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Governance and communal conflicts in a post-democratic Nigeria: A case of the oil-producing Niger Delta Region

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The Niger Delta Region of Nigeria is the store of Nigeria's crude oil, which accounts for a substantial part of Nigeria's revenue and exports. Despite this, the people remain poor, marginalized and restive. Resort to conflicts is the only way of expressing grievances in oil-rich communities in the Region. The conflict situation has been alarming since the present democratic dispensation in 1999. Most studies on conflicts in the region have not actually addressed the issue of inter and intra-communal clashes in relation to oil resources and Governance. The study sets out to address this through stakeholder meetings. In the result, various forms of communal conflicts were identified as inter or intra community conflicts or community against Governments and oil multinationals. The sources of these conflicts were mostly linked to struggles for sharing oil benefit, absence of standard practice among oil multinationals, Governments and competition for power. Implications of these were discussed with useful recommendations.

Key words: Governance, oil exploration, communal conflicts, Niger Delta, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria had been under the British Rule until 1960 when it got her independence. Since independence, it has been one experience of military intervention and the other. The country has had four transitions to civil rule programmes. The first programme was that of the Mohammed /Obasanjo regime, the second was the subverted military disengagement programme of the Babangida's administration, the third is the transition leading to the May 1999 democratic experiment of the Obasanjo and Atiku led administration; while the fourth is the transition that ushered in the present administration led by Alhaji Umaru Yar'Adua in May, 2007.

Nigeria is frequently categorized as a "deeply divided society" divided both by religion (a predominantly Muslim North and predominantly Christian South) and by ethnicity (experts estimate that Nigeria contains between 250 and 400 distinct ethnic groups including three major players: the Yoruba, Hausa and Ibo). Minority issue

becomes the greatest socio-economic and political problem in the country. One sub-national minority group that forms a recurring decimal at local, national and international political arena is the Niger Delta region. The Niger Delta Region is the store of Nigeria's crude oil, which accounts for approximately 90% of Nigeria's revenue, providing more than 90% of total exports (CBN, 1981).

Given its position as the foundation of the Nigerian economy, the Delta Region has always been a source of concern to the government of Nigeria. Demands for local autonomy and resource control by the locals have occupied the centre stage of Nigerian politics. Such demands got more pronounced and enhanced during 1999 when Nigeria made a landmark transition to democratic Governance. With the laying of democratic foundation came the promise of granting a degree of local autonomy and control (which implied local benefit from local resources). Such prospects of local autonomy and resource control have greatly increased competition for political control of such areas and the economic benefits they promised. Ellsworth (2000) observed that in the Niger Delta area, the economic competition brought

about by the potential for political control over economic resources has fractured society along three faults. First, it has pitted local political interests over the derivation formula – how much of the oil profit falls in local government coffers compared with that the National Government takes. Second, it has pitted local political interests against each other over which local government controls oil resources and therefore has a right to any revenue the National Government allows them to keep. Third, there is a violent schism between the oil producers (Multinational Corporation and their Nigerian workers and security personnel) and the local inhabitants who feel they possess the land but have had no claim to the oil profits. These have set the stage for all forms of activism, struggles, restiveness and violence.

Given the sharp rise in communal conflicts accompanying democratization and given the degree to which many of the conflicts are directly linked to Governance and democratic competition over representation, economic assets and code of law, it is important to examine the interconnectedness of democracy, Governance and communal conflicts in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. This is expected to offer a better understanding of the link between Governance and resource struggles. Most studies on conflicts in the Niger Delta have not actually addressed the issue of inter and intra-communal clashes in relation to oil resources and Governance. This study attempts to address these issues. The study intends to achieve this through the following approach:

i. Examining the concept of Governance and its application in the local community contexts in the Niger Delta region.
ii. Discussing the Niger Delta with specific reference to physical and socio-economic background as well as environmental degradation.
iii. Looking at the various Governance factors that promote communal conflicts in the current democratic Nigeria.
iv. Discussing the implication of observed findings with appropriate recommendations.

Governance as the deciding factor of communal conflicts in the Niger Delta

Governance as a concept has become a useful tool for understanding human and societal organization. According to the UNDP (2001), Governance is the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. Governance relates to the broad social system of governing, which includes, but is not restricted to, the narrower perspective of Government as the main decision-making political entity. According to Rogers and Hall (2003) there is no single definition of Governance and different approaches may be followed.

