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## Youth restiveness and violence in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: Implications and suggested solutions

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### Abstract

The Niger Delta is a region in Nigeria endowed with enormous natural resources of which petroleum oil is the most exploited. This petroleum oil has been the engine of development in Nigeria since 1958, providing more than 90 percent of total exports (CBN, 1981) and over 80 percent of Federal Government revenue. Despite this, the Niger Delta people remain poor and underdeveloped. Youth restiveness and violence is the order of the day. As a product of two separate youth forums, this paper recommends good governance, youth impact assessments, youth inclusion in decision-making, as well as capacity building as a way out of this discord.

### 1. Introduction

Every country in the world is concerned with the safety and well-being of its youths. They represent our future and our potential, but are also extremely vulnerable. Youths are more likely to be victimized and are more frequently involved in delinquent behaviour and breaking the law than all other age groups in society (Shaw and Tschiwula, 2002). In the Niger Delta Region, the term 'youth' not only connotes age but social exclusion, economic disempowerment, and political disenfranchisement – a situation which has escalated especially since the structural adjustment reforms of the 1980s.

Social and economic changes in Nigeria over the past two decades, which are incidental to petroleum oil exploration and exploitation, as well as concomitant physical and environmental problems, have had a marked impact on the lives of youth especially in the Niger Delta Region. There is growing youth unemployment, stark poverty, increasing income disparities between the

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wealthy and the poor, capitalist economic policies and the virtual exclusion of all sections of youth populations living in the Niger Delta areas from the increased prosperity experienced by others. In the past two decades, there has been significant increase in youth activism, restiveness, and violence. The background of this lies in attempts to control the resources of the Niger Delta Region and fighting marginalization sustained at the hands of the ruling class in Nigeria. This article therefore examines the incidence of youth restiveness and violence in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. This will be achieved by:

- (i) Looking at the background to youth restiveness and violence in the Niger Delta Region;
- (ii) Assessing the causes of youth violence in the Region; and
- (iii) Examining the implications and suggesting solutions for youth violence in the Niger Delta.

## 2. Clarification of Concepts

Youth, as noted above, represent an active group (those 16 - 30 years of age) who are deemed more adventurous and impressionable at this stage and prone to extreme behaviour (Etuk, 2003). By virtue of the energy in them, youth are more likely to take any form of risk and are easily prone to violence. There is no universal agreement on the causes of escalating youth violence, but inequality and social exclusion have been identified as two of the most significant factors. Offending and victimization among youths are often highly predictable and closely linked to the outcome of a variety of circumstances and experiences in the lives of the youths, which can lead to serious consequences as they grow up.

According to Shaw and Echiwula (2002), three terms are commonly used to distinguish between three groups of youths, namely: youth offenders; youths in conflict with the law; and youth at risk. Youth offenders are those already subject to the criminal justice system, having been found guilty and sentenced. Youth in conflict with the law, a broader term, includes those reported to the justice system but not prosecuted, those reported to the police, and those charged with offences and found guilty. Youth at risk, those whose circumstances, lifestyle or behaviour puts them at risk of offending in the future. Youth at risk are a distinctly separate group from those already in conflict with the law. McWhiter *et al* (1998) defines the concept of 'at risk' as "... a set of presumed cause-and-effect dynamic that place the youth in danger of negative future events ... at risk designates a situation that is not necessarily current, but that can be anticipated in the absence of intervention."

There is no widespread agreement on factors that place youth at risk of offending. In South Africa, for example, the following risk factors for violence in schools have been identified (university of Cape Town, 1999):

- (i) poverty, poor environment;
- (ii) harsh, erratic parenting;
- (iii) poor supervision;
- (iv) early aggressive behaviour;
- (v) parental conflict, family violence;
- (vi) lack of facilities or jobs; and
- (vii) poor schooling, truancy, exclusion.

Factors (i), (vi) and (vii) readily apply to the Niger Delta situation. Accumulated experience demonstrates that when good programmes are targeted at areas most at risk, there is a reduction in violence, crime and social problems (ICPC, 2001).

## 3. Study Area

The area referred to as the Niger Delta Region was limited to the geo-political zone occupied mainly by the minorities of southern Nigeria, which currently comprises the six States of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers. But in recent years, the Niger Delta Region was redefined and enlarged to include all nine contiguous oil-producing states. The new States of Abia, Imo and Ondo were therefore added to the original six. Today, the Niger Delta people form the largest group amongst the ethnic minorities spread over the south-south geographical zone of the nation. It has a population of over 7 million people distributed in over 1600 communities.

The region has some unique characteristics, which tend to make development difficult. It is, for instance, one of the largest wetlands in the world. It covers an area of 70,000 square kilometers and is noted for its sandy coastal ridge barriers, brackish or saline mangroves, fresh water, permanent and seasonal swamp forests as well as low land rain forest. The whole area is traversed and crisscrossed by a large number of rivers, rivulets, streams, canals and creeks. The coastal line is buffeted throughout the year by the tides of the Atlantic Ocean while the mainland is subjected to regimes of flood by the various rivers, particularly the River Niger. By this, the Niger Delta Region is the second largest delta in the world and the largest wetlands in Africa. The Delta is home to an extraordinary variety of people, mostly fishers and farmers with a proud history and cultural heritage.

