

The Multiple Jeopardy of Oil Producing Communities and the Incessant Militancy in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the role of the Niger Delta ruling elites in the worsening of development of the region. Through a series of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders having knowledge about the region, and using the elite capture theory, this paper found out how the elites have contributed immensely to the exacerbation of social crisis through several corrupt channels. The cocktail of environmental degradation and elites actions have pushed the people to double jeopardy, because it has obliterated the sources of their livelihood. Hence, this is fueling more grievances and the endless crisis of militancy in the region despite the existence of Amnesty Program.

INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta region is synonymous to crude oil exploration. Beneath the soils of communities in the region, lies the confluence of Nigeria's wealth and power. Proceeds from crude oil made up most of the country's accrued revenue (Paulais 2012). However, several decades after the discovery and subsequent commercialization of the crude oil, the Oil Producing Communities remain amongst the poorest in the world (Ewoh 2012). This is as a result of decades of neglect that has been characterized by corruption; which communities have suffered from successive Nigerian governments, and also environmental degradation (Haken et al. 2013) caused by Multinational Oil Companies (MNOC). However, there is a dearth of research so far to show how local elites of the region have been aiding to perpetuate the sufferings of these communities.

Inspired by the quest to confront these neglects from its initial stage, the first major insurgent movement led by Isaac Boro, Nottingham Dick, and Sam Owonaro was born in 1966 (Osaghae 1995). These young activists steered a 12 day Revolution under the platform of Niger Delta Volunteer service (NDVS) in 1966 against the government of Nigeria and multinational oil companies operating in the region. The 12-day revolution was because of the perceived exploitation and marginalization of the region in Nigeria's power equation, but the Federal Government security suppressed the rebellion in less than 20 days (Osha 2006). The government sup-

pressed the rebellion, but the aspiration of the indigenous people of the area towards the quest for better living and self-determination of their resources continued in several ways. The first major movement after the aborted Boro revolution was in the 1990's. This movement was under the umbrella of a group known as the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), the group is an upshot of *Kagote*; a traditional and professional group formed in the region by the elites after the end of the civil war in Nigeria (Welch 1995). The movement was to voice out the grievances and their aspiration in terms of protecting their rights within the Nigerian nation-state. Although the movement was initially none violent (Ogundiya 2009), the peaceful approach did not last for long (Mustapha 2000), as tension escalated between those who are perceived to be government apologists, and those perceived radically oriented youths led by Ken Saro Wiwa. Nonetheless, Rowell and Lubberss (2010) observe that Wiwa was eventually accused of allegedly behind the assassination of four eminent leaders in the Niger Delta. This development changed the entire movement of MOSOP, as Saro Wiwa and eight others were arrested by the military junta, tried under a military tribunal, which subsequently led to their conviction and execution.

The preparation for the return to democratic governance in the country in 1998 revitalized the quest for self-determination within the Niger Delta region. In December 1998, just five months to handing over of governance to civilian government, a coalition of Ijaw youths representing

about 24 organizations gathered in *Kaiama* to further galvanize and strengthen the struggle of the Niger delta. This was the major event that changed the Niger Delta Struggle from the peaceful measures to a full blown violent approach, as the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) that was constituted at the *Kaiama* began a violent confrontation with the government (Omotola 2009). One of the former presidents of the Ijaw Youth Council further reiterated that:

So when the IYC started ... in 1998 we gathered at Kaiama and Declared the Kaiama declaration ... During my presidency I changed the Motto of the organization to "self-determination and resource control by any means necessary". Therefore, when I did that, it means that the IYC now legitimize arms struggle. By saying that we are not going to dialogue alone, and if the dialogue fails, we have every right to pick up arms and regain our stolen sovereignty. (Informant 2, Personal Communication, February 27, 2012).

In continuation of the struggle, and deep into the democratic era in Nigeria, numerous groups such as the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and many more emerged (Courson 2009). These groups and others in the Niger Delta culminated to the birth of the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) to lead the struggle. The targets of the MEND have always been the backbone of the nation's economy which is the crude oil installations and facilitates. The Group MEND began its full-blown violent attacks in 2005 on oil installations and this was in order to the force the government in fulfilling its desires. They also engaged in kidnappings of expatriate for ransom; as a result, the country has recorded significant losses due to this sabotage (Watts 2007).

