THE EFFECTS OF NIGER DELTA CRISIS ON SOCIO, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
Just as physicians have been searching for the appropriate and enduring cure for AIDS, the Nigeria government has also been searching for solutions to the crisis in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The crisis has been of great concern not only to the people of the area but to all Nigerians, the international communities and other genuine stakeholders. The Region is where the bulk of the nation's wealth is generated. The focal point of this paper is the impact of Niger Delta crisis on Nigeria's social, political and economic development. The primary essence of government is to ensure the security of lives and properties of its citizens. In the light of this, governments, the world over have always in one form or the other been actively involved in addressing security issues in their respective countries. This is hinged on the relevance of security and peace to the growth and development of a nation. It is cardinal and central to sustainable development of a nation, socially, politically and economically. Since the return of democratic governance in 1999 there have been spontaneous protests and agitations by the Niger Delta people to draw successive government's attention to the unsolved developmental problems in their area. Efforts aimed at maintaining peace and stability in the area have been of major concerns for successive administrations in the country. However, despite several institutional frame work and approaches adopted by government aim at addressing the problems in the Niger Delta Region such as the establishment of Willinks Commission, the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB), The Oil Minerals Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC), the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the Niger Delta Master Plan, and Niger Delta Ministry and lately the amnesty programme, did not seem to meet the wishes, needs and aspirations of the Niger Delta people due to continuous agitations and violence in the area. The author relied on secondary data such as textbooks, journals, magazines and the internet etc. The study recommends that for peace and stability to be sustained in the region, the government needs to demonstrate the necessary

political will by massively investing in human, infrastructural and capital development, job creation and confidence building measures among other things. Moreover, since programmes put in place in the past to address the problems in the region were bedeviled with shortcomings and defective implementation, such programmes and others that may be initiated henceforth must be effectively monitored and evaluated. This latter step must form an integral part of the implementation strategy.

Key words: Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Crisis and Niger Delta,

INTRODUCTION
Few national issues have provoked profound debate and lengthy discussion than the crisis in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria which is considered as one of the most volatile regions of the world (Annan, 1998). The region has witnessed incessant crisis especially recent upsurge in violent activities. The crisis has been a long drawn one which started as a legitimate agitation by the neglected people of the region for resource control and political empowerment (Osaghae. E, Ikelegbe, A.O., Olarimoyo B. & Okhomina, (2007). The struggle however took a dangerous and frightening dimension when some persons masquerading as freedom fighters, hijacked the process and thereby blurred the initial noble objectives of the struggle, brought incalculable damage to the people of the region, economy and survival of the nation at large.

Niger Delta communities are the main oil-bearing areas in Nigeria. Oil which was first discovered in Oloibiri now Bayelsa State in 1956 and first exported in 1958 accounted for more than 90% of Nigeria exports and about 80% of Government revenue (Okonta, I., 2008). However, the considerable endowment in oil resources has not translated into tangible outcomes in the region. Rather, it is confronted with massive degradation such as devastating erosion, and oil spillage just to state a few.

The historical grievance which eventually leads to crisis revolves among other things around the struggle for political and economic independence, social factors including the control of resources and retarded infrastructural development necessary for stimulating growth and development in the region, land devastation by oil exploitation, water and air pollution, and air poison by gas flaring, dearth of basic human needs, communal or cultural recognition, deforestation, depletion of mineral resources, destruction of aquatic lives (which affected negatively subsistent peasant agricultural economy and the environment as well as the entire livelihood and basic survival of the people), participation and denial of distributive justice over a period of long time (Burton, J. 1990). The resultant effects manifested in different forms such as land displacement, economic backwardness, social unrest, diseases, and violent protests in several communities. It also affected the supply of immediate source of livelihood for the people of the region (Douglas, O. and D. Ola, 1999). The crisis has led to not only armed insurgents but to ferocious ethnic rivalry amongst the various ethnic groups.

The complexity and volatile nature of the crisis has continued to pose serious y threat to national and international security. The complicated nature of the crisis in the Niger Delta Region conflicts which is rooted in the discovery, exploration and exploitation of oil by the multinationals has assumed domestic and international dimensions (Anee J, 2004).

An examination of the effects of the Niger Delta Region crisis on Nigeria's socio, economic and political development is apt and necessary in order to fully understand the dynamics of the crisis and how Nigerian government has been contending with the security dilemma.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The crisis in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria has continued to threaten not only the survival of the nation and the primary responsibility of government in securing the lives and properties of its citizens and the preservation of the nation as a sovereign and indivisible entity, but international security as well. There has been worsening insecurity and instability in the oil producing areas due to agitations for developmental programmes. The disruption of the oil business is taking its toll on the nation's economic fortune coupled with hostage taking, hijacking and kidnapping of expatriate oil company workers and demand for ransom, sabotage, oil bunkering, repeated invasion, destruction and blockading of oil installations (John Iwori, 2006). Moreover, human and material costs of conflict are enormous and far reaching with serious negative repercussions on the people and national economy.