The Niger Delta Region is also the main center of oil production activity in Nigeria and therefore the center of Nigeria's economy, accounting for more than 90 percent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and more than 80 percent of government revenue (CBN, 1981). The major oil companies operating in the region include Shell, Chevron, Exxon Mobil, Agip, Elf, Texaco etc. Given Nigeria's status as a major oil producing country in the world, events in the Niger Delta have a strong impact on the global economy.

#### 4. Study Procedure

This paper is the product of an interactive/stake holder workshop on Governance, Environment and Development in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The interactive stakeholder forum, which took place on 29 January 2003 at the University of Uyo, Nigeria, marked the commencement of a six-year collaborative, interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary linkage programme between the University of Uyo, Nigeria and Lancaster University, U.K, funded by the British council and the DFID.

At this forum, attention was concentrated on paper presentation by resource persons and academics; policy statements from multinational and project agencies in the Niger Delta; experience sharing by stake-holders and individuals; position papers by NGOs and organized groups; statements by key officials in Federal and State agencies; and interview, questions and answer sessions. Representatives to the workshop were drawn from NGOs; multinational oil companies; state and federal agencies; and local government authorities and individuals. The outcome of the workshop was very useful for building this paper.

The paper also draws strength from a one-day youth workshop, sponsored by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), on youths and the protection of developmental projects in the Niger Delta held on 24 April 2003 at Ikeri, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The workshop was a very stormy one and featured speeches, position papers and questions and answer sessions. The youth participants acted in representative capacities and there, their various needs were highlighted. The representatives of the NDDC also presented facts, clarified issues and answered some questions. The facts derived from the Workshops constitute points for analysis.

#### 5. Background to the youth activism and intervention programme in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta problem is rooted in the faults in the Nigerian system. Scholars of Nigeria's political development observe that the Federal Constitution of Nigeria suffers from two fundamental and destabilizing flaws (Onduku, 2001). The first is the division of the country into three unequal regions, with the population of the size of the northern region alone exceeding that of the two southern regions put together. The second flaw involves the political and demographic domination of the northern, western, and eastern regions, being the majority ethnic nationalities and the attendant marginalization of the minority ethnic nationalities that comprise approximately one-third of the population of each region. The Niger Delta people form the largest group amongst the ethnic minorities spread over the south-south geo-political zone of the nation today.

Political history reminds us that the Niger Delta Region predates Nigeria's emergence as a British colony by at least a decade. Britain's Niger Delta protectorate and the Niger Delta coast protectorate were already well established by the mid 1890s before further British interests led to the formation of southern Nigeria in 1900. In the decades before Second World War, many Niger Delta communities had their own local leaders who distinguished themselves in the service of their people while serving the British. But it was only as a result of the Arthur Richards Reforms of 1946 that regional representation became important in British colonial arrangements. The people's experiences with the treacherous British policies served them well in the leaders who emerged to represent them in the late 1940s (<http://www.waado.org/NigerDelta/Essays/Resourcecontrol/Onduku.html>)

It was agitation by the Ijaw Rivers People's League that led to the creation by the British of the Rivers Province in 1947. It was here and during this period that the Niger Delta Congress was founded by the young Harold Dappa Biriye to fight for equality for the disadvantaged people of the Niger Delta. He later represented the Niger Delta in the London Conference of the Minorities and the report of the Willink's Commission in 1958 described the Niger Delta as a "poor, backward and neglected region."

At Nigeria's independence in 1960, the injustices against the Niger Delta people prompted Isaac Adaka Boro, the young radical nationalist, an Ijaw born revolutionary and master campaigner of resource control to champion a revolt against the oppressors of the people of the Niger Delta to effect a change of the environment so that "man can be man." On February 23 1966, he landed at Tontoubau, a sacred forest in Kaiama town in the present Bayelsa State in the riverine areas of the Niger Delta with one hundred and fifty-nine comrades to

launch a guerrilla war against the then Federal Military Government. Earlier in January 1966, Boro had proclaimed the Niger Delta Peoples Republic with himself as Head of State. He engaged the Nigeria Police Force in a bloody battle and defeated them, but the Armed Forces of Nigeria went into the war and Boro and his men held up the Federal troops quite a while before he was defeated on the 12<sup>th</sup> day. This rebellion has today become known in political history of Nigeria as the Twelve-day Revolution.

By popular perception, the marginalization and balkanization of the peoples of the Niger Delta, the despoliation of their environment and the resultant conflicts have their roots in the discovery of oil, exploitation, exploration and production activities by the oil multinationals in the late 1950s. Despite being the richest geopolitical region in terms of natural resource endowment, the Niger Delta's potential for sustainable development however remains unfulfilled, and is now increasingly threatened by environmental devastation and worsening economic conditions. Particularly threatened is the mangrove forest of Nigeria, the largest in Africa and sixty percent of which is located in the Niger Delta. Also facing extinction are the fresh water swamp forests of the Delta which at 11700km square are the most extensive in West and Central Africa and the local people depend on this for sustenance.

