

## **MYSTIFYING DEVELOPMENT POLICY STRATEGIES IN THE NIGER DELTA: THE UNENDING MISTAKE**

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### **Abstract**

*The Niger Delta has been a centre of intense conflicts and violence. These conflicts and violence have necessitated the setting up of various intervention bodies to remedy the situation. These bodies include Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) (1958), the Oil Minerals Producing and Development Commission (OMPADEC) (1992), the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) (2000) and the most recent, Ministry of Niger Delta (2008). In spite of these measures, violence is on the increase coupled with the taking and use of hostages as a means of negotiation. It is in this direction that this paper seeks to investigate why the development efforts have not translated or impacted much on the lives of the rural people in the region. This paper asked a fundamental question of; what is responsible for the development crisis in the region? The exposed answer is that, the problems that besieged the Niger Delta intervention agencies since 1961 of NDDDB through OMPADEC to the present NDDC, was ill-managed by inefficient administrators. This article demonstrates how the state pursues the interest of the few Niger Delta ruling elites to the exclusion of the intended beneficiaries of the development. The consequences are the feeling of deprivation and alienation which is still persuasive till date.*

**Keywords:** Governance and Public Policy: Development, Oil, Instrumentalist, Theory, Niger Delta.

### **Introduction:**

The Niger Delta is an important sub-region in the Nigerian Federation. Since the colonial days, the region has always presented one problem or the other. The Henry Willinks Commission set up in 1958 identified the region as being poor, backward and neglected. This was the Federal Government's first reaction to the problem of the minority which it canvassed. The

recommendation of this commission was that, special attention should be devoted to developing the Niger Delta, but did not satisfy the yearnings of the people.

The discovery of oil in 1956 and its subsequent exploration created other problems of ecological degradation and pollution through gas burning, among others. The Federal government's second reaction was to establish the Niger Delta Development Board in 1961 to take care of these problems. The impact of this board was little felt. The special provision for enhanced derivation to revenue allocation was also made to provide additional revenue for the development of the area. But during the military regime of General Yakubu Gowon, up to the 1982 Revenue Act implemented by the Shagari led government, gave 1.5% special fund (as derivation benefit) to develop oil producing areas. The entire revenue allocation formula was modified by General Buhari's administration in 1984 via **Decree 36**, which reduced government share of oil revenue from 80% to 55%. 32.5 percent went to States and 10% to local governments (Sanya, 2006). Due to poor resource governance, no meaningful development could take place. This led to the agitation for resource control that late Isaac Adaka Boro and Kenure Saro-Wiwa laid their lives for. Unfortunately, all conscious efforts towards the direction of redress were met with repression from the Federal government.

### **Conceptualizing Development and Policy**

Development is the attainment of socio-economic advancement of an individual, a community, country, or part of it at a given point in time. The priorities or properties of the concept of development may include: increase in per capita income and its even distribution, availability of employment opportunities, increased supply of skilled manpower, development of infrastructural facilities, indigenization of economic activities as well as improved standard of living and stability, and diversification of economic activities, among others (Todaro, 2003).

A policy is a statement of action by an individual or government over its intentions to carry out certain actions or functions as defined. Public policy according to Ikelegbe (1994:4) is simply, governmental actions or course of actions, or proposed actions or course of proposed actions, directed at achieving certain goals. Friedrich (1975:111) also defined public policy as a proposed course of action of the government or one of its divisions. Leichter (1979:19) and Sharkansky (1975:10) agreed that public policy simply means a series of goal oriented actions taken by the government. Mlekwa (1976:147)

Marxist instrumentalist theory, therefore, draws attention to the connections between members of the Niger Delta ruling class and the key actors in the policy-making institutions of government in order to highlight that the state lacks independence or initiatory role since its power is entirely rooted in the economy dominated and controlled by the ruling class.

The Marxist Instrumentalist theory aptly explains the reason why the development efforts have not translated or impacted much on the lives of the rural people in the Niger Delta region. This theory helps to explain why Niger Delta ruling elites who are connected to the state are depriving most of the Niger Delta citizens their anticipated benefits.

### **Problems of Development in the Niger Delta**

The discovery of the "black gold" (crude oil) in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria in the mid-1950s by Shell (then SHELL d'Archy) had been a source of curse rather than blessing to the people. The continued exploration of the crude oil and its production in commercial quantities for export, have affected the rural peoples' conditions of living. As posited by some activists, the lives of the people have turned into a harbinger of misery, poverty and anguish (Fayemi *et al*, 2005). According to Edosomwan (2006), these problems are associated with regular oil spills, gas flaring by oil companies, inadequate compensations for damaged crops and land in the areas, no good hospitals, pipe-borne water, good learning facilities in schools, no modern road networks in the areas; no meaningful youth capacity building opportunities in terms of skill training and engagements (Amaize, 2006).