As the living standards of the people of Niger Delta region declined, (UNDP, 1994), the struggle for survival exacerbated and became the breeding ground for all manner of criminal activities in the region. It has created a large class of young men and women who have no hope of legitimate employment opportunities work that would fulfill their ambitions and thus are easily recruited into violent activities.

The failure of the government and multinational corporations to keep to promises of ameliorating the condition of the people and curbing environmental degradation has built up feelings of frustration in the minds of the people (Ikelegbe, A., 2006). Though the Federal Government of Nigeria on its part, through its Amnesty programme, helped to ameliorate the effects of militancy in the Niger-Delta region, there are still substantial security threats there.

CONCEPTUAL CLARRIFICATION

The concepts to be conceptualized in this study are: *Conflict, Conflict resolution, Niger Delta.*

Conflict

This arises in a situation in which people, groups, communities or countries are involved in a serious disagreement or argument between or among themselves. It is also a struggle between two or more forces that create tension which if not urgently and amicably resolved could lead to a breakdown of law and order in the society.

Conflict resolution

This is a process of addressing the root cause\s of conflict in term of its elimination, alteration or transformation. It is an intervention in the conflict process to prevent further hostilities.

Niger Delta

Niger Delta region also referred to as the South-South geo-political zone in the current six geopolitical structures in Nigeria is made up of the following states: Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Imo, Ondo and Edo. It has a population of about 40 million people comprising of several minority ethnic groups

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
This study adopts theory of development in explaining the impact of Niger Delta Region crises on Nigeria's development. Human development emphasizes enhancement of human capabilities, which reflects the freedom to achieve different things that people value. This goes beyond the basic dimensions measured by the Human Development Index
(UNDP, 1994). Of course, the human development concept encompasses additional choices and goals, processes and outcomes that are highly valued by people, ranging from political, economic and social freedom to opportunities for being creative and productive, and enjoying personal self-respect and guaranteed human rights. Political freedom relates to the available opportunities of people to determine who should govern them and on the basis of what principles; economic freedom which is predicated on the ways the economy is run to generate income opportunities and promote the distribution of common wealth; social opportunities anchored on the arrangements of the society to ensure quality and affordable education and health care; and protective security, which deals with provision of relevant social safety measures for the vulnerable groups in the society (Alamieyeseigha, D. 2004).

EFFECTS OF NIGER DELTA CRISIS ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
The negative consequences of the crisis in the Niger Delta on the nation's development have been devastating overwhelming and far reaching. They include but not limited to illegal
  oil bunkering, oil pipeline vandalism, oil theft, illegal refineries, hostage taking, violent
  agitations and sea piracy, just to state a few. For instance, militants' activities have negatively affected Nigeria's economic and petroleum production potentials and wealth creation through illegal oil bunkering and kidnapping of expatriate workers (Austin Ogwuda, 2003). Nigeria is said to be losing 70,000 to 300,000 barrels per day to illegal bunkering, the equivalent output of a small oil producing country. It was stated further that a loss of just 70,000 barrels per day at a price of $60 a barrel would generate over $1.5 billion per year. The amount would have enough to solve several of the problems in the region and employed some army of unemployed youths. For instance, the relative peace in Nigeria Delta sequel to the amnesty programme resulted in over 50 per cent increase in crude oil production in Nigeria.

CHALLENGES OF ENSURING SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN THE NIGER DELTA
Since the basis of conflict is the clash of interests, values and goals, conflicts can only be resolved when these issues are resolved. According to the United Nations Commission on Human Security:

> "The solution to the problem of militancy and violent conflicts in
> Niger Delta should begin with the eradication of problems associated
> with the underdevelopment of the area, such as poverty and
> inadequate infrastructure. Oil companies should be community
> friendly and employ unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled labour from
> the communities in order to solve the unemployment problems in the

area. This will make it difficult for any individual to justify the activities of militants in the area".

Preventing and mitigating the impact of internal violent conflicts are not sufficient to achieve peace and stability in today's interdependent world. The upholding of human rights, pursuing inclusive and equitable development and respecting human dignity and diversity are very important. Equally decisive is to develop the capability of individuals and communities to make informed choices and act on their own behalf. In many respects, "human security requires including the excluded." (Onduku, A., 2001) It focuses on the widest possible range of people having enough confidence in their future- enough that they can actually think about creating genuine possibilities for people to live in safety and decency.