Furthermore, environmental degradation in the Niger Delta by multinational oil companies has featured very prominently in intellectual discourse regarding the region's economic, environmental, and political sphere. The multinational oil companies have been operating in the Niger Delta region for decades, and Okonta and Douglas (2003) note that within this period, there have been numerous environmental hazards caused by crude oil exploration. Although the multinational oil companies have often denied the initial cries as excessive exaggeration, as such the companies do not accept the responsibili-

ties of negligence that contribute to environmental degradation in the oil producing communities (Skjærseth et al. 2004). Nonetheless, the decades of military governance in the country have exacerbated the suffering of the oil producing areas due to lack of accountability and transparency in managing the wealth of the nation, as well as indifference regarding environmental issues of the region. This catalyzed to more agitations after the Boro revolution, from the nonviolent approach to a full-blown violent militancy in the region. Nevertheless, the return of democratic governance in 1999 in the country signified a total turn around towards transparent and accountable development of the region. The leaders of the region were expected to harness the tenets of democratic governance to guarantee sustainable development of the region. Hence, the aim of this Paper is to explore how the region's indigenous leaders from the grassroots, to the top level have helped in exploiting the people, as such leading to another cycle of sufferings and the unending armed struggle in the region during democratic governance.

The literature on Niger Delta that deals with militancy as a direct result of Nigerian state marginalization and multinational oil company's environmental degradation of the communities are enormous. In the last decades, researchers have intensified effort in revealing the extent of how this dual action directed at oil producing communities have generated chain reactions with debilitating consequences. However, there has been a dearth of how indigenous leaders of the region have greased the wheels of this exploitation since the return of democratic governance in the country. In the study by (Ikelegbe 2005), he argues that decades of neglect of oil producing communities by the Nigerian State and the environmental degradation is mainly the trigger of armed resistance in the region. The resistance further gave a chance for criminal syndicates to infiltrate the movement. Furthermore, according to Omotola (2006) the radicalization of youth into armed conflict is as a direct result of decades of underdevelopment, and the indifference of the Nigerian government despite the contribution of the region's wealth to the country's economy. In another study, Omeje (2006) posits that the dependency on crude oil revenue by the Nigerian government, which is consolidated by ruling elites, has equally fuelled

conflict in the region, while in the other hand multinational oil companies take advantage of weak legislation in the country to make more profit at the expenses of the environment and the oil producing communities. The work of Watts (2008) has provided the schemes of how political intrigues within the political class are providing seamless opportunity for militant groups to unleash violence. Politicians in the region hire thugs to checkmate political rivals using public money, and this patronage has substantially increased the might of militant groups in the region. Furthermore, Obi (2008) shows the violent reaction of the youth in the oil producing communities toward multinational oil companies, particularly the new companies that are trying to gain access to valuable resources in the communities. The distrust of all foreign companies operating in the region is a reflection of the perceived connivance with the central government to sustain the exploitation of the region and its people.

Another study that looked at youth restiveness is that of Arowosegbe (2009). It suggests that absence of development and the marginalization by the central government of the minority groups in the Niger Delta region created youth restiveness in the region. It was also compounded by the by State policies that are detrimental to the development of the region. The study of Omoyefa (2010), cited multiple theories of conflicts, and the study suggests that the conflict in the region was inevitable. The oil producing communities remain in poverty, while the Nigerian political elites live in affluence generated from the resources of the communities. This increases the sense of hopelessness, thereby triggering discontent within the communities. Nonetheless, Ibaba (2011) summarized the main issues triggering conflict in the region. The study suggests, "The causes and sources of the conflict are attributed to factors which include ethnic-based political domination; the politics of oil-wealth distribution and the country's centralized Federal system, environmental degradation and the associated impacts on productivity; and unethical corporate practices and poor Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by Multinational Oil Companies". The study further suggests that acute poor governance bedeviling the management of the region's resources by the leaders has led to human rights abuses in the region, hence frustration and conflict.