Incidental to and indeed compounding this ecological devastation is the political marginalization and total oppression of the people and especially the denial of their rights, including land rights. In spite of the enormous wealth accruing from their land, the people continue to live in pristine conditions in the absence of electricity, pipe borne water, hospitals, housing and schools. The late environmentalist and minority rights crusader, Ken Saro-Wiwa summed it up by describing the pitiable situation of his 500,000 Ogoni people in the Niger Delta to have been consigned to slavery and extinction. The internationalization of the Ogoni case in the 1990s committed a global audience into the Niger Deltans plight.

Demands for more equitable and privileged treatment by the oil-producing minorities of the Niger Delta, as well as struggles by them and other minorities to redress power imbalances in the country which makes them internally colonized people are not new. The Niger Delta communities have been protesting the injustices peacefully for decades and they have been in the vanguard focusing on the "national question" as a problem. Notwithstanding the Ogoni uprising from the early 1990s and the consequent execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa on 10 November 1995 by the Federal Military Government, the military invasion of Ijaw communities consequent upon the Kaiama Declaration and the Odi direct action of 1998 to 1999 marked a new interesting dimension of oil politics in Nigeria.

The parties in the conflict do not involve only the Federal Government and the Niger Deltans but also the oil multinationals. In sum, the grievances of the Niger Deltans have involved three closely interrelated but analytically distinct issues. Firstly, that all laws relating to oil exploration and land ownership be abrogated; secondly, the issue of natural resource control and self-determination; and thirdly, that appropriate institutional and financial arrangements should be put in place by the Nigerian nation state and the oil multinationals to compensate the oil producing communities for the developmental and environmental problems associated with oil exploration and exploitation ([www.waado.org/NigerDelta/Essays/ResourceControl/Onduku.html](http://www.waado.org/NigerDelta/Essays/ResourceControl/Onduku.html)).

The conflict has therefore been made further complex by the goal-blocking behaviour practised by the parties. The government continues to marginalize the people, militarising the area, suppressing intellectualism, for example, by the killing of Isaac Boro, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Professor Claude Ake and the countless numbers of promising youth activists. The locals have now opted for hostage taking, hijacking and kidnapping of expatriate oil company workers and the demand of ransom, and the repeated invasion and blockading of oil installations. In 1993 for instance, it is claimed that the operations and activities of Shell were disrupted by about a hundred communal disturbances (Onduku, 2001). The oil companies despite all of this continue to invest in oil exploration in the Niger Delta and have at most times been linked to equipping the Federal military for the militarisation of the Niger Delta. In all, the government wants to continuously maintain the region for revenue purposes and the oil companies have refused to remove from the region in spite of the several ultimatums given to them by civil groups. The Niger Delta people have now become more organized in their demands for the development of something that has been denied them for a long time. This goal-blocking behaviour has set the stage for violence mostly masterminded by youths. According to Onduku (2001), the whole conflict has been compounded by the cultural patterns of the people. The people consider their land to be sacred, for it is the source of their subsistence and income, and it also links the living to the dead. This too is reinforced by a refusal to accept change, pride, and confidence in supernatural deities.

It is of interest to note that the peculiarities of the Niger Delta problem attracted the developmental attention of even the colonial masters which was later carried over by the Nigerian government at independence in 1960. In the colonial days, her Majesty's Government set up the Sir Henry Willink's Commission to recommend the best strategies for the development of the region which has the most difficult terrain in the country. When the commission turned in its report in 1958, it specifically recommended that the Niger Delta region ~~deserve~~

special developmental attention and should, therefore, be made a special area to be developed directly by the Federal Government. It is pertinent to state that this was before crude oil, which is abundant in the region, became the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. Based on the commission's report, the Federal government established the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) in 1960 to cater for the unique developmental needs of the area. The NDDDB was moribund before the outbreak of the civil war seven years later. After the civil war, an omnibus body called the River Basin Development Authority was established not just for the development of the Niger Delta, but for the whole country. This was a negation of the developmental ideas for the Niger Delta as contained in the Willink's Commission's report.

At this time, the Niger Delta region was already producing crude oil which accounted for a large chunk of the nation's foreign exchange earnings. For their enormous contribution to the national purse, the people in the region continued to agitate for the restoration of the Willink's Commission's dream by requesting special attention to be paid to their developmental needs. This later led to the setting up of a Presidential Task Force which devoted 1.5 percent of the Federation Account to the development of the Niger Delta Region (NDDC, 2001). This, again, did not make much impact on the region's development, though it lasted from the Shehu Shagari civil era to the earlier years of the Ibrahim Babangida military regime.

As a result of the growing restiveness in the area, Babangida set up the Belgore Commission to, among other things, identify the root causes of the incessant communal clashes and disaffection in the oil producing areas and to suggest the best way forward. The commission recommended the establishment of a developmental agency for the region to ameliorate the problems that arise from oil production. This led to the establishment of the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1993.