The authors observed that some may see Governance as essentially preoccupied with questions of financial accountability and administrative efficiency. Others may focus on broader political concerns related to democracy, human rights and participatory processes. There are also those who look at Governance with a focus on the match and mismatch between the politico-administrative system and the ecological system or in terms of operation and management of services.

Governance involves the manner in which allocative and regulatory mechanisms are exercised in the management of resources (natural, economic and social) and broadly embraces the formal and informal institutions by which authority is exercised. The new term for discussing this combination of formal and informal institutions is distributed Governance (Kooiman, 1993). There is a profound political element to Governance, which involves balancing various interests and facing political realities (Rogers and Hall, 2003). This implies that politics defines the agenda and prioritizes issues. In all ramifications, this is very important for economic, social and environmental outcomes. These are key elements that matter most in a given society and the degree of inclusiveness, accountability, transparency, predictability, responsiveness and participation determines whether the Governance system is good or bad. According to Rogers and Hall (2003) poor Governance leads to increased political and social risk, institutional failure and rigidity and a deterioration in the capacity to cope with shared problems. Some analysts have shown that there is a strong causal relationship between better Governance and better development outcomes such as higher per capita incomes, lower infant mortality and higher literacy (Kaufmann et al., 1999). Effective Governance is thus essential to poverty reduction as it can help the poor to help themselves. Poor Governance is a barrier to development and hurts the poor through both economic and non-economic channels, making them more vulnerable and unable to adapt to changes.

Current question that Governance attempts to answer, borders on whether a society can co-ordinate and manage itself. This is the essence of distributed Governance. It looks at co-ordination and the various forms of formal and informal types of State/society interactions and the role of civil society and policy networks. This according to Rogers and Hall (2003) is more society-centred and less "Statist", with Governance systems providing the power balance, recognition of course that political power are derived essentially from economic resources and instruments.

Governance has become a useful tool for understanding and addressing questions of equity in the distribution of

amenities, sharing of o resource benefits as well as responding to environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, Nigeria (Rogers and Hal. 2003 . To conceive of a just society is to conceive of two key principles namely, need and equality (Engeset. 2007. The need question relates to the basic and inexcusable human needs (UN-WWAP, 2003; UN. 1977). The principles of equality demands that people must be treated as equals in a political community in their position as citizens and they must have equal political, legal and social rights. The equality principle is mostly entrenched in constitutional provisions and it is very important if the minority question is to be effectively addressed in development and resource allocation (Miller, 1999).

Issues of equity are broadly located in resource management and development. Of recent, emphasis on sustainability has become the key word with respect to intra-generational, inter-generational and · distributional equities (Haughton, 1998). It concerns for the right of future generation is widely understood as the inter-generational equity principle while its emphasis on meeting the present needs through elimination of poverty is understood as intra-generational equity. The third issue, a recent concern, border on distributional or geographical equity (Haughton, 1998). Bullard (1990, 1993) (Haughton, 1998) looks at geographical equity as the way in which the location of communities and their proximity to non desirable land uses, such as toxic waste incinerating plants, landfills and sewerage works, is not randomly configured but instead tends to link to social equity concerns about who lives and works in the most environmentally disadvantaged areas. Haughton looks at geographical equity in broader perspectives, not just in a way in which environmental "disamenities" such as pollution are distributed, but also environmental assets, in particular the issue of inequitable access to environmental resources. Haughton went further while quoting Curran (1997) by saying "geographical equity is also used here as a term which embraces consideration of how structural geographical inequities are constructed, including the use of national political boundaries and bounded legal systems to restrict legitimacy to those outside these boundaries. The resultant entrenched processes of political, economic and social exclusion are profoundly important in devising policies for sustainable development as transboundary environmental issues rise to the fore, raising issues of reciprocal rights and obligations for people impacted on by distant decision making processes" (Curran, 1997). When sociological issues such as race, ethnicity, class, culture and political power on resource allocation decision making are brought in, geographical equity then becomes much more relevant and related. This is because certain groups tend to be disadvantaged in terms of resource allocation decisions and policies. To underscore this point, the 1996 Report of the United Nations Development Programme

states that distributional equity is at the heart of economic development (UNDP, 1996). Unequal access is not only inequitable; it can also do tremendous damage to national integration and unity.