Ogundiya (2011) also supports this view. The study further provided statistics of Accrued Federation Funds allocated to the region from 2004 to 2008, and how the various state governors stole or mismanaged the public funds. The root of conflict in the Niger Delta is a reflection of unfavorable oil exploration policies of the Central Government in the region (Umukoro 2012); it shows how oil exploration has generated environmental inequality, because of the lopsided laws that tend to discriminate local communities of land ownership. The economic survival of the communities is made worse due to environmental degradation brought about by the activities of the multinational oil companies coupled with the indifference of Nigerian government of the communities' welfare.

Furthermore, most of the previous studies have been a conceptual analysis; though have importantly pointed out some of the reasons leading to the debilitating conflicts in the region.

Nonetheless, in addition to the above, this study has gone beyond the itemized reasons, and has argued that the indigenous leaders have helped incredibly in sustaining the sufferings of their communities. This article uses the elite capture theory to illustrate with empirical evidence on how the welfare and benefits of the people in the oil producing communities are being diverted by the local chiefs, the leadership of the institutions created for developing the region, as well as State Governors and their cronies. Elites capture explains how local elite benefits at the expense of the people through fraudulent control of resources (Platteau et al. 2012; Wong 2010), and this can happen through diverting donor or central government funds channeled to the communities for development (Dutta 2009).

Moreover, since the return of democratic governance in 1999, governance has been decentralized to the hand of indigenous people in every State of Nigeria. The people are at liberty to elect their leaders, because it is one of the democratic norms, while decentralization is seen according to Agrawal and Gupta (2005) as a vehicle for "increased efficiency, greater equity, and higher responsiveness of governments to citizens' demands". Particularly, in the oil producing States, more powers have been given to the indigenous people through the establishment of several institutions in order to drive their development. The ideas of handing over the af-

fairs of the region to its indigenous people arise from the popular belief that the local people have “better knowledge of local conditions and constraints” (Platteau 2009:23). This however has increased the advantage of the region’s elites over the resources, hence perpetuating the exploitation of the people.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The data of this paper were from a broader study conducted between December 2011 and March 2012. The main source of data of this study is a semi-structured interview conducted with 50 stakeholders. The researcher used the purposeful sampling to recruit the informants due to their understanding and connection with the issue under study. However, snowballing referral was an effective mechanism utilized, as some of the recruited informants referred the Researcher to other willing informants. As such, this gave the Researcher the opportunity to leverage out more information from the categories of Community Leaders, Politicians in the Niger Delta, Ex-militant, Non-governmental organizations and government officials. The Data collection was conducted in various locations in Nigeria, which includes Abuja, Bayelsa and Port Harcourt. However having access to other senior officials that are directing dealing with the management of the wealth of the region was difficult due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Furthermore, other Secondary Sources such as News reports were used to complement the interviews, while other confidential reports were only availed to the Researcher to sight. The interviews were recorded with a tape recorder with the consent of the informant, while iterative transcription of the interview was verbatim.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The oil producing communities are in a dilemma, because of the intricate exploitation platform created within the chain of institutional leadership in the region on one hand, and the continuous environmental degradation by multinational oil companies on the other hand. Local pervasive corruption has been hindering the alleviation of the perceived marginalization of the communities by the Nigerian government. This Paper has explored on how these leaders have been scheming out the people of the region.

The history of environmental degradation by the multinational oil companies dates back to the beginning of crude oil exploration in the country. The Nigerian government, particularly the military regimes have never been fully committed to confronting the multinational oil companies with the view to implementing the international best practice in the Petroleum Industry. The return of democratic rule in the country suggests a sustainable solution to environmental degradation would be achieved, but more than a decade later, it is far from over. This could actually be seen in how the Nigerian government is handling the comprehensive report by the United Nations Environmental program; the report still lay dormant while oil spills are still unabated in the communities. This is in sharp contrast to how governments across the globe react to such activities of MNOC’s. This can be illustrated from the reactions of the United States President, Barack Obama when the facility of British Petroleum (BP) spilled millions of barrels of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico. He promptly reacted in order to save the people and avoid the destruction of their livelihood, he concludes that:

“I’m not going to rest or be satisfied until the leak is stopped at the source, the oil in the Gulf is contained and cleaned up and people in the Gulf are able to go back to their lives and livelihoods” (Rose 2010).