More than its predecessors, OMPADEC appeared better established to make some impact on the development of the region. However, it was to suffer a number of faults, namely: lack of a master plan that would define its developmental objectives and strategies, inadequate funding, official profligacy, and an unfavourable political climate. Though its projects spread throughout the region, it was to suffer an untimely demise, with a great deal of unfinished projects in its wake. The failure of all these development intervention agencies worsened the economic woes of the people, as well as the environmental and ecological degradation of the area. This was mainly because of the intensified activities of oil prospecting companies which adversely affected farming and fishing – the predominant occupation of the people of the region. Incessant oil spillages and years of gas flaring impacted negatively on the environment,

thereby making the inhabitants to demand for remediation and prevention strategies to resuscitate the rich ecosystems of the Niger Delta.

The long years of neglect and deprivation, coupled with the insensitivity of some previous government and oil companies, as well as the failures of previous development intervention agencies, had created by the late 1990s a volatile atmosphere characterized by protest, agitation and communal conflicts. By 1998, the Niger Delta Region had become a lawless zone, where youths disrupted oil production activities at will and communities frequently engaged, with little provocation, in destructive inter and intra-community strife (NDDC, 2001).

This was the scenario when President Olusegun Obasanjo made his first campaign visit to the region. He then made a promise that when he became president, he would establish a programme that would deal urgently and fundamentally with the developmental needs of the Niger Delta and bring sustainable prosperity and peace to the area. Following his election and inauguration as president on May 29, 1999, President Obasanjo made good his promise. Within two weeks of his inauguration, the president sent to the National Assembly, a Bill to establish the Niger Delta Development Commission as the agency to implement a programme for the sustainable development of the Niger Delta Region.

The NDDC is not set up to replace the state or local government. The President Olusegun Obasanjo reiterated this when he said:

The Niger Delta Development Commission has the potential to offer a lasting solution to the socio-economic difficulties of the Niger Delta Region which successive governments have grappled with even before independence in 1960. The commission is an agency and one of the stakeholders in the development of the Niger Delta Region. Its activities do not preclude other federal government development programmes that are normally due to the states. Nor is the NDDC intended to inhibit local initiatives that are the normal responsibilities of state governments, local government and local communities. The commission is not to take over constitutional responsibilities of any tier of government in the region: the federal ministries and agencies will continue to carry out projects in the region, just as States, the local governments, the oil companies etc. (President Olusegun Obasanjo, 1999)

Apart from the above specific programmes, the Niger Delta Region has also benefited from general government development programmes. For instance, since independence in 1960, the government of Nigeria has adopted several

developmental and poverty alleviation measures to transform the predominantly rural areas of the country to stem the tide of rural-urban migration. The creation of the local government councils in 1976, and afterwards, as the third-tier of government was to ensure rural development. Between independence and 1980, the following development programmes which were tied to the Land Use Decree and River Basin Development Authorities were created (Ekpeyong et al, 2003). They include Farm Settlement Schemes, Agricultural Extension Services, Nigerian Roots and Cereals Production Programmes and Operation Feed the Nation. At post-1980 other rural development programmes which appeared more properly focused and conceptualized emerged to include the Directorate for Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI), Better life programme (BLP) and the Family Support Programme (FSP). The chief objective of such rural areas-based programmes was to improve the quality of life and standard of living of the rural populace. The activities to realize the above objectives spanned from the provision of rural infrastructures (feeder roads, electricity, water and sanitation, housing); promotion of rural industrialization; to enhancing the living standard of rural women through the empowerment, development and the promotion of family well-being.

As stated already, states in the Niger Delta benefited immensely from the aforesaid programmes. In addition, many of the multinational companies operating in the region have also contributed to infrastructural development in the Niger Delta.

What may be deduced from the above discussion is that, by now, all these organizations and their development programmes should have left a considerable positive impact in the Niger Delta. However, this is not the case. The problem we have in the Niger Delta today is that of stark poverty, persistent conflicts and youth restiveness (Ukpong, 2003; Ekpenyong et al, 2003; Etuk, 2003; Akpabio, 2003).

## 6. Youth restiveness and violence in the Niger Delta: the causes

Youth violence is a concern in the Niger Delta Region. At the forum on youth and the protection of development projects in the Niger Delta, there was agreement that certain factors put youths at risk of offending, among them, poverty, a poor environment and a lack of facilities, along with a range of social factors. Youths who are denied a sense of belonging and opportunity within their communities are more likely to seek these within the framework of violence. At the two forums on the Niger Delta, it was in consensus that youth violence was the last resorted consequence of marginalization, the breach of agreements, the incorrect policies of government and oil multinationals and

extreme cases of insensitivity on the part of the government of Nigeria and the oil multinationals operating in the Niger Delta Region. For instance, in April 2002 the Supreme Court of Nigeria ruled (in a suit brought by the Obasanjo administration against the States in the oil region) that the federal government had exclusive control over all revenue from offshore oil and gas operations. This was in the face of agitation by states in the oil region for more control of revenue form resources derived in their area. Youth groups in the Niger Delta were alarmed by the trend. Their fear was that after decades of environmental degradation and impoverishment due to oil activities, the Federal Government and oil multinationals were preparing not only to deny their states potential revenue, but also to abandon them to their fate. Various youth groups such as the Ijaw National Congress (INC), the Niger Delta Youth Movements (NDYM), Ibom Allied Congress (IBAC), Afi Waad Ekid, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), The South-south People's Conference (SSOPEC), and Akwa Ibom State Youth Council, among many others (at village, clan, local government, state and regional levels), issued statements condemning such a concealed abdication of responsibilities to the region.