Equity as a Governance tool could be used to understand how the differential availability of the fruits of economic development among populations in different Nigeria's area units is distributed. Who gets what amount of environmental resources and why? Which region or community should have access to how much resource in a given time? These and related questions are very crucial in daily Governance decisions bordering on allocation of oil benefits and wastes and equally concerns with the issue of the "fairness" with which rules, regulations and assessments are made and enforced (Haughton, 1998). This paper attempts to address these issues in the Niger Delta oil-rich region of Nigeria.

Nigeria's Niger Delta Region

General physical and socio-economic backgrounds

The area referred to as the Niger Delta Region was limited to the geopolitical 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 (Figure 1).

Today, the Niger Delta people form the largest group amongst the ethnic minorities spread over the South-South geographical zone of Nigeria. It has a population of over 45 million people distributed in over 1600 communities (NPC, 2006).

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 km^2 and is noted for its sandy coastal ridge barriers, brackish or saline mangrove, fresh water, permanent and seasonal swamp forests as well as low land rainforest. 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 history and cultural heritage.

Oil resource exploration and environmental issues

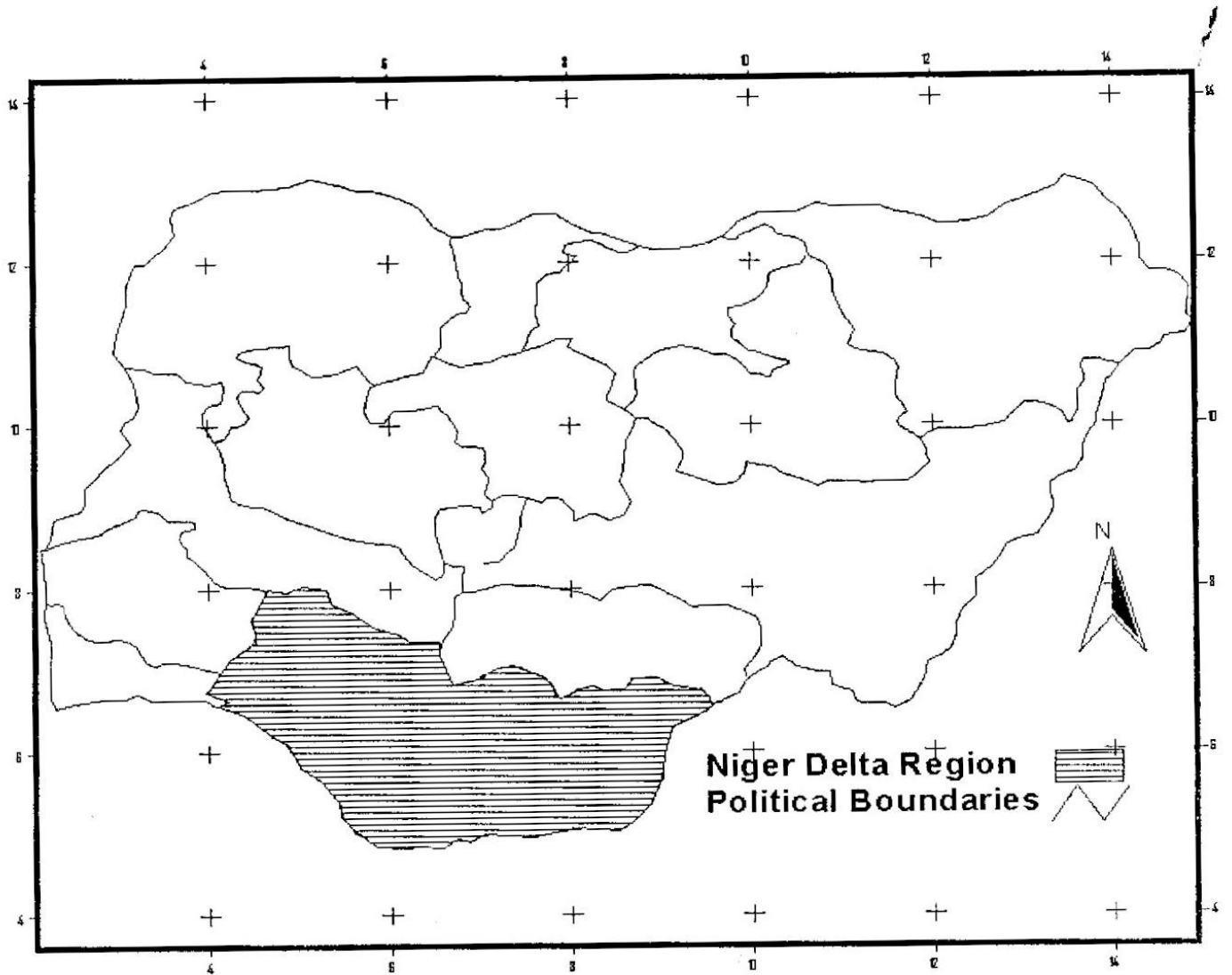The Niger Delta Region is also the main centre of oil

