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**OIL AND MILITANCY IN NIGERIA'S NIGER DELTA:
"DEVELOPMENT CATALYST" OR "DEVELOPMENT
REVERSE"?**

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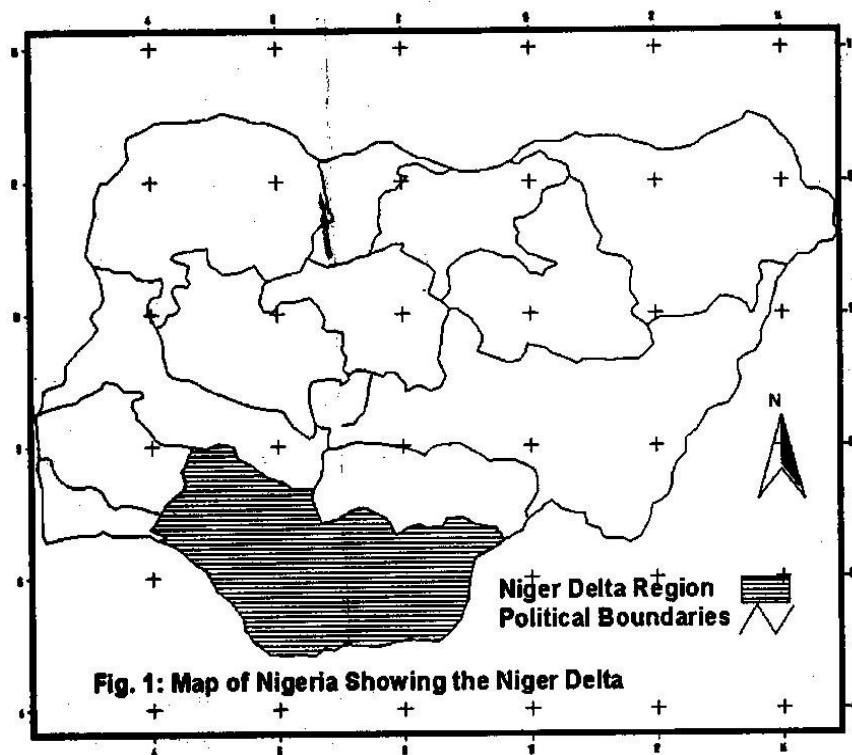
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Summary

Since the oil boom of the early 1970s, Nigeria's economic fortune has been largely dependent on the oil resources. Its vast oil reserves are mostly concentrated in the onshore and offshore areas of the Niger Delta. Despite its central role in the economy of Nigeria, the Niger Delta's potential for sustainable development remains unfulfilled and is now threatened by environmental devastation and worsening economic conditions. As a result, the indigenous people have taken up arms to fight perceived neglect and marginalization giving rise to various forms of militancy. In the paper, we argue that the rising militant activities pose a threat to development as well as catalyst for governmental developmental interest and agenda for the region. In the final analysis, we conclude that the success or failure of militancy in the region will be ultimately assessed by the nature of development outcome that will get to the region.

Introduction

Nigeria's Niger Delta region is made up of the six states of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers States. Politically, it has been redefined and enlarged into nine states as a strategy of aiding the spread of oil benefits to other nearby major ethnic groups particularly of the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups (Fig 1).



Consequently, the new states of Abia, Imo and Ondo have been incorporated. The region is currently estimated to have a population of over 45 million people distributed in over 1600 communities.

The Niger Delta 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 kilometres and is noted for its sandy coastal ridge barriers,

brackish or saline mangroves, freshwater, permanent and seasonal swamp forests as well as lowland rainforest. The whole area is traversed and crisscrossed by a 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.

Conceptual Clarification

The concept of development has evolved over the years from a very narrow conception of the 50s and 60s, which tended to emphasize economic growth, to a much broader and all encompassing interpretation of recent times (Todaro and Smith, 2003). Giving emphasis on the need for a broader look at development, the World Bank in 1991 asserted thus: "the challenge of development.....is to improve the quality of life. It encompasses as ends in themselves better education, higher standards of health and nutrition, less poverty, cleaner environment, more equality of opportunity, greater individual freedom, and a rich cultural life" (World Bank, 1991 cited in Todaro & Smith, 2003: 17).