According to Africa Action (the Human Rights Watch group), the incidents of violent protests and the disruption of oil activities by militant youths, which had declined over the past years, appeared to be on the rise again. For instance, in June 2002 after the Supreme Court ruling militant youths boarded a rig working offshore for oil giant (Chevron Texaco) and held hostage nearly 90 foreign and Nigerian workers to back their demands for jobs and amenities. The youths released them three days later. Consequently Chevron Texaco was forced to shut down several oil wells in Imo and Delta States, where a number of communities laid stringent conditions (including the provision of jobs and amenities) before they would allow the company to operate in their area ([www.africaaction.org/docs/02/nig0207b.htm](http://www.africaaction.org/docs/02/nig0207b.htm)).

Popular opinions in the oil region were re-echoed at the Niger Delta Stakeholders/Consultative forum by participating Youth representatives. This opinion goes back to the early years of independence, when groundnuts produced in the North, cocoa produced in the Southwest and palm oil from the Southeast, were the main foreign exchange earners for Nigeria. Produced respectively in the lands of the Hausa, the Yoruba and Igbò, the three biggest ethnic groups in the country, their regions had absolute control over these resources. Regional control over resources was reduced after the military took over government in 1966, first to 50 percent in 1970, and a few years later further down to 45 percent. In 1977, Obasanjo as military ruler further cut back regional control of resources to 25 percent. Under subsequent military governments it dropped eventually to one percent. With the agitation of minorities from the oil region, it has since risen to three percent and then 13

percent approved by the 1999 constitution (see also Adenikinju, 2002, www.lppanigeria.org).

An analysis of the fiscal revenue allocation formula among states in the Niger Delta from 1954 to date reveals serious cases of inequity and a lack of fair play. Table 1 below shows the evolving Criteria for revenue allocation among states in Nigeria. Population and equality are the major criteria for resource allocation in Nigeria. Other criteria, though of lesser importance, are land size, internal revenue effort and social development. The dilemma facing policy makers though is how to balance the need to compensate resource owners against the need to reduce disparity in development (Adenikinju, 2002).

Since 1993 when the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) was established, derivation has ceased to feature as a horizontal principle; and it has become vertical with the revenue accruing to it controlled by the Federal government (Adenikiju, 2002). However, as Egwaikhide and Aregbeyen (1999) argued, this method and the process of arriving at it violate the twin principles of equality and fairness often stressed by fiscal federalists.

**Table 1**  
**Criteria for revenue sharing amongst Nigerian States, 1960-1999**

Criteria	Shares (%)			
	1954-59	1969-80	1981-89	1990-1999
Population	-	50	40	30
Need	-	-	-	-
Balance development/equality	-	50	40	40
Derivation or Contribution	100	-	-	-
Land area	-	-	-	10
Social Development	-	-	15	10
Internal revenue	-	-	5	10

Source: Adapted from Ikporukpo (1996)

In whatever definition the revenue sharing statistics in Table 1 above conveys, the oil and resource endowed minority ethnic nationalities of the Niger Delta is still placed at a disadvantage in favor of the three major ethnic giants in Nigeria.

When President Olusegun Obasanjo decided to appropriate a 13 percent derivation (entrenched in the 1999 Constitution) to states in the oil-rich Niger Delta Region, politics set to further deprive the people of benefits accruing from their God-given natural resources. The South-south people's Conference (an advocacy group for the Niger Delta Region) testified to this when it accused the Federal Government of a 'neglect' of the area in preference for other regions of the country in terms of development. The group cited the ecological fund

disbursement and the withholding of 40 percent of monies accruable to oil-producing States through the 13 percent derivation fund. The group stated:

"In the disbursement of ecological funds for example, the Lagos Bar Beach Project and ogunpa rechannelization project both in the South-West alone have taken more than what has been disbursed to all the projects in the whole of the South-south." (Newswatch, 5 May 5 2003)

It is instructive to note here that a 2 percent allocation from the Federation account is given for ecological funds, of which 90 percent should be channeled to address the ecological problems of the Niger Delta Region.