Figure 1. Map of Nigeria showing the Niger Delta.

producing activity in Nigeria and therefore the centre of Nigeria's economy, accounting for more than 90% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and more than 80% of government revenue (CBN, 1981). The major oil companies operating in the Niger Delta are as summarised in Table 1.

Petroleum was discovered by Shell-BP in 1956, following half a century of exploration. Oil production became important in the 1960s, but the Biafra conflict and civil war between 1967 and 1970 delayed further expansion. The main reservoirs are located in and around the Niger Delta, in both on-shore mangroves and shallow off-shore basins and since 1990 exploration has increasingly moved to deep, offshore areas. Unclear boundary demarcations in the Niger Delta have caused disputes among local communities relating to several

strategic areas. Wunder (2003) observed that Cameroon and Nigeria both claim zones on and off the Bakassi Peninsula and ownership of the Zafiro oil field is disputed with Equatorial Guinea. Shell continues to be the most important company, but it has been joined by a series of other multinationals over the years (Table 1).

Despite being the richest geopolitical region in terms of natural resource endowment, Akpan and Akpabio (2003) observed that the Niger Delta's potential for sustainable development remains unfulfilled and is now threatened by environmental devastation and worsening economic conditions. The inhabitants of this region heavily depend on the environment for daily living, mostly in the form of fishing, farming and gathering. Consequently, oil exploration and exploitation have had far reaching negative environmental, social as well as economic impacts

Table 1. Players in Nigeria's oil industry.

Consortium	Shareholders	Joint venture operator	Production barrels/day (2003)	Production (%)
Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd	NNPC (Nigeria, 55%) Shell (Dutch/British, 30%) Elf (France, 10%) Agip (Italy, 5%)	Shell	950 000	42.2
Mobil Producing Nigeria Ltd	NNPC (Nigeria, 58%) Mobil (USA, 42%)	Mobil	500 000	21.2
Chevron Nigeria Ltd	NNPC (Nigeria, 58%) Chevron (USA, 42%)	Chevron	485 000	18.6
Nigeria Agip Oil Company	NNPC (Nigeria, 60%) Agip (Italy, 20%) Philips (USA, 20%)	Agip	150 000	7.5
Elf Petroleum Ltd	NNPC (Nigeria, 60%) Elf (France, 40%)	Elf	145 000	6.1
Texaco Overseas (Nigeria) Petroleum Company	NNPC (Nigeria, 60%) Texaco (Nigeria, 20%) Chevron (USA, 20%)	Texaco	55 000	2.7
Other Producers	Ashland (USA) Deminex (Germany) Pan Ocean (Switzerland) British Gas (British) Sun Oil (USA) Conoco (USA) BP (British) Statoil (Norway) Conoil (Nigeria) Dubri Oil (Nigeria)	Various	35 000	1.7
Total			2320 000	100

Source: Idemudia and Ite (2006).

on the host communities (Akpan and Akpabio, 2003). Many of the oil production and exploration areas are in the 700,000 ha of delta mangroves. These represent the main remaining forested biome in Nigeria and about two-thirds of all the mangroves left in Africa and are an essential ecosystem both for local people and for fisheries off West Africa's coast. No deforestation estimates are available, but operations and infrastructural development in the mangroves have been quite intense: 349 drilling sites, 700 km flow lines, 400 km pipelines, 22 pumping stations and 1 terminal (Bassey, 1999; Wunde, 2003). There are many cases of oil spillage, some of which have not been accounted for. According to Rowell (1995), cited in (Bassey, 1999), Shell alone has spilt 1.6 million gallons of oil in twenty-seven incidents between 1982 and 1992, which account for no less than 40% of Shell's global oil spills. Equally important are extensive ecosystem changes from water flow disruptions, including involuntary damming, tidal changes and the exchange of fresh and salt water, which are caused by road construction, dredging and the use of heavy machinery. Other direct effects include pollution from drilling mud and

the effects of explosives. Indirect effects are also present, such as accommodating 6,000 temporary workers for gas plant, who practice hunting and other forest extraction (Bassey, 1999). Gas flaring is higher than anywhere else in the world (Wunder, 2003). According to Mbendi (2002) current ongoing efforts are aimed at eliminating the current levels of 75% flaring, while 12% is being reinjected. On this information, Wunder (2003) observed that the oil companies' environmental practices in such a sensitive ecosystem have been deficient; direct and indirect deforestation effects have been limited, but forest degradation has been serious.