The multinational oil companies in the Niger delta have often been accused of profiting more at the detriment of their host communities, although evidence suggests that the multinational oil companies have in recent years injected several funds, several corporate social responsibilities (CSR) in their host communities (Aaron 2011), but there are still cries of doing less by the multinational oil companies. However, the argument remains within observers, that although the multinational oil companies have the moral obligation to inculcate international best practices in their business dealings, the multinational oil companies as profit-oriented companies are not compelled to alleviate poverty, because that rest squally on the government as their responsibilities to the people. Informant 29 clearly posits that:

People like to blame the Multinational Oil Companies for all these things, but I do not think they are to be blamed. We must understand that Multinational Oil Companies, their primary responsibilities are to make as much

money as they can for their shareholders. They are not in business to be nice or do the job of government... It is the failure of government that has caused the problem of Nigeria and the Niger Delta, and not the Multinational Oil Corporations. (Informant 32, Personal Communication, March 2, 2012).

However, multinational oil companies have thrived to maintain CSR, because they largely believe it is important to the sustainability of their business, as Porter and Kramer (2006) argue that CSR “can be a source of opportunity, innovation and competitive advantage” to the Multinational oil companies. As such, the Companies have been engaged in CSR or paying compensations to their host communities in Nigeria. However, the compensations and other CSR benefits have not been trickling down to the real beneficiaries in the communities, because it is often diverted. In this respect, local community leaders in these areas play a pivotal role in this regard. This is done in different patterns within the inner circle of the community leadership through the monetary compensations and other entitlements paid by the multinational oil companies and the Central Government. Though these compensations are arguably grossly insufficient, the community leaders still misappropriate it. There are such numerous cases reported to Law Enforcement Agencies for investigation by aggrieved members, while other cases pass unreported due to threats from leaders. Based on interviews with some Nigerian Federal Law Enforcement Agents handling such cases, evidence suggests that the leaders of some of the communities are the bane of poverty alleviation, as they are corruptly engaged in the direct theft of the people’s wealth. This can be seen below for the interview transcript of such three major selected cases reported to law enforcement:

Case One

This is a case of embezzlement and misappropriation of funds some oil companies paid to a community as compensation for oil spillage. Investigation showed that some sum was paid by one company. The community leaders embezzled the money.. In addition, the Traditional ruler of the area enjoyed substantial part of it... because it is a standing order that if such monies come, the Traditional ruler must have his

share... Hence, we have established the criminal case against the community leaders. However, we cannot invite the Traditional Ruler because he is very influential in the area, and some of the oil companies are not forthcoming in providing us with information (Informant 39, Personal Interview January 15, 2012).

Case Two

This case is against some community leaders in Rivers State. One oil company paid some said amount of money to a community, and part of the money was meant for scholarships to some youths in the community. But the community leaders decided to pay only half of the money to the youths, while they paid in full to their own children... not only that, the leaders of the community inserted fake names in the list of the scholarship beneficiaries in order to get more money from the oil companies (Informant 38, Personal Communication, January 15, 2012).

Case Three

This is a case of diversion of funds meant for a community in Akwa-Ibom State. When lands are acquired, compensations are made to the community...But you have to see how this money was shared... The leaders embezzled it.... Just imagine! They claimed to relocate a very small shrine for over 2 million Naira... and the community Chief is at the forefront of this... We have arrested the leaders including the Chief himself” (Informant 37, Personal Communication, and January 15, 2012).

The above and other several reported and unreported cases of exploitation by local community leaders that are supposed to be the custodians of their public become an effective tool for the exploitation of the people. When this deteriorates, an average person in the community becomes helpless, and his aggression translates to full-blown tension. However, in trying to corroborate the alleged cases with the Law Enforcement Agents, a community leader in the Niger Delta was interviewed. He averred that:

I am a leader in a community with about 2000 people... there was an explosion in our community... I single handedly took the case to court; we won the case against the oil company in 2004... The money was shared among us, I benefited 30 million Naira as a leader and

the other three leaders got 30 million Naira each. We have a list of affected people and the payment was done based on that, the people on the list got two hundred thousand Naira each. The Lawyer who filed the case got 50 percent of the total amount of the compensation. Later, more people were added to the list that we feel should get the money...Some people have grudges, now my life is under constant threat and mortal danger because of the rebels in that community, and most of them are not members of that community. (Informant 36, Personal Communication, January 16, 2012).