So far, the Federal Government has released about ₦215.6 billion to the government of the South-south states in terms of revenue derivation from oil production. This represents 60 percent of the total revenue accruable to the states (Newswatch, May 5, 2003). What happens to the remaining 40 percent or ₦143.74 billion of the derivation fund "withheld by the office of the Accountant-General of the Federation?" The money was meant for the states even before the April 2002 Judgement of the Supreme Court on revenue derivation. This ₦143.74 billion represents the outstanding 40 percent of derivation funds to the South-south states from January 2000 (when President Obasanjo decided to pay the 13 percent derivation) to April 2002 (after the Supreme Court Judgement on resource control) (see also Newswatch, 5 May 2003).

Despite the wealth of resources available in the Niger Delta, its people remain impoverished and oppressed. Socially and economically the Delta community is underdeveloped, scoring low on virtually all measurements of the development index. The precious ecosystem that supports the agricultural and fishing industries is being adversely affected by oil industry practices that result in numerous oil spills per year, frequent petrol fires, pervasive pollution and deforestation. The government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the oil Multinationals remain insensitive to all these. This act of insensitivity is the basis of community oil multinational pacts. At the Youth Forum in Eket, the majority of the Youth leader representatives expressed their resentment at the wanton breach of agreements by oil multinationals between them. From their discussions, it was deduced that pacts of that nature always center on employment, award of contracts, infrastructural provisions and inclusions in activities of any oil-related organization upon which they have an agreement. Breach of such agreements breeds restiveness and violence. On 7 April 2003, the News (a weekly news magazine) had this caption about the Niger Delta: "Angry Youths close down Total fina ELF flow station". The story read:

The Total Fina Elf Flow Station located at Ogbogu on Ogba/ Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State was shut down by angry youths on Tuesday 17 March, who operate under the umbrella of Egi producing Families Youths Association. The Egi communities are the hosts of rich oil and natural gas that feed the multi billion dollar Nigerian liquefied Natural Gas in Bonny Island, Rivers State. The protesting youths who chanted war songs, seized some of the company vehicles and barricaded the entrance gate of the flow station of the company, accusing the multinational Oil Company of breaching the agreement it entered into with the community in July 1999 and December 2001. The agreement relates to employment, provision of social amenities, human development and the protection of the host communities' environment... The protesting youths vowed that the flow station would remain shut until Elf petroleum implemented the agreements both parties earlier entered into.

Another in the series of insensitivities by oil multinationals manifested when on 29 April 2001, oil blew out in Ogoni, spilling massive quantities of crude oil into the environment and destroying the economic life wire of the people (which is embedded in fishing and farming). Shell (the owner of the oil well) could not respond to arrest a potentially dangerous and life-threatening situation, or to disseminate sufficient information to the community of the ongoing efforts to address the situation. The community became restive and uneasy due to perceived inaction by Shell. The general feelings by members of the concerned communities are summed up by SEEN (2001) as follows:

When spills or blowouts occur, these are not investigated by international standards, nor are compensations assessed by international standards. Instead, bags of money are given to individuals who work for themselves, and never the communities. Shell is well aware that these are greedy and selfish people, and that these monies do not get to the persons who are entitled to them, yet Shell chooses to use them as middle men to the communities, possibly because certain persons within the Shell hierarchy receive kickbacks from these individuals, so, prefer to pay the monies to them out of selfish interest, or, that Shell simply does not care what happens to the communities from whom it makes its huge profits... Shell always manages to bring communities to loggerheads by unequal allocation of what it calls relief materials and monies during crisis such as oil spills, blowouts, or fires.

On a large scale, Shell's community relations policy is not working for the people it is meant for. It provides fish ponds and the pollutes them with oil; health centers with no equipment or relevant staff; classroom blocks with no textbooks or teachers; bags of rice and beans, which now and again lead to jealousy and encourages disputes between communities that intermarry and live less than 3 – 5 kilometres apart. It claims that it builds tarred roads, but more

often than not, these roads only lead from one Shell facility to another Shell facility in communities and are intended primarily to facilitate Shell's business. If such a road happens to cut through 1, 2 or more communities, then Shell has successfully constructed umpteen kilometres of tarred roads and brought development to the lives of the people of A, B and C community (SEEN, 2001). From the complaints of the communities it is clear that Shell is still not as sensitive, and as responsive as they ought to be to the host communities and the environment.

Cases of insensitivity of this nature have always reinforced youth restiveness and militancy in the Niger Delta forcing the government and the oil multinationals to 'beef up' and sponsor military presence respectively in the region. Such was the case during the popular Kaiama declaration which demanded an immediate withdrawal of oil exploration and exploitation activities in the Ijaw area. The violence that followed this declaration led to a state of emergency in the Niger Delta. It was all blood and tears in the Ijaw communities of the Niger Delta as the Nigerian State bombarded the region with her military might. For instance, in the Opia community (an Ijaw settlement) in the Warri North Local Government Area of Delta State, Human Rights Watch reported that a helicopter claimed to be owned by Chevron carrying Nigerian soldiers landed and set the entire village ablaze with many local killed.