The pervasive degradation of the environment by oil exploration has led to pervasive poverty culminating in a sense of relative deprivation and a perception of alienation within the host communities (Idemudia and Ite, 2006). The environmental and human rights aspects of oil company's operations in Nigeria have been one of the main targets for international and local protests against the oil industry. Attention was lifted to new heights when Ken Saro-Wiwa and several colleague activists from the Ogoni people who were opposing Shell's practices in the

Niger Delta were executed by the Nigerian Government in 1995. Apart from manifest cases of violent conflicts, the general attitude of the host communities is that of aggressiveness and confrontation targeted at either oil companies in the region (through bombings of oil facilities or kidnappings of foreign oil workers) or the Federal Government of Nigeria (threat of wars and kidnappings or killing of enforcement agents). Idemudia and Ite (2006) has asserted that the oil industry in Nigeria has been dominated by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) and the oil companies, while the host communities play a second fiddle in decision making processes within the oil industry. The FGN performs two key responsibilities namely: 1) negotiating and granting concessions for oil exploration to oil companies; 2) regulating the activities of the oil companies through the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), which was established in 1977. The role of the host communities has been categorized into three groups (Agim, 1997) as cited in (Idemudia and Ite, 2006) as follows: Producing Communities-communities in which onshore oil exploration takes place; Terminal Communities- provide Port or Terminal facilities for offshore oil exploration and Transit Communities-communities whose territories transit pipelines pass through. Some other communities are neither producing terminal nor transit, but are still classified as oil producing by virtue of general environmental impacts of exploitation.

STUDY METHODS

This paper is the product of an interactive/stakeholder workshop on Governance, Environment and Develop-ment 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 commence-ment 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 Department for International Development (DFID).

The Workshop was basically one of the ways of giving voice to the various layers of stakeholders in the Niger Delta oil politics as well as enhancing their capacity to influence policies affecting their environment and livelihoods. The Workshop attracted over 73 participants drawn from representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs); multinational oil companies; state and federal agencies, village representatives and local government authorities and individuals, among others. At the 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 stakeholders and individuals; position papers by NGOs and organized groups; statements by key officials in federal and state agencies; and interview, questions and answer sessions. 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). The goal of the forum was to engender awareness among the Niger Delta youths as a way of engaging them on the protection of developmental projects in the Niger Delta. The workshop which

was held on 24 April, 2003 at Eket, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria attracted over 89 participants drawn from the Civil Societies, Youth groups, NGOs, Federal, State and Local Government representatives; the NDDC and the Oil multinationals, among several others. The workshop was a very stormy one and featured speeches, position papers and questions and answer sessions. The youth participants acted on representative capacities and there, their various needs were highlighted. The representatives of the NDDC also presented facts, clarified issues and answered some questions mostly relating to their empowerment schemes, youth inclusion in their project activities and procedures for contracts awards. The facts derived from the workshops constitute points for analysis. Finally, this paper builds on numerous fieldwork experiences of the researchers in various academic and consultancy projects in the region over 7 years from 2002.

The Niger Delta and communal conflicts: The oil and governance connection

What has become the foundation for communal conflicts in today's Niger Delta has its origin in 1947 when Ijaw rivers people league started an agitation, which led to the creation by the British, of Rivers Province, about the same time, the Niger Delta Congress was established by Harold Dappa Biriye. This era of conflict was more vertical than horizontal, the oil communities targeting the government than communities competing for resource rents. For instance in 1960, we have read of Isaac Adaka Boro, who on 23rd February, 1966, launched a guerilla war against the Federal Military Government. Since then, youths, children, women and elders in the Niger Delta region have repeatedly protested against what they describe as abject poverty, deprivation of basic amenities and other forms of economic exploitation by not only the oil companies operating in the areas but the Nigerian Government as well. The nature of such conflicts is as follows (http://all africa.com/Nigeria):

Warri crisis: Shell shuts down two oil flow stations

Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) hasshut down two of its crude oil flow stations in Warri, Delta State, following violent clashes between restive youths in the area and armed security personnel (http://all africa.com/Nigeria).