The above indicates that the leaders affected or not, always get the largest share on compensations. As such, in the overall structure of crude oil benefits for the average people in the oil communities remain at the bottom and at the negative receiving ends. Considering the cocktail of environmental degradation, the basic needs absence and the corruption within the local elites; it exacerbates poverty within the average people in the various communities and the consequences are enormous.

Furthermore, even before the Boro Revolution, there was a major development before the independence of the country and it was considered the plight of the minority especially to protect the rights of the Niger Delta people. One of such moves was the Willink Commission (Akinyele 1996). This Commission was aimed at the protection of minority rights. Idemudia and Ite (2006) notes that after Independence, the Government of Nigeria created the Niger Delta Development Board and in 1993, there was another institution called the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) and by the year, 2000 there was the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). These institutions were created for the sole purpose of developing the Niger Delta area that was considered disadvantaged within the country. The NNDC was established to address the shortcomings of OMPADEC, and to provide proactive measures towards developing the region. Apart from the NDDC, the Niger Delta ministry and the amnesty program were all initiated in order to mitigate the social and economic problem of the region. In order to safeguard the development of the region the leadership of these institutions is often from the region. For example the NDDC is exclusively reserved for the indigenes of the Oil Producing State. By doing so, the institution is

expected to propel indigenous measures towards developing the region. The Act in section 12 sub 1 clearly states that:

There shall be for the Commission, a Managing Director, and two Executive Directors who shall be indigenes of oil producing areas starting with the member States of the Commission with the highest producing quantum of oil and shall rotate amongst member States in the order of producing (National Assembly Act 2004).

However, Omotola and Patrick (2010) argue that corruption has also invaded NDDC. As such, the provision of the NDDC Act with regard to leadership has not produced the desired result of having proactive indigenous leaders capable of utilizing the institutional framework for the region's development, because it is a direct reflection of the contradiction of the purpose of its creation. The corrupt tendencies in the institution have always scuttled the progress of the institution. Corruption within the institution has led to the denial of service delivery to the targeted population. Although there have been allegations of underfunding of the institution (Dokpesi and Ibiezugbe 2012), but still the earmarked budgets in this regards often ends up in private pockets, while the suffering of the constituent deepens. However, the huge amount of money channeled to this institution has been a major source of attraction for political intrigues, and this subverts the aims of the institution towards championing sustainable development in the region. Even the county's President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan had reasons for concerns due to the repugnant kleptomaniac behaviors of people saddled with the responsibilities of the institution. The President while inaugurating new management of NDDC stressed to the new management that:

I believe you will learn from the mistakes of your immediate predecessors... NDDC must stop this political patronage, political warfare. The past Board was camping all kinds of criminals in hotels in the name of helping politicians... You are not sent there to solve political problems (Embu 2011).

Some other politicians from the region who felt the tenet of the NDDC establishment must be honored at all cost for the benefit of the people, met stiff resistance from corrupt interest. A former Member of the House of Representatives representing one of the oil communities in the National assembly averred that:

The communities that produce that oil, people still buy water to drink as I speak to you. In fact, when I wanted to question NDDC, they plotted against me and wanted to kill me. They tried to recall me through illegal means... they fought me badly, and even my colleagues tried to betray me by getting me stop questioning their expenditures. You find ghost projects, as you find ghost workers. It was through this NDDC that I know that there are ghost projects (Informant 16, personal Communication, February 29, 2012).

This indicates that some projects are initiated, but the funds are diverted to private pockets within the cycle of the elites. The NDDC which was designed to mitigate the shortcomings of other intervention programs in the region becomes also confronted with myriad problems. There have been mixed feelings on its effectiveness in addressing the very reason it was set up, and one of such reasons has been the issue of those directly handling and discharging the duties of the Commission. In 2008, the Chairman of NDDC Ambassador Sam Edem was arrested for the alleged offense of using about 800 million Naira of the Commission for voodoo (Ige 2009). The alleged neglect and misuse of public funds of the institution made the Nigerian President dissolve the management of the NDDC and order a probe in 2011 (Onyeose 2011).