Emerging from these discussions is the consensus that development carries a multidimensional interpretations and processes including major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of poverty. Todaro and Smith (2003:17) further asserted that the essence of development means a whole gamut of change by which an entire social system is tuned to the diverse basic needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system or the social system moves away from a condition of life widely

perceived as unsatisfactory toward a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better.

One related concept that is very critical to the attainment of development outcomes is the governance system. In the late 1980s, Africa Region Group (cited in Yamada, 2008) was the first operational unit in the World Bank to identify governance issues as necessary for the success of development agenda. The group noted that "underlying the litany of Africa's development problem is a crisis of governance." Governance as used here 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.

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 profoundly 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 achieves development outcome or not.

In Nigeria, the discovery of oil presented governments with the opportunity of developing the economy with rising oil revenue. While greater improvements in physical and social infrastructures have been achieved in major cities of Abuja, Lagos, Kaduna, among others within the ethnic majority States, the oil producing States in the Niger Delta, however, suffer immeasurable environmental degradation and governmental neglect, leading to frequent violent conflicts. While the violent conflicts have worsened the condition of livelihoods of the poor as well as reversing all vestiges of development gains, the paper also argues that such violent conflicts have recently become a catalyst of governmental developmental interests in recent times. The paper attempts to examine this two-sided coin of conflicts as "development in reverse" or "catalyst of development".

Petroleum Exploration and the Environment

Since the oil boom of the early 1970s, Nigeria's economic fortune has been largely dependent on oil resources. Its vast oil resources are mostly concentrated in the onshore and offshore areas of the Niger Delta. Total proven oil reserves are estimated at about 36 billion barrels, while proven natural gas reserves are well over 150 trillion feet (EIA, 2006). Oil production activity therefore accounts for more than 90 percent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and more than 80 percent of government revenue (CBN, 1981). 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 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. Wunder (2003) observed that no deforestation estimates are available, but operations and infrastructural development in the mangroves have been quite intense: 349 drilling sites, 700 km flowlines, 400 km pipelines, 22 pumping stations and 1 terminal (Bassey, 1999). There are very 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 percent 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 percent flaring, while 12 percent 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) have 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; 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.

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 put 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 pitched 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 it 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 are issues at the core of militancy in the Niger Delta but when and how did militancy start and what condition favoured its materialization? The next segment explores this argument.

Militancy in Nigeria's Niger Delta: How and why it Started?

The root and rise in militancy in Nigeria's Niger Delta can be traced to what Townsend (2008) referred to as "natural resource nationalism"-the tendency to seek bigger shares of the returns from natural resources. It is also compounded by what Omeje (No Date) termed "accumulation politics"-the tendency for the ruling class to be involved in endless accumulation of natural resource rents accruing from the region through deliberate act of marginalisation and deprivation.

The Niger Delta "question" or "unsolved problem" of today is a heritage of Nigeria's structural flaws which are fundamentally constitutional and political. Onduku (2001) classified these flaws into two categories. The first has to do with 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 marginalisation of the minority ethnic nationalities that comprise approximately one third of the population of each region. The Niger Delta is one of such minority groups and its position becomes so important given that Nigeria's economy depends on petroleum resources, which is drilled in the region.

Concerns for the development of the Niger Delta region are age-old phenomenon. The communities in the region have

been protesting the injustices peacefully for decades, until recently when such protests took on violent form. The parties in the conflict do not involve only the Federal Government and the Niger Delta people but also the oil multinationals. In summary, the grievances of the people 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 for the oil producing communities for the developmental and environmental problems associated with oil exploration and exploitation (Onduku, 2001). The government seems not to be taking this matter seriously given its attitudes of using military option to suppress the people's demands and protests. The local people 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. It is so far estimated that over 200 foreign oil workers have been kidnapped in the region (AKBC-FM 10am News: 12th Nov, 2008). 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 multinationals have also been linked to equipping the Federal military for persistent militarization of the Niger Delta to protect its investments and interests. In all, the government wants to continuously maintain the region for revenue purposes and the oil companies have refused to pack out of the region in spite of the several ultimatums given to them by the civil groups. The Niger Delta people have now become more organised in their demands for the development of the region, which has been denied them for a long time. These conflicting positions of the Federal government and the indigenous people have set the stage for violent conflicts. Who gains and who benefits? What we know is that every act of violent conflicts reverses the gains of development and the

manifestation of violent conflict itself may also catalyze government interest in developing the region. The next section explores these arguments.