Warri: Rampaging youths kill four soldiers

Seven persons including four soldiers have been reported killed in a bloody clash between restive youths and armed security personnel at Okerenkoko, a riverine community in Warri South-West Council of Delta State (http://all africa.com/Nigeria).

However, reports on inter and intra-community conflicts have not been given prominent headline in the region, yet this has been going on as a result of various forms of communal competition for oil resource rents. Very few of

such conflicts have been captured in some national dailies thus:

10 Feared dead as Ijaw youths attack Itsekiri villages:

"Youth suspected to be Ijaws...razed mandangho and Aruton towns belonging to the Itsekiri... Unconfirmed report said about 10 people are feared dead and several others injured in the arson attack on the riverine towns. Also the Escravos Beach flow station, which served as the logistic base of Shell Petroleum Development Company..." (http://all africa.com/Nigeria).

Five Kula Chiefs Killed in a Communal Clash:

"Militant action in the Niger Delta took another twist penultimate Saturday when it consumed about twelve high ranking chiefs of Kula, an oil rich community in the area. The dust raised by that had hardly settled when an expatriate, one rating and two other Nigerians were killed. Sources put the death toll in Rivers State between penultimate Thursday and last Tuesday at twenty five" (http://all africa.com/Nigeria).

Several factors have been held responsible for oil related inter and intra-community clashes in the Niger Delta. Among such factors include revenue and related oil benefit sharing; absence of standard practice among oil companies; and competition for political power, among others. They are discussed below.

Problem of revenue and oil benefit sharing among oil communities

The peculiarities of the Niger Delta problem attracted the developmental attention of Governments from colonial periods to period of Independence. 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 deserves special developmental attention and therefore, be made a special area to be developed directly by the Federal Government. This was before crude oil became the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. The advent of crude oil, found in the region, led to the use of the idea of derivation as a revenue allocation formular. According to Aaron (2003), the derivation formular witnessed a progressive decline from 100% (1953), 50% (1960), 45% (under Gowon in 1970), 20%

(under Murtala/Obasanjo in 1975), 2% (under Shagari in 1982), 1.5% (under Buhari in 1989) to 3% (under Babangida). Recently, the 13% constitutional provision has been implemented by the Obasanjo administration. Even so, there is widespread allegation that through the application of offshore/onshore dichotomy, the presidency pays 7.5% and not the 13% constitutional provision.

Apart from the disagreements this revenue sharing formular have frequently generated between the oil region and the FGN, the oil communities themselves are perpetually locked in clashes and conflicts as to who should have the highest share of oil revenue from the derivation principle. While the FGN has explicit criteria of sharing oil revenue to oil producing states in the Niger Delta, the oil producing states in the region do not have any clear revenue sharing criteria to reflect the concerns of the oil communities. This boils down to lack of autonomy of Local Government Councils in the region and Nigeria in general, leaving their State Governments much stronger to control all what accrue to government as revenue from oil. The nature of inter-communal struggle is founded on the idea of which community belongs to the core oil community and which does not. Between 1999 and 2003 the frequency of such Fights was high and in most cases, unreported in the media. At a stakeholder workshop in the Community Centre, University of Uyo, Nigeria, most participants spoke against division. A case was cited between Eket and Ibeno communities in Akwa Ibom State. These two communities were one until the political creation of Local Government (which made Eket and Ibeno independent Local Government Areas). However, because of oil, these two communities do not have cordial relationship over the years. While Ibeno people believe they are the core community from which oil is derived, Eket, which is less than 4 kilometers apart, say they are also affected by the activities of oil exploration. Consequently, Ibeno expects that they should have the largest share of oil revenue and benefits than other communities. They expect to have the largest share of employment benefits, notwithstanding merits. Between 2002 and 2003 such Fight culminated in most non-indigenous staff of Exxon Mobil being chased out of its operational headquarters. Between 2008 and 2009, the Ijaw community was not in good relationship with the Ibibio groups when the FGN appointed one of the Ibibio indigenes as the Minister of the newly created Niger Delta Ministry (Newswatch, 2009). They believe an Ijaw indigene should have been appointed as the pioneer Minister of the newly created ministry. In the distribution of Federal and State infrastructures to the region, major disagreements arise as to which community a given infrastructure should be located. Oftentimes, those communities who classify themselves as the "core" oil communities would prefer location of major infrastructures in their communities

even without any merit in such location. These are few examples of the nature of such conflicts which play out, not only between communities in the oil region but between communities in the oil region and those in the non-oil region. While this happen, The FGN and the oil multinationals always capitalize to promote "divide and rule" as a way of sustaining the marginalization agenda.