Therefore, Niger Delta struggles have been centered primarily on environmental degradation, over-exploitation and security problems. According to the Niger Delta Environmental Survey 2002, most Niger Delta villages and communities lack good roads, potable drinking water, and electricity supply even when they are near flow stations or tank farms, and health care system is still very low. The fight to correct these ills brought losses of many heroes and potential leaders.

### **Fiscal Federalism in Nigeria:**

The principle of federalism by its operational value is cooperation and understanding as a political system processor. The three tiers of government must interact with each other at various points of national developments through consultation and cooperation. To Enaruna (2005:228) revenue allocation is one of the problems of Nigerian government and administrations

areas). Buchanan further explained that, under fiscal federalism, an individual (here representing Niger Delta state) is subject to the influence of the fiscal operations of three levels of government. This he suggested will promote the efficiency in resource allocation. Resource Allocation to Nagel Stuart (1992) as cited in Imhalahimi (1998:27) is, the allocation of resources to all the activities (which includes all round development projects and programmes of the government) and places or units (oil producing areas in the Niger Delta) in the social formation, with a view to harnessing and equalizing the marginal rate return of oil production and exploration that is taking place in the region. J.E. Imhalahimi thus contributed that, an understanding from the above contextual definition reveals that the theory of resources allocation is a budgetary process involving many interests and group of actors (majorly the Federal government on policy plans). Absolutely, equal recognition with other needs without any special preference or marginalization is necessary.

#### **The Mystification of Development Processes in the Niger Delta Areas:**

The Niger Delta has a history of non-performing government institutions. Attempts by the Federal Government to address the problems of the Niger Delta date back to the formation of the Niger Delta Development Board in 1958 with the mandate to develop the region, funded with a 15% revenue contribution from the Federal Government. This was replaced in 1993 by the Oil Minerals Producing and Development Commission (OMPADEC). However, OMPADEC was scraped in 1999 for failure to achieve its development objectives. In the past, State and Local Governments have also been unable to implement sustainable solutions to the region's poverty. This failure was due in part to corruption, poor governance and lack of accountability. Communities, the supposed beneficiaries of the oil revenue allocations back to the region, have had little or no influence on the use or management of these funds. Clearly, the resources that have been made available for the development of the region in the past have not been used effectively. According to President Obasanjo, "the Niger Delta Development Commission was inaugurated to ensure a principled, coordinated and focused approach to addressing the peculiarities of the region. Here Akpofure *et al* (2000) contended that, not one of the administrations had deemed it fit to abolish obnoxious laws and decrees such as the Land Use Decree, the Petroleum Act of 1969, Mineral Act of 1948, Land and Title Vesting Decree 52 of 1991, the National Inland Waterways Authority of 1997, and other such draconian legislation that denies the people of Niger-Delta the right to own,

(2007:8) observed that, the federal government had identified underdevelopment and lack of infrastructure as the biggest cause of insecurity in the Niger Delta region. The expectation of many is that, when the federal government makes a prompt implementation of the Niger Delta master plan and sincere commitment to the execution of projects, Sara-Igbe (2007:45) agreed that the provision of infrastructures will stop Niger Delta crisis.

To this end, the federal government has jacked up the NDDC subvention to the tune of N76 billion for a space period of three years compared to its previous benefits of N176 billion received from 2000-2006 (Henry 2007:8). Nonetheless, the NDDC on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 2008, commissioned the first Phase N23 billion road project, that is, Bomadi-Tuomo road in Bomadi Local Government Area of Delta State. According to Timi Alaibe (2007:23), within the limited resources, the NDDC has commissioned 2,386 projects ranging from building, school programmes, hospitals, electrification, jetties, flood and erosion control, roads and bridges.

Complementing the efforts of the NDDC to infrastructural development in the region, the federal government had in 2007 as a renewed development support strategy in the region, approved the dualization of the East-West roads and rural electrification of 396 communities in the Niger Delta region worth N20 billion (*Vanguard*, 2008,11). Therefore, the expectation was that, all efforts in the developmental processes in the region by the stakeholders should be integrated for an acceptable all round development which will translate regional peace promotion.

#### **Development Policies without Developments:**

From 1961 to 2000, different boards or commissions were constituted to look into the "problems" of the Niger-Delta people and nothing substantive reflects such policy plans. History unfortunately refused to be corrupted or influenced. These Commissions include:

**Niger-Delta Development Board (NDDB 1961-1972)** was established by Section 14 of the 1960 Constitution to provide physical development for the Niger Delta Region. This section enjoined among other provisions essentially that,

1. There shall be for the Niger Delta, a Board which shall be styled the Niger Delta Development Board; and
2. The Niger Delta Development Board shall be responsible for advising the government of the Federation of Nigeria and the government of then Western Nigeria and Eastern Nigeria, with respect to the physical

management swooping of staff. Few rice-mill factories were set up by late Mike Okiro in Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State (formally under Rivers State). In short while, this effort turned a failed project as it lacked maintenance.

**Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC 1992-2000)** was established by the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida under **Decree No 23** of 1992. The purpose and mandate to the commission was to address the years of neglect of the Niger Delta region. **Section 2** of the Decree No 23 states the following objectives that the Commission shall:

- a. receive and administer the monthly sums from the allocation of the Federation Account in accordance with confirmed ratio of oil production in each state for the rehabilitation and development of all mineral producing areas, so as to tackle the ecological problems that have arisen from the exploration of oil minerals;
- b. determine and identify, through the commission and the respective oil mineral producing states, the actual oil mineral- producing areas and embark on the development of projects properly agreed upon with the local communities of the oil mineral-producing areas;
- c. consult with the relevant federal and state government authorities on the control and effective methods of tackling the problems of oil pollution and spillages;
- d. liaise with the various oil companies on matters of pollution control;
- e. obtain from the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation the proper formula for actual oil mineral production of each state, local government area and distribution of projects, services and employment of personnel in accordance with recognized percentage production;
- f. consult with the federal government through the presidency, the state, local governments and oil mineral - producing communities regarding projects, services and all other requirements relating to the special fund (derivation revenue);
- g. render annual returns to the President, Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces and copy the state and local governments on all matters relating to the special fund;
- h. advice the federal, state and local governments on all matters relating to the special fund;

would be in force until the commission satisfactorily accounts for the previous allocations made to it" (Adesina 2001:51).

**Niger-Delta Development Commission (NDDC, 2000-2008):**

In 2000, former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo submitted to the National Assembly a Bill for an Act to provide for the repeal of the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission Decree 23 of 1992. Among other things, the President's goal was to establish a new commission with a reorganized management and administrative structure for more effective use of the special funds it will receive from the federation account to tackle ecological and other related problems arising from the exploration of oil minerals in the Niger Delta areas. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Act was subsequently passed into law in 2000 that established the Commission. **Section 7** of the Act 2000 provides that: The Commission shall -

- a. formulate policies and guidelines for the development of the Niger Delta area;
- b. conceive, plan and implement (in accordance with set rules and regulations) projects and programmes for sustainable transformation of the areas including roads, jetties and waterways, health, education, employment, industrialization, agriculture and fisheries, housing and urban development, water supply, electricity and telecommunication;
- c. cause the Niger Delta areas to be surveyed in order to ascertain measures which are necessary to promote its physical and socio-economic developments;
- d. prepare master plans and schemes designed to promote the physical development of the Niger Delta areas and the estimates of the costs of implementing such master plans and schemes;
- e. implement all the measures approved for the development of the Niger Delta areas by the Federal Government and the member- states of the commission;
- f. identify factors inhibiting the development of Niger Delta area and assist the member-states in the formulation and implementation of policies to ensure sound and efficient management of the resources of the Niger Delta.
- g. assess and report on any project funded and carried out in the Niger Delta areas by oil and gas producing companies or any other company including non-governmental organizations, and ensure that funds released for such projects are properly utilized to tackle ecological and

From these reasons, one can substantially posit that, the intervention agencies' failures is partly linked to federal government's attitude and perception towards developing the region. This is in consonant with the attitude of Niger Delta State Governors whose share of derivation funds had not been properly used to promote the lives of rural people in the oil producing communities. This to a large extent explains the failure of the state governments in the Niger Delta to effectively utilize the trillions of naira allocated to them for development.

### **Conclusion**

Though, the Niger Delta River Basin Development Authority was established in 1976 by the Obasanjo regime (then) as military Head of State for same development purposes, the entire programme failed in objectives based on similar features of corruption and unseriousness among the board members like the Niger Delta development Board. Also in June 1992, the led government of General Ibrahim Babangida (Rtd), established another special development agency called the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC). OMPADEC also failed from its overall assessments, because it was bogged down by serial corruption and ineptitude. Although some projects were executed as detailed in chapter two, OMPADEC was later replaced with the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000 under the administration of former President Olusegun Obasanjo.

Though many governments have not been sincere in addressing the problems in the oil-producing areas, yet the little the government has done towards alleviating the sufferings of the people in these areas, failed with a particular reference to OMPADEC. This may have aroused by lack of commitment, inadequate funding, over politicization of policies and appointments, lack of clear focus on the part of the government and its agencies. What is of utmost essential is that, eminently qualified and tested technocrat (not politician) with proven professionalism in project delivery and public works management. Somebody who has a thorough appreciation of the problems to be addressed and the correct level of transparent commitment, level-headedness and morally stable in administration is required to serve all interest groups fairly and without bias. The strong political will on the part of federal government to transform the region with sustainable development programmes is required.



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