Militancy and Development; "Development in Reverse" or "Development Catalyst"?

Townsend (2008) has observed that countries rich in natural resources have rarely been able to use that wealth to boost their economies or reduce poverty. This is because such countries tend to be more repressive, corrupt and badly managed in part because there is a greater wealth to fight over. This assertion holds true for Nigeria's Niger Delta. Despite its enormous oil wealth, the Niger Delta region now faces even more developmental crisis than before owing to the activities of militant groups struggling for resource control and self-determination. Douglas et.al (2003) observed that since March 12, 2003, mounting communal violence has resulted in at least 50 deaths and levelling of eight communities in and around the Warri petroleum complex. Seven oil company employees were also killed, prompting all the major oil companies to withdraw staff, to close down operations, and to reduce output by over 750,000 barrels per day (almost half of national output).

In 2006 alone, Akpabio and Akpan (forthcoming) documented oil related conflicts, kidnappings and killings in the Niger Delta which include:

January: Separatist gunmen kidnapped four foreign oil workers and blew up a pipeline feeding an export terminal. Five days later, gunmen shoot dead several troops and attack a Shell oil plant. The four foreigners-an American, a Briton, a Bulgarian and a Hungarian-were freed at the end of the month, but the group threatened to take further hostages.

April: The US firm Exxon Mobil briefly evacuated non-essential staff from its Nigerian oil installations due to fear of an attack by militants. At the end of the month, separatists militants used a car

bomb to attack oil tanker trucks, and warn China not to invest in the Nigerian oil industry.

May 10: an executive with the United States-based oil company, Baker Hughes, was shot and killed in the southeastern city of Port Harcourt. At the time of the shooting, it was not immediately known if MEND was involved or not. Witnesses said the attacker appeared to be specifically targeting the American executive.

August 20: Ten members of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) were killed by the Nigerian military. The members were working on releasing a Royal Dutch Shell hostage when they were probably mistaken for saboteurs.

October, 2: Ten Nigerian soldiers were killed off the shore of the Niger Delta in their patrol boat by a MEND mortar shell. Earlier that day a Nigerian/Royal Dutch Shell convoy was attacked on in the Port Harcourt region resulting to some wounded.

November, 20: Two former militants killed in a raid by an unidentified armed group at the premises of a non-governmental organisation AAPW (Academic Associates Peace Works) in Port Harcourt.

Several other incidence of conflicts had been making headlines in the "News" in the following forms (<http://africa.com/nigeria>)

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...

Warri Crisis: Shell Shuts Down 2 Oil Flow Stations:

Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) has shut 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.

Ijaw Leaders Condemn Killing of Soldiers by Youths:

Ijaw leaders in Delta State Weekend condemned the killing of two soldiers...at Okereakoko village... The Ijaw group in Delta State also dissociated itself from the murder of the security agents...

Niger Delta Crisis, Governments Diversionary Technique – Activist:

Niger Delta crisis including the recent one in Warri is said to be masterminded by the Federal Government in order to divert the attention of the Niger Deltans from fighting for resource control and environmental justice.

Warri: Rampaging Youths Kill 4 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.