The failure of the various institutions to address the socio-economic situations of the area despite the huge amount of money being channeled was another reason of apprehension to the communities within the Niger Delta and this continued unabated. These institutions are led by the indigenes of these areas, and this is done in order to provide to them with the unrestricted opportunity of developing their area and reduce the decades of marginalization suffered by the people. Although the financial contribution to these institutions have been argued to be insufficient, and often controlled by the elites at the Federal level, evidence suggests that the extensive fraudulent activities in such institutions have always derailed the course of development in the area. The increasing level of corruption within the ruling elites has left the communities undeveloped. Other informants interviewed in the research argue that no matter how well projects are planned, if elite's corruption in the region is not curtailed, the region's underdevelopment will be endless. This informant posits that:

It does not matter whether how many intervention funds came into the Niger Delta, but were they are put into effective use?...So basically what is wrong with Nigeria is corruption... unless we fight corruption to a standstill we will not get anywhere, whether in the Niger Delta, in the South, North-East- North-Central or anywhere in Nigeria. (Informant 5, Personal communication, February 16, 2012).

The above suggests that poor governance fueled the militancy in the Niger Delta. The elaborate scheming of the Institution's Budget by the management led to its deviation from its key purpose of restructuring the Niger Delta region. Essentially, it became a tool of becoming rich within the political class. A former Member of the National Assembly, who was a member of the NDDC Committee in the House, suggests that the corruption by the top hierarchy in NDDC, who are often indigenes of the region, has been taking the region backward. He clearly recalls that:

I also remember very well the level of corruption in that area. When we went for oversight function, the first day we arrived there was a Birthday party for the MD of NDDC... he was a former colleague of mine in the House of Representative. I remember very well the kind of drinks they were serving us. That was the first time I saw a particular wine called Crystal. When we came back to the hotel, 250 thousand Naira was sent to each Member of the committee... I left to Abuja and NDDC gave us a contract of 1.6 billion Naira as a committee (Informant 12, Personal Interview January 28, 2012).

The persistent action of indigenous leaders saddled with the task in this institution has dragged the development prospect of the region backward. The institution has been practically transformed into the elite club at the detriment of the region's salvation. Another institution saddled with the responsibility of the region is the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, which was established in 2008. Equally the Ministry's leadership has always been sourced from the region's teeming population. However, in recent years the Ministry has also been in an alleged corruption scandal (Agba et al. 2012).

Nonetheless, the State Governors in the Niger Delta region have increasingly compounded the problems faced by the majority population in the region. This negative development is

happening at a time the region was getting more priorities in order to accelerate its development. The National Assembly in the year 2004 passed a bill called Abolition of Dichotomy in the Application of the Principle of Derivation (Assembly 2004). This entails relatively increasing the amount of money allocated to the Niger Delta States in order to cater for more development and poverty alleviation of the people. However, the State Governors have taken advantage of such to systematically enrich themselves and their cronies. This informant suggests that, though there has been an increase in the region's allocation of funds from the federal government, but the fund has not been effectively used. He maintained that:

Whether the political leadership in the Niger Delta has used that income effectively is another issue. But many suggested that they could have done much well than what they had done so far. This has generated a substantial level of corruption; monies are not being accounted for... You can see the trial of some of the former Niger Delta Governors...It is a pathetic issue that people are not happy about, that the level of income flow has not translated into a commensurate level of development (informant 28, Personal Interview February 16, 2012).

The anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria have arrested several former State governors from the region. However, only the former governor of Bayelsa State and the former governor of Edo State have been convicted so far, while other cases are still in court passing through court procedures. One of the first major corruption scandal involving a State Governor was that of Bayelsa State governor; Diepreye Solomon Peter Alamieyeseigha, Maton and Daniel (2012) suggest that the governor defrauded his State of Billions of Naira. He governor was eventually impeached, and was subsequently convicted for the crimes in Nigeria. His approximate salary for the entire period as governor was about US\$81,000, but evidence suggests that he amassed wealth and purchased various expensive choice properties across the globe (DOJ 2012). However, he was recently given a presidential pardon for his criminal records by President Jonathan. Nonetheless the former Governor of Edo State Chief Lucky Igbinedion was also convicted of corruption charges too (Ibaba et al. 2012).