Experience in the Niger Delta has shown that this direct military response only serves to aggravate youth restiveness and violence, as this excerpt from the Punch Newspaper captioned: "Niger Delta to get resistant movement" shows. The report went on to state:

A group of activists from the Niger Delta Area has concluded plans to form a resistance movement to fight for the autonomy of the area and control its resources... Lagos lawyer and rights activist, Mr. Festus Keyamo...said that the movement would be known as Armless Revolutionary Council (ARC) and would be made up of young men across the Niger Delta (The Punch Newspaper, 23 December 2002, p. 5)

The problems of the Niger Delta Region appear too hydra-headed. At the two consultative workshops, the youths were in agreement at pointing out the problems of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) which is meant to alleviate the numerous problems of the people of the region. They raised issues of "politicking" surrounding the NDDC's empowerment programmes, awards of contracts and some minor cases of appointments. In appointments and awards of contracts, the youths complained that patronage is given to relatives of political faithfuls and people who have owned big business empires



to the detriment of the intended beneficiaries (the poor). They also complained that project targeting is often done to favour areas where highly placed government officials come from even if such area does not need such project. In Akwa Ibom State alone, the NDDC claims it has 140 projects but out of which 40 are ready for commissioning (Ukot, 2003). The same number of projects are quoted for other states in the Niger Delta. These projects, according to NDDC, range from electricity, roads, water, schools, etc. Where are these projects located? In Akwa Ibom State, for instance, how could those projects exist when there are many infrastructurally backward and ecologically devastated local government, for example, Ini, Ikono, Etim Ekpo, Ibiono Ibom, Itu, Nsit Atai etc. (see Akpabio, 2003). This confirms the earlier statement that these projects are targeted where there is little need for them. At the youth forum at Eket, almost 90 percent of the youths asked questions regarding the awarding of contracts and the transparency of the processes.

The federal government of Nigeria is not helping matters. It seems as though the Niger Delta people are "refugees in their own camps." It seems that all draconian laws and decrees in Nigeria are directed at oppressing the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta Region. For instance, the Land Use Decree of 1978 vested the ownership and control of all land in Nigeria on the Federal Government. As a result of this Act, the interests and concerns of the Niger Delta communities are placed beneath those of oil corporations and the Nigerian treasury, which limits communities' abilities to make their own decisions about their surroundings (read Oyeshoda, 1995, 66). Flowing from the above are the following questions: how just is the 1978 Land Use Decree? And can the people of the Niger Delta whose environment is being polluted by the government or its agents or collaborators demand a commensurable compensation and a halt to a further damage to the environment?

To add to the above draconian decree are existing decrees that discourage protest and muzzle the press. Most of these decrees have direct impact on communities in the Niger Delta. For example, the state security Detention of Persons Decree No. 2 of 1994 empowers the President or Inspector-General of Police to arrest and detain any person for a period of three months, renewable on grounds of an ambiguous "in the interest of the State" clause. It has an ouster clause that allows no court in the land to entertain the matter. This Decree was used comprehensively under the former military rule – General Sani Abacha. The Special Petroleum Offences Miscellaneous Decree makes tampering with any oil or gas installation an offence punishable by life imprisonment. This means that anyone who enters an operating area on land or climbs aboard oil platforms in protest can be punished by life in jail, with no option of bail, even if unarmed and non-violent. Even more draconian is the Treason and Treasonable Offences Decree of 1993, popularly known as "Ken

Saro-Wiwa Decree." The Decree states that any person "who utters any word, displays anything or publishes material which is capable of breaking up Nigerian or part thereof; causing violence or a community of section thereof to engage in violence against the community or against another community, is guilty of treason and liable on conviction to be sentenced to death." Ken Saro-Wiwa was hung by General Abacha on 10 November 1995, along with eight other Ogoni activists, after actively championing the cause of the Ogoni people, and making Shell's anti-environmental practices an international issue. These Decrees effectively muzzle the press and disallow civil society to protest, while empowering the police, military and oil companies to ignore concerns from communities, imposing a detrimental effect on the system of checks and balances vital for a healthy democracy. They also directly contribute to the further exploitation of the people and land of the Niger Delta by multinational oil corporations (see [www.essentialaction.org/shell/report/section4.html](http://www.essentialaction.org/shell/report/section4.html)).

## 7. The implications of youth restiveness and violence in the Niger Delta Region

Youth restiveness and violence in the Niger Delta has many implications not only for the people but also to general Nigerian society. In all cases, violence in the region leads to widespread killing and maiming, the destruction of property, the displacement of people, the suspension of economic activities, and the loss of the means of livelihood. Presently, the Niger Delta problem and consequent youth restiveness is a threat to the nascent democracy and the stability of Nigeria as a country. The response of government has always been to deploy the military forces to maintain peace when restiveness is suspected. Often times this has served to worsen the situation. In some instances, political and economic considerations have taken precedence over the welfare concerns of the citizens in the Niger Delta Region. The youths have alleged that there is no definite effort by the government to ensure that the oil companies and their joint venture partners improve the living conditions in the operating communities, as they were required to do by law. In other cases, there has been outright government inaction or a belated response.