Restiveness and violence in the Niger Delta have many implications not only on the people but on the general developmental efforts of the region in particular and Nigeria in general. Apart from widespread killing, maiming, the destruction of property, displacement of people, there is always a general suspension of economic activities as well as the withdrawal of investments. In most cases "State of Emergencies" is outrightly declared while soldiers are drafted to the region to restore peace and order. In every act of violence, there are bombings of oil facilities and public infrastructures. In all cases such violence

degenerates into criminal activities such as petty robbery and piracy, among others. Currently, the situation in the region has gone so bad that the federal government resort to using men of the armed forces to restore order. Workers and investors have abandoned the region for safety. For instance, the Nigerian Sunday Tribune (2008, February 12-Terrorism in the Niger Delta: Nigeria held hostage) carried the lamentation of a native of the region as follows:

"I entered Port Harcourt and I started having headache, for no just reason. The moment you step into the city, may be after a long time, and you hear of the experience of those living there, you are bound to be scared. If I have my way, I don't think I want to enter Port Harcourt in a long time, forget the fact that I was born there and my parents live there.....I had my own bitter experience in 2005 when I went to see my parents. Just outside my parents house, a guy came down from a bike, walked straight to me, pointed a gun at me and demanded for my phone, I could not say a word, seeing a gun live. That was on the same street where I grew up and that was just my own experience of what I read about daily in the newspapers", an Ijaw lady resident in Lagos lamented (The Nigerian Sunday Tribune, 2008 February 12-Terrorism in the Niger Delta: Nigeria held hostage)

With the rising daily cases of militancy in the region, all available gains or developmental structures seem reversed not only in the region, but the larger Nigerian society. The Guardian Newspaper once carried a report on the lamentation of the Federal government of Nigeria with respect to loss of revenue following the persistence in Niger Delta conflicts as follows:

'THE Federal Government at the weekend disclosed gains recorded in the oil and gas industry were being eroded

renewed violence in the Niger Delta. The government described the fresh violence and hostage-taking saga as one of the most difficult eras in the history of the industry. According to statistics reeled out by the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), the country's contribution to the global oil output has dropped by 800,000 barrel per day since militants in the oil-producing states resorted to hostage-taking and destruction of oil facilities. With oil prices hitting \$73 per barrel last Friday, this translates to a loss of \$56.7 million or N7.28 billion daily for the country' (Guardian Newspaper, June 12, 2006).

The Director of the Department for Petroleum Resources (DPR), Mr. Tony Chukwueke confirmed this when he stated:

"We are experiencing one of the most difficult periods in the history of Nigeria's oil and gas industry. As I am talking to you, Nigeria is losing over 800,000 bpd. So this is a trying period for the Federal Government despite its drive to ensure that sanity reigns in the sector. So, the entire western operations of the SPDC had been shut down," (Quoted from Guardian Newspaper, June 12, 2006).

At the moment, foreign and home investors to the region have reduced significantly; oil company workers and other business men and women have fled the region; most oil company operations have been shut while the volume of investments and capital flows to the region have reduced drastically to almost a zero mark. The argument that the Niger Delta conflicts have tended to erode or reverse the gains of whatever vestige of development structures in the region seem tenable.

In another perspective, the general militancy approach in the region has gingered a much more serious governmental developmental interest over the years. Such governmental interest seems to be on the rise in the past few years and was particularly

noticed in the late 20th century. This is so because the persistent conflict in the region has been seen at official quarters as posing serious threat to the stability of Nigeria as a nation. From the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) in 1960 to the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1993, the Federal Government of Nigeria had always shown interest and concern to the development of the Niger Delta. However, the seriousness of the interest and concern always seemed to coincide with the degree of violent activities in the region, which particularly affected the heart of Nigeria's economy. It is of interest to note that NDDDB and OMPADEC did not make much impact as the current Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC).

The birth of NDDC in 2000 followed the lawlessness, persistent violent protests and conflicts in the region against developmental neglect over the many years of oil exploration. The NDDC seems more focused than previous intervention agencies. However, its mode of funding has not been satisfactory to the people concerned. For instance, the NDDC Act (2001) provides several sources of funding for the Commission as follows:

- (i) Federal government contribution, which shall be equivalent to 15% of the monthly statutory allocations due to member states of the commission from the federation account.
- (ii) Oil and Gas processing companies' contribution of 3% of their total budget.
- (iii) 50% of the ecological fund allocations due to member state.
- (iv) Proceeds from other NDDC assets; and
- (v) Miscellaneous sources, including grants-in-aid, gifts, interests on deposits and investments, loans by federal and state governments and any local or foreign bodies, donations, etc.