Furthermore, the source of wealth to several other Governors in the Niger Delta region were found deeply rooted in alleged corruption and diversion of wealth and resources of their various States. One other such celebrated case was of Mr. James Ibori, the former governor of Delta State. He was investigated by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and was charged with 170 counts for money laundering, corruption and public wealth mismanagement. Nevertheless, a court acquitted and discharged him of all charges under a controversial circumstance. The action of the Judge actually reflects the assertion that 85 percent of judiciary in Nigeria is corrupt according to the findings of Daniel and Freeman (2007). The Governor was however arrested after some years in the United Arab Emirate at the instance of the British government, and he was extradited to the United Kingdom where he was convicted (Okonjo-Iweala 2012) and was sentenced to 13 years in prison after pleading guilty. Other accused governors from the region like Peter Odili and Orji Uzu Kalu continue to enjoy freedom due to legal maneuvers that have overshadowed their prosecution. Nonetheless, more recently, another former Governor of Bayelsa State Timipre Sylva who lost re-election was arraigned in court by the EFCC for allegations of corruption. The EFCC obtained an interim order to take possession of about 48 expensive properties in the form of buildings (Uwujaren 2013); remarkably, these properties are those in Abuja alone. The properties were alleged to have been bought by the Governor during his four years as the chief executive of the State.

The absence of development, the proliferation of arms through politicians and the unabated level of corruption in the Niger Delta region has ultimately increased the level of radicalization of people into becoming militants. This is also in line with the findings of Narayan et al. (2009) that suggest the conflict in Assam was triggered by elite capture and corruption.

The average people feel aggrieved due to the perceived misuse of allocated crude oil revenue by the ruling elites. The attitude of the elites widens the gap between the rich and the poor in the region, and this increased the level of poverty and unemployment. Hence, the propensity of violent militancy and kidnapping becomes unavoidable. That is why this informant clearly states that:

I refused to get married because one day I have it in mind, that I will be a suicide bomber...that I will go and shake hands with a Governor and blow him up (Informant 1 Personal Communication, February 16, 2012).

The consequences of denial of the social and economic improvement that would benefit the Niger Delta population increase the buildup of public discontent and disconnect about the action of ruling elites. In this regards, another informant notes that:

In terms of the Niger Delta you have seen the level of conflicts we have been having. These negative impacts are conflict, deadly conflicts in the Niger Delta and very bloody conflict... The people feel aggrieved that they have not been participating, they have not benefited from the oil economy (Informant 28 Personal communication, February 16, 2012).

The magnitude of absolute poverty (See table Appendix A) in the oil producing States remains an irony, although the elites in the region often blame the central government of control of the natural resources in the country. However, the preponderance of fraudulent and corrupt activities by the elites suggests the opposite. The allocations to these areas have substantially increased in the democratic dispensation, but the plights of the average citizens of the area have been nose-diving detrimentally since the return of democracy to the country. The actions of the elites have added to the accumulated suffering of the people that was inherited from the military era, and this informed the militarization of the youths in the democratic dispensation.

Furthermore, when the violent approach adapted by the MEND reached its peak between the year 2005 and 2008, this adversely affected oil production, making the nation to lose about 25 percent of its total output (Hanson 2007). Hence, the colossal damage necessitated an alternative approach in ending the debilitating issues in the Niger Delta region, and the Federal government during the tenure of Umaru Musa Yaradua as president proffered a multi-layered methodology to solving the protracted problem. The solutions encompass the overhauling the whole nation through a seven point agenda which include; Food Security, Security and Education, Transportation Wealth Creation and Employment, Power and Energy, the Rule of Law (Salami 2011). In the Niger Delta, one of the ma-

ajor steps was the announcement on June 25, 2009 by the Federal Government granting amnesty to all militants that surrendered their arms within 60 days (Obi 2010). The idea of the amnesty by the government was to considerably reduce the threat by the militants, which has obviously hampered the backbone of governance in the country, and then engage the youths toward a possible reintegration into society. Observers have hailed the move as proactive and insightful, however some informants have placed a caveat on it, and this informant observes that:

I think it is a smart political move to disarm them, train and put them back into the system by providing them with jobs...I hope the Government will pursue it objectively. However, they must not create the impression that if you want a job and training, you have to be a militant. The government must not allow this impression to be developed... It is good to disarm them and train them to get jobs (Informant 14, Personal Communication January 16, 2012).