Absence of standard practice

Standard practice constitutes a prescribed procedure for carrying out business in a given situation. The success or otherwise of oil exploration activities in the Niger Delta depends to a greater extent on the availability of baseline standards of operation. The government can play important part in setting up a minimum operational factor for the oil multinationals and the affected communities. Such role may either be in terms of helping to shape an institutional environment that fosters sustainable economic growth, the pursuit of an active distributional and social policy or the provision of motivation for ecologically sensitive practices within the operational environment (Idemudia and Ite, 2006). Absence of standard practice has implications for the operating oil companies and the communities of operation. Ite (2004) observed that poor regulation and dearth of incentives for Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives within Nigeria means oil companies are left to set their standards. Being purely profit driven in operation, it is difficult to imagine oil multinationals evolving acceptable operational standards within its areas of operation, unless compelled either through community action or government regulations. For instance the Conflict Expert Group Baseline Report (2003) observed that there is a 'flexible' interpretation of Shell Company in Nigeria (SCIN) policies, a low level of standardization and continued unethical practices. The Report further noted, 'poor consequence management undermines policy compliance. Audit experts report that in cases where they had clear evidence of violation of business principles, the superiors of guilty staff failed to take action. This sends a message of impunity to the rest of the organization. Idemudia and Ite (2006) similarly observed that the absence of a minimum control mechanism means that oil companies face a high temptation to break the law, with little or no associated risk for doing so.

According to Conflict Expert Group Baseline Report (2003), about 70% of the conflicts that lead to work interruptions relate to contractor issues and there are currently no guidelines or policies in contractors' contract that determine their behavior in dealing with communities. For instance Shell's contracting policy states that contractors are responsible for their own community relations, which means each contractor has its own

approach. For communities who see every activities as oil company's activity in its area of operation, this implies much confusion in locating who to hold accountable for what action, as over 99% of oil companies contractors count themselves 'unaffected' by community demands or environmental policies. It is also important to note that in dealing with oil companies, some communities wield more powers than others. Some have signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) while others have not; some communities have effective leadership command and elite group that could facilitate dealing with oil companies, while others may not; again some communities are very aggressive or militant with the oil company operators while others may not. The tendency is that more powerful communities are able to extract more (in terms of money, goods, opportunities and infrastructures) than others. This generate a perception of favoritism (as some communities watch their neighbors very closely over benefits derived from oil companies) creating an atmosphere of animosity and tension. For instance, the recent violence that led to the death of over 25 persons in Rivers State was partly a culmination of one of such animosities between communities over oil benefits. The Nigerian Vanguard Newspaper of 21 January, 2007 reported on the incidence as follows:

"Narrating the circumstance that culminated in the death of the Kula chiefs to Sunday Vanguard, a source said the oil rich community had long been enmeshed in crisis over oil revenue accruing to the area. Sharing formula had polarized the community. There were those labelled favourites of the oil companies (this is the group oil companies like doing business with), another group that wanted a reversal of the disposition of the oil companies and those who were just indifferent to the oil politics in the area. The community sources said this situation had persisted in the community for long and was at the root of nearly all the conflicts in the area."

Setting guidelines for standard practice should be the role of the Federal Government of Nigeria. This absence or weak regulatory guidelines undermines 'best practices' by oil companies and contractors in their areas of operation. The truth about Nigeria today remains that corruption is more deep rooted and always undermine any effort at promoting effective Corporate Social Responsibility or Community Relations of the oil companies (Agim, 1997).