Amendment to this was later effected to make all the member-states contribute 10 percent of their monthly statutory allocation to the Commission. The contention about these provisions is that the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) is not sincerely committed to the development of the Niger Delta. There is no clear provision holding the FGN exclusively responsible to the NDDC, other than contributions drawn from statutory revenues of the Niger Delta States and the ecological fund. The arguments here are two-fold. First, the development of the Niger Delta region deserves very special attention since the FGN has control of its resources. Second, there is absolute need to separate: 1.) ecological problems from infrastructural provisions; 2.) general State revenues from special and dedicated funds for the NDDC. The inability to separate these issues by the FGN underscores the politics surrounding the development of the region. By all calculations, it means the Niger Delta States and ecological funds have been indirectly used to fund the NDDC, thereby tactically divesting the FGN of its responsibility and commitment to the development of the region.

These feelings engender various versions of violent conflicts forcing the Federal Government of Nigeria on its knees. What this has meant for the development agenda in the region is one of the cardinal arguments in this paper. Beginning from 2007, government interests in the development of the region seem to be on the rise. So far, the current Administration of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua has proposed various development options and agenda for the region as a way of curbing and stemming the incessant and rising cases of restiveness and conflicts that have impacted negatively on the general economy of Nigeria. The Federal government has been forced to negotiate with the people directly and has gone as far as approving the establishment of a special Ministry in charge of the development of the region named "the Ministry of the Niger Delta Development" with a Minister in

charge. There are also proposals for constitutional amendment which are aimed at increasing the Federal derivation fund to the region. Whether these proposals and actions taken address the developmental needs of the region in a holistic manner is a matter of time. The argument, however, bothers on the fact that rising incidence of militancy in the region has not only reversed existing developmental gains but seems to be catalyzing enormous developmental interest for the region.

Recommendation

If the Niger Delta problem has been seen now as a threat to the stability and economy of Nigeria, then it behoves that government initiates serious developmental and capacity building measures to empower and include all stakeholders in the decision making processes on how the oil resources could be effectively managed.

On this basis, the study therefore recommends the following measures as the way forward:

1. Federal Government of Nigeria should evolve clear infrastructural need assessment for the region. Priorities should be given to road network development, accessible healthcare system; regular power supply; potable water provision and functional education, among others. These are controlling determinants for self-empowerment;
2. There is urgent need for responsible and transparent governance. This implies that oil resource benefits should be transparently shared through realistic derivation formula and accountably utilized for development purposes in the region. The current 13% derivation formula should be reviewed upward taking into consideration the numerous ecological problems incidental on oil exploration. When considered against the history of revenue sharing formula in Nigeria, it is a question of equity that the Niger Delta

region deserves not less than 50% derivation from oil revenue accruing from the region.

3. One of the key issues in the Niger Delta struggle today is the prevalence of massive poverty in the midst of oil resource abundance. Addressing the poverty question needs massive rural development and employment generation. The people should be given a voice in their local politics and resource decision. It is through participatory governance of this magnitude that can guarantee real peace in the region.

Concluding Remarks

Natural resources could catalyze the development process through improvement on income and foreign exchange earnings as well as the general infrastructural developments, if well managed. On the contrary, a number of studies have demonstrated that countries whose economies are dominated by resource extraction industries tend to be more corrupt and lead to badly managed benefits. With regard to Nigeria's Niger Delta, this paper has demonstrated a new dimension bordering on the relationship between resource wealth and development. How a resource is managed affects development outcomes negatively or positively. For many years of Petroleum oil exploration, the Nigerian government has not respected and recognized the concerns of the minority on whose lands oil flows for her economic well being. This has resulted in fights over control and proper use. The study has shown that such persistent fights have led to a reversal of whatever developmental gains were accruable to the region. The fight itself has a basis and on the strength of such basis, the Nigerian government has demonstrated deep interest in the development of the region as the discussions in the paper have shown.

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