Furthermore, another informant from the Niger Delta region, illustrate the significance of the amnesty program and concludes that:

In regards to the amnesty...I really congratulate the late President who thought it very wise to engage with the issue at that level. So the amnesty program is laudable. Although I think that, the presentation is a little bit faulty. Corruption has affected the amnesty program... Therefore, I think much need to be done beyond the fact that there is an amnesty program ongoing. What about the rest of the Niger Delta youths who are not militants? I am not a militant...but I did my PhD without any support from the Nigerian State...I am an indigene, don't I need to have some form of support from a Nigerian State. Do I have to be a militant before I get support from my State? (Informant 13, Personal Communication, February 16, 2012).

However, the first major test to the program was when some of the ex-militants detonated bombs during a post-amnesty dialogue meeting taking place in Warri, in March 2010 (Amaize 2010). Furthermore, on 1 October 2010 MEND detonate bombs during the 50th Independence Anniversary of the nation in Abuja (Patrick 2011). This shocked the fragile peace of the region, and it introduced a new dimension to the capacity of the militant groups, as the group has extended its aggression to the Federal Capital for

the first time. Furthermore, there is already allegations of mismanagement and insincerity of the amnesty officials are already brewing in the amnesty program. Although these crimes are often hidden from the public view, some of it became obvious with the suspension of the staffs of the Amnesty Office for fraud (Soriwei 2012). Indicatively, their actions scuttle the whole program, thereby compromising the volatile situation in the region. Already these allegations are creating disquiets among the ex-militants, as they were allegedly deported from South Africa due to failure of commitment of officials (Nkanga 2012). The allegation of mismanagement did not stop with the Amnesty Officials; it has been within the ex-militant leaders since the inception of the program. Over one hundred ex-militants were with investigators to testify against some of their leaders who allegedly diverted payment meant for them. In a revealing interview with him, he explained that:

No funds have been diverted in any way.... There is a level of payment the Amnesty Committee is paying us for feeding... I don't think any leader has diverted any money from anybody. Leaders employ boys into their camp; leaders brought boys from the rivers. Even when we were in the river, it was we that bought guns, it was we that own our boys, and it was we that own our facilities. We were managing the boys until we disarmed. We still manage boys and maintain peace until now. So the boys do not have much right on us (Informant 10, Personal Communication, February 17, 2012).

Ironically, the above assertion from one of the leaders of MEND suggests the shortcomings of the program. The absence of mechanisms that will ensure a proper management of the funds distributed to the militants has created an avenue for corruption and exploitation of the low ranking ex-militants. As such, this could lead to anarchy, considering the fact that the leaders of the group do not hold the monopoly of violence, kidnappings and oil pipeline vandalism.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has tried to show several mechanisms used by the local elites to exploit the people in the Niger Delta. The overall improvement of relative peace in the region is due to the amnesty program, and this has increased the fortunes of government through significant in-

crease in oil production. Nevertheless, there have been increased incidences of violence, kidnapping, pipeline vandalism and oil theft despite the existence of the Amnesty program. However, the internal contradictions and political intrigues within the region and of MEND itself is a source of major concern for the survival of a sustainable peace in the region. The development of the region hinges at the political will of the region's political elites. Unfortunately, the level of kleptomaniac tendencies of some of the elites directly connected to the funds meant for development of the region have further compounded the problems.

These failures have equipped the ex-militants and other criminal tendencies in the region with the avenues to commit further criminal acts under the guise of social injustice. From year 2010 to 2012 after the Amnesty Program, some of ex-militants and other criminal elements have been escalating bombings and threatening Government institutions and kidnappings with impunity. Consequently, there is no such evidence to suggest that all the ex-militants have surrendered their arms and ammunition, and as such, the threat of regrouping remains eminently. As such, it is worthy to note now, that the relative peace in the Niger Delta equally has to be close to the obvious fact that the current President is an indigene of the region, hence becoming a stabilizing force. However, evidence suggest from the pronouncement of ex-militant leaders that there are strong tendencies that some of them may spearhead another round of revolt if there is any shift in the political status quo.

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