Competition for political power

The very idea of who controls power controls wealth and resources means a lot in the context of the oil producing Niger Delta region and the numerous communal conflicts arising. Competition for power has both national and local dimension. Ajagu (2000) cited in Ameh (2001) observed

thus:

'In recent years, there have been the perceived feeling by some ethnic groups that key institutions have been dramatically restructured in such a way as to create imbalances in favour of some ethnic nationalities. There is the argument that the position that confers the power of recruitment and power to control the nation's resources are now being controlled by a section of the country. These gross imbalances are the reasons for the rise of ethnic militia and agitation for a sovereign National Conference and restructuring of the Federation'.

At the national level, key and self interested political elites decide remotely at far away Abuja of who controls the key institutions of Governments and development agencies in the Niger Delta. For instance, during local and state elections, who contests and who wins are determined by a few political elites while the affected people do not have any say. In appointment of key officers of Governments, the rules are not followed, while merit is discarded giving room for political patronage, even when such appointments are not acceptable to the people.

What this implies is that the struggle and competition for power often set communities against communities and communities against individuals and Governments. It is even more pronounced when the leaders use politics to decide the distribution of infrastructures and oil wealth. During every election period, there is always high incidence of political assassination, massive rigging and thuggery as political tools to achieve persistent control over the resources of the region. Communities often react by way of conflicts and violence. This can take many forms namely: conflicts against political leaders, community against community or community against Governments.

Implication and concluding remarks

This paper has observed the rise in communal conflicts since the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria. The paper has also noted that such high rate of communal conflict in the face of this democratic experiment is not a mere coincidence of events, it has Governance connection. From 1999 (when the present democratic experiment took off) to date, communal violence and conflicts in the Niger Delta are alarmingly on the rise. The paper has highlighted some of the major sources and causes of communal conflicts in the Niger Delta to include problem of revenue and oil benefit sharing among resource communities; absence of standard practice; and competition for political power, among many others. Competition for political power has been a very common phenomenon since the advent of the democratic

Governance. This probably has to do with the high economic benefits associated with political power given the huge oil revenues incidental to its exploitation. The previous States and Local Governments' elections in Nigeria attracted high incidence of communal conflicts and consequent killings associated with it. This was partly because of the persistent moves by the federal authorities and oil multinationals to corruptly influence the election of their candidates of choice to protect their interest.

Having regards to the negative impact that communal conflicts tend to generate in the region, the following recommendations are made as follows:

a. There is need for inclusive and accountable Governance at all levels of the Nigerian society as a prelude to efficient, effective, equitable and realistic benefit sharing of oil wealth. From oral accounts, it is very clear that the "dividends of democracy" is not accessible to the people on whose land oil is mined. Because of intense and high competition for political power, there is concomitant factionalization and consequent benefit capture. This deprives the real people from having access to oil resource benefits. Generally, the Niger Delta region has been known for lack of basic physical and social infrastructures. Inclusive and accountable Governance demands that the proceeds of oil wealth should be used to provide accessible and good roads network, constant power supply (the abundant gas in the region could be harnessed for this purpose instead of flaring); affordable health care facilities, among others. The people should be made as partners in the development process. In this case, the implementation of projects through contractor/government machinery who inflate prices, underpay labor, or discriminate in labor recruitment matters should be discarded in preference for the grassroots and community consultation in "development delivery." This is also a step in capacity building and poverty alleviation. When the people are gainfully engaged, they are able to provide for themselves and thus idleness would be checked. These are clear routes to good community relations".

b. There is need to manage conflicts through the interactive conflict management (ICM) (Upreti, 2003) as opposed to persistent militarization approach of Governments. ICM is community focused learning-based and action-orientated methodological approach to resolve conflict at local level. It is less expensive and moves beyond the structurally designed, compartmentalized blue print approach of conflict resolution. It focuses on the continuous interaction between people and their position in the broader socio-cultural setting with Governments and other social agents acting as facilitators. ICM acknowledges the knowledge, skills and experiences of the community to help manage conflict. It is a pragmatic approach and the diversity embedded in the local community can be

mobilized to resolve manage conflict.

It is a common knowledge that anytime there is outbreak of conflicts in communities in the Niger Delta, the Federal Government of Nigeria responds swiftly with direct military action without proper consultation with stakeholders and community leaders. This has always escalated the case and led to more harms and problems than intended solutions. The case of the Odi direct military action is a good pointer. With ICM, community stakeholders and leaders will be brought to a round table and this has been proven to be very useful in resolving conflicts in many situations. From the testimonies of the people in the area, it was clear that incidence of high handedness and disregard for their views in matters affecting them only help to worsen conflict situations.

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