The youth were also unanimous in voicing concerns about the extent to which they feel excluded from their own resource-endowed environment. The youth considered that violence was not only an economic phenomenon motivated by the desire to get money from the authorities concerned but also a type of initiation process to being accepted and considered in decisions that concern their welfare. They need empowerment and inclusion. Recently the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) started a long-term skill acquisition and self-sufficiency programme and about 46,960 youths in the Niger Delta

Region are to benefit from this programme. This was advertised in the Punch Newspaper (31 March 2003, p. 7). However, the majority of youths in the Niger Delta do not have access to daily newspapers to read because of poverty. At the forum, most of the youths complained they were not aware of this advertisement. By implication, the core-poor youths (those who do not have access to information or money to scout for information) will not benefit, except the children of the rich and well-connected. It is a fact that most cases of youth restiveness and violence are perpetrated by the core-poor and idle youth. Ironically, the youths' efforts to escape from poverty also damage the very projects that have been set up to help them. In their struggle to survive, they protest and this leads to the destruction of schools, health centres, roads, water and other utility systems. This scenario has persisted for quite a long time.

### 8. Summary and suggested solutions

This paper has carefully examined a whole range of issues that youth in the Niger Delta Region feel dissatisfied with and which have been the bedrock of violence and restiveness. The youth cite injustices, oppression, deprivation, marginalization, exclusion, insensitivity, breach of agreements, and a lack of attention as an explanation of their behaviour. The parties to their problems include the federal government of Nigeria and the oil multinationals. The paper has proved to the contrary the popular expectation that the oil-rich but underdeveloped Niger Delta would become more stable and less volatile with the inauguration of civilian democratic rule in 1999.

Often, the federal government of Nigeria, in an attempt to respond to the needs of the Niger Delta Region and people, embark on certain developmental projects. Most of these projects fail even at conception and according to Ukpong (2003) the following factors are held responsible by experts:

- (i) Top-bottom approach to issues rather than bottom-up, stakeholders driven approach. This approach involves policy decisions and implementation being handed down to the lower level without due consultation with the communities;
- (ii) Lack of partnership among stakeholders has affected the delivery of development projects. Segmented stakeholders groups that hold diverse opinions mainly for selfish reasons have adversely affected the sustainability of projects because of the application of the syndrome of "theirs", "they" and "ours" which arbitrarily define areas of responsibility that are in reality non-existent. The notion is, "if it does not belong to

me, then it is really no interest of mine what happens to it" (Ukpong, 2003);

- (iii) Implementation of projects through contractor/government machinery who inflate prices, underpay labour, or discriminate in labour recruitment matters to the detriment of the local economy or workforce. These aspects have been the wheels on which protests and agitation have been driven using the agency of youth throughout the Niger Delta area;
- (iv) Careless execution of projects (to maximize profit) leads to short-lived projects that decay after a period of time; and
- (v) Shallow funding, particularly a lack of post project maintenance funding has resulted in failed projects and a lack of continuity.

In the light of the above and relying on the experiences of the youths, this paper suggests the following solutions to youth restiveness and violence:

- (i) The Federal Government of Nigeria should carry out immediate "Youth Impact Assessment." This should seek to ensure that all practices and development and other relevant policies developed and employed by the community leaders, oil multinationals and government are assessed with respect to their impact on the youths. This is necessary because in most parts of the Niger Delta, the "Elders" hold sway in everything as a matter of tradition and culture and the youths are expected to be seen and not heard. They are expected to give unquestioning obedience to the Elders who in turn are not transparent and exemplary in their conduct and relationship with the youths especially with regards to matters of economic opportunities. As a result, the youth continue to be poor while the Elders become richer;
- (ii) Youths inclusion should be institutionalized. The ultimate goal for participatory initiatives is to make it standard practice to include youth. There are a number of mechanisms to achieve this end:
  - (a) The appointment of youth representatives at levels of decision-making, including budget decisions in oil companies, government and village councils); and
  - (b) Similar staff positions in agencies and organizations whose work affects youth.
- (iii) Effective and result-oriented capacity building. As the NDDC institutes a yearly skills acquisition and capacity building programmes, it should not rely on putting information/advertisement on newspapers only. It should go beyond that to different ward levels and get the registers of

unemployed youth and target their programmes. That is the most direct approach. The selection criteria for intended beneficiaries should also be transparent and open at each ward in the Niger Delta; and

- (vi) The government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria should revisit all relevant laws, decrees and policies that tend to marginalize the oil-rich under-developed Niger delta. Indeed, the solution to the problem of the Niger delta region today lies in good governance.

## 9. Conclusion

The problem of the Niger Delta today revolves around bad governance and lack of good corporate-community relationships. The urgent question of our times now is building the capacity and strengthening the capabilities of youth through economic empowerment and inclusion in decision-making. The NDDC should be strengthened to respond to these goals, rather than being seen as conduit for enriching contractors and political supporters. In projects planning and implementation, the participation approach, whereby the youths are properly consulted and incorporated, should be encouraged. Finally, all possible sources to youth restiveness and violence in the Niger Delta Region should be resolved so that the region can witness lasting peace and stability.

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