THE WAY FORWARD
        In order to consolidate peace, deescalate the crisis in the area, curb renewed of hostilities and ensure long term peace building, the following recommendations are proffered:
        The Nigeria state must find a possible way of mapping out and establishing its presence in the Niger Delta region to forestall frequent crisis and large scale destruction in the area. Ad-hoc and fire brigade approach is certainly not the best option. There must be proper deployment of security personnel, material and technology to curb the random movement of the militants unchallenged.
        There is the dire need to build enduring institutions to ensure continuity irrespective of who occupies a particular office within a specific duration. According to the former Minister of Defense and pioneer Chairman of the Presidential Committee on the Implementation of the Amnesty Programme, Major General Abe (retd.), the death of Alhaji Musa Ya-Adua and failure to implement some of the packages in the amnesty programme led to the present upsurge in violence and hostilities in the area.
        A holistic approach should be adopted. This will ultimately result in the attainment of political, social and economic growth. Government should also invest massively in infrastructural development to ensure sustainable improvement in the general standard of living of the people and to address the challenges of under-development in the oil producing communities of Niger Delta and to also stem the growing army of unemployed youths. An investment friendly climate should also be provided to allow individuals and corporate bodies to be co-partners in the development agenda not only of the Niger Delta Region alone but also of the nation at large.
         There is the need for a more fundamental change in government's approach by reordering its priorities towards seeking better understanding of the underlying causes and dynamics of the crisis with the primary aim of providing effective conflict prevention and management strategies. No doubt, t**he prospect of e**ensuring sustainable and lasting peace and development anywhere in the world is not a one-sided affair but a collective responsibility of all concerned. This can only be done through genuine peace efforts, developing a culture of peace, creation of the enabling appropriate environment for peace, security and stability, participation of all stakeholders in the peace building process, addressing the issues of poverty, environmental devastation, political, economic and social justice, low level of literacy and unemployment.

The goal of achieving and maintaining peace and security must be pursued along the pathway to development and **insightful and comprehensive planning that is based on sound judgment.** Along the pathway to peace, continuing conflicts will inevitably arise and many lessons are to be learnt from the collective experiences which can help produce well and more effective means of preventing and resolving future conflicts. It is only by so doing that relative peace and stability can be restored to the region in particular and Nigerian in general.

The need for sustained peace in the Niger Delta would be achieved if the living standards of the majority of people in the region drastically improve through Infrastructural development which must be the driving force for peace-making efforts in the region.

It is an indisputable fact that there are significant disparities in the development of the different regions of the country and the failure of government to create viable institutions that could help curb poverty. Knowing that the Niger Delta is the economic lifeline of the Nigerian nation, there is need for multi-dimensional strategies to ensure grassroots sustainable economic development in the area. Political will is required in the areas of ensuring equitable distribution of revenue derived from the region, a determined effort towards massive infrastructural development, job creation and confidence building measures in the area.

There should be Improvement in the living standards of the majority of people in the region through empowerment programmes. Infrastructural development is a critical factor and it must be a driving force for peacemaking efforts in the region.

Oil companies should ensure that their operations conform with necessary health, safety and environmental standards so that the environments are not polluted and creating more hardship to the people of Niger Delta.

Finally, since violent activities have not actually helped in finding lasting solution to the Niger Delta question, it is not out of place to suggest non-violent approach which is a moral imperative or even a way of life such as negotiation of issues, reconciliation or arbitration as may be determined by impartial standards (Miall, 992). There is no need sticking to a particular and rigid position, reprisal attacks, taking actions that are mutually exclusive from parties concerned or seeing the other parties as enemies. As the saying goes, whereas war and violence destroys, peace builds. In this regard, all right thinking Deltans and Nigerians must embrace the ongoing dialogue between the federal government of Nigeria and leaders of the Niger Delta Region. After all two wrongs do not make a right. It takes a thinking man to realize, embrace, and practice peace.

No doubt, the restoration of positive and irreversible peace after violent is a daunting task that is complex, sensitive and prone to fragility (Conoir 2007:13-14).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION
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Undoubtedly, the crisis in the Niger Delta constitutes a threat to the security, national survival and development of the country. The pacification of a set of militia leaders, armed groups and adhoc and cosmetic measures could only have a temporary effect. No doubt, in the midst of inexhaustible materials and human resources, Nigerian is capable of joining the league of advanced economies of the world with the right leadership with the right focus, vision, political will and willingness to address the problems in the Niger Delta once and for all head on.

CONCLUSION

Peace is an inevitable and necessary requirement for economic growth, development and democracy. The governance must play a major and leading role in the creation of the requisite enabling environment for peace, security and stability in the nation. Moreover, genuine peace effort in the Niger Delta should involve the participation of all stakeholders in the peace building process and avoiding conflict **accelerating factors such as rising poverty and unemployment.** Though conflict is inevitable and inherent in human societies and organisations, it could be curtailed.

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