the information generated in the course of the research verbally as well as presented some of the data in tables and pictorial representations for easy comprehension.

Results and Discussion

Causes of Flood in Niger Delta Region

According to the United Nation Environmental Programme (UNEP) flooding is one of the major environmental crises ravaging the universe within the century and the millennium. This is especially the case in most wetlands of the world. The reason of this is general rise in sea level globally, due to global warming as well as the saturated nature of the wetlands in Nigeria (Okonkwo, 2013).

Meanwhile, the incidence of flood had been attributed to a number of factors such as heavy rainfall, highly accelerated snow melt, sever wind over water, unusual high tide, tsunamis, or failure of dams, levees, retention ponds, or other structures that retain water (Okonkwo, 2013; Ezekiel *et al*, 2013). Again while Okonkwo (2013) noted that flooding can be exerbated by increased amounts of impervious surface or by other natural hazards such as wild fires, which reduce the supply of vegetation that can absorb rainfall; on the other hand Ezekiel *et al* (2013:175) observed that during times of rain,

Fig. 1: Flooded Community in Orashi – Rivers State



Source: Mmom, & Aifesehi, (2013:218).

Table 1: List of Local Governments and Some Communities affected by the 2012 Flood Disaster in Selected Niger Delta States

S/n	State	Local Government	Communities
1	Bayelsa	Yenagoa, Sagbama, Ekeremor, Kolokuma/Opokuma Ogbia and Southern Ijaw	Sagbama, Adagbabiri, Peretorugbene, Agbere, Ofoni, Ayamasa, Sabagriea, Igbedi, Famgbe, Yenaka, Ogu, Fortorugbene, Agbura, Aguadama-Epetiama, Oporoma, Ndoró, Peremabiri, Elemebiri, Asamabiri, Angalabiri, Opokuma, Odi, Kaiama, Biseni, Gbarantoru, Tombia Amassoma, Ekeremor, Isampou, Okoloba, Zarama, Koroama, Okolobiri, Opolo, Igbogene and Toru-Orua <i>et cetera</i>

Assessment of Official Response and Intervention on the Plight of the 2012 Flood Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The study reveals that in order to attend to the challenges of the 2012 flood victims the various state governments of the three selected Niger Delta states in addition to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and Nigerian Red Cross Society conducted rescue operations of various nature. For instance, some of the state governors purchased and hired speed and engine boats in its quest to rescue its citizens that were trapped by the flood; some other used fishing boats and any other means necessary and within their capacity.

Meanwhile, in order to relocate and resettle the flood induced displaced persons as well as provide them with shelter, the various state government and NEMA the federal agency charged the emergency response in the country established camps at various points for the flood internally displaced persons across these states. The table below shows some of the camps that were established in these states.

Table 3: Camps for the 2012 Flood Internally Displaced Persons in the Selected Niger Delta States of Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers

S/N	STATE	LOCATION OF CAMPS	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF CAMPS
1	Bayelsa	Bishop Demiari Grammar School, Samson Siasia Stadium Complex, Igbogene, UBE-Kiama, Tombia and Biker Camp	17
2	Delta	Ughelli Camp, Cavegina Primary School Camp –Warri, Oleh Camp, Institute of Continuing Education Asaba Camp, St. Patrick College Secondary School Asaba, Ashaka Relief Camp, Tuomo, Okwagbe, Aboh, Ossissa camp, Kwale camp, Ozoro camp, ogbe-Ijoh camp, Okpu-Elenchere Primary School	18
3	Rivers	Akinima CPS, Ogbo; CPS Okogbe; Canti High School, Ahoada;	Over 20

resources," he said referring to the N17.6bn donated to flooded states in the country which was not being reflected on the people. The complaints of accessibility of the recovery funds to the affected people were rife within the IDPs in the affected states.

Assessment of Life in the IDPs Relief Camps

The study revealed that the condition of life in most of the camps have nothing to write home about as the people had to battle with various sorts of highly deplorable and squalid conditions. Meanwhile, the analysis of the reports that emanated from these various resettlement camps indicated that they are not just over-crowded but grossly lacking essential facilities such as potable water, food, medications as well as filthy, stinking, smelling, unhygienic and prone to infections and diseases of all sorts. This was corroborated by the observations of Edukugho (2012:10) that "the challenges experienced by the displaced persons at the camps include lack of toilets, food insufficiency, electricity, possible outbreak of epidemic diseases such as cholera; malaria and also the metropolitan nature of the location which allowed many people not displaced to troop down for daily ratio of food".

Fig. 2: Flood victims at the Delta State Government rehabilitation camp in Oleh, set up for internally displaced persons during the sharing of clothes donated to the inmates.



Source: <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/10/lamentations-of-flood-victims-in-delta/#sthash.Oz1nFdgg.dpuf>

can easily detect and offer early warning advise to the people as way of limiting the impact such phenomena.

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