

THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS IN NIGERIA: SOME MORAL LESSONS

Idorenyin Francis Esikot (Ph.D)

Faculty of Arts, Department of Philosophy, University of Uyo, Nigeria

Mobile: +2347065379343

Matthew Akpan

Faculty of Arts, Department of Philosophy, University of Uyo, Nigeria

Mobile: +2347032593504

ABSTRACT: *The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is richly endowed with enormous and abundant oil and gas resources contributing to ninety percent of Nigeria's annual income. The Niger Delta region however, is severely exploited after being explored of her natural resources. This has led to widespread agitation, protest and militancy by her citizens. The crisis this has engendered has very significant moral undertone that one can learn from. Thus this work, apart from its historical insight, attempts to highlights these moral lessons with the thesis that "injustice" always leads to consequences that are not desirable.*

Keywords: Crisis, Niger-Delta, Nigeria, Morality, Injustice, Militancy

INTRODUCTION

Anyaegbunam (2000) in his text, *Niger Delta: A Case for Regional Contingency Plan*, reveals that:

Niger Delta lies within some twenty two major estuaries that are linked locally to a complicated network of mangrove creeks, rich in Wetlands, biodiversity, oil and gas, as well as human resources (p.140-149).

Similarly, the World Bank, in its report on Defining an Environmental Development Strategy for the Niger Delta, describes the Niger Delta as "one of the world's largest wetlands, and Africa's largest delta covering some 70,000km formed by the accumulation of sedimentary deposits transported by the Niger and Benue Rivers" (1993:p.1).

In the same vein, the erstwhile Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), in its Quarterly Report, said this about the Niger Delta:

The River disgorges its water into the Atlantic Ocean through a large number of tributaries which form the Niger Delta. The area of the Delta is further enlarged by rivers other than tributaries of the Niger ... Calabar, River, Cross River and Imo River to the East, and Siluko River, Benin River, Escravoes River and River Forcados, to the West (1993: p.80).

The Willink Commission Report, in its own way, describes the Niger Delta as a region with definite geographical structures. It sees it as a piece of country formed from broad vertical and horizontal strips of the coastal belt and the cross river valley with sprawling reversal shape, enclosing Ibo plateau. The report also reveals that the inhabitants of the cross river valley are non-Ibos, while the swampy area, located south west is predominantly accommodating the Ijaws. The Efik and Ibibio tribes are said to be located close to the mouth of the cross river, leaving the North of the cross river for various tribes, mixing together. Thus:

to the east of Ibo Plateau lies the valley of Cross River ... This forms a broad vertical strip containing people who are not Ibos ... these two strips of the coastal belt and the cross river valley together make a piece of country, the shape of a rather sprawling reversal 'L' which enclose the Ibo Plateau. In the swamp and creek country of the south west there is an area in which the predominant tribal group is that of the Ijaws... towards the mouth of the Cross River are the Efiks and the Ibibios. Further north on the Cross River are many tribes intermingled... (1958:p.34).

Ephraim Essien describes the Niger Delta from the geo-political point of view. This involves those states of Nigeria that border the coastal waters of the Atlantic. According to him:

The Niger Delta is made up of at least 7 states – Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Ondo and River States. This corresponds almost exactly with the states that make up the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, to wit; Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers State classified as core Niger Delta States (2008:p.293-294).

These states of the Niger Delta are said to be richly endowed with crude oil and gas, contributing ninety percent Nigeria's annual income. Concerning the Niger Delta crisis, Essien contends that "the crisis involves a violent conflict and militancy due to the exploration and exploitation of oil resources in the area" (2008:p.294).

Ibaba (2005) attributed the Niger Delta crisis to certain factors, such as land alienation, unfulfilled promises for compensation, political marginalization, socio-economic inequalities,

dishonest leadership, communication gap, inadequate research input and cultural disorientation. Mark Arikpo (1998) substantiating on the exploitative treatment of the Niger Deltans, argues that the protesting youths, women and others are pawns in the hands of the privileged class who use them to further their interest.

To crown it all, Anayochukwu Agbo, (2006) points to the fact that the Niger Delta crisis is heightened by terrorist activities that are manifesting in different forms, including armed robbery, kidnapping, bombing and bunkering.

Our intention in this work is to re-examine the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria and pin point some of the moral lessons that must be learnt from it. Such lessons are of interest not only for our present use, but more importantly for future generations.

THE NATURE OF THE CRISIS

The Niger Delta crisis involves the existential and environmental problems faced by the people of the Niger Delta region in Nigeria and the resultant conflict, violence and militant operations in the same region. Ephraim Essien (2008) captures this when he reasoned that “the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is enmeshed in conflict and militancy....” (p.294). According to Ibaba (2005) the Niger Delta crisis is caused by the following factors:

Land alienation, unfulfilled promises for compensation, political marginalization, socio-economic inequalities, dishonest leadership, communication gap, inadequate research input and cultural disorientation (p.24).

Apart from the above factors, communal conflicts in the Niger Delta are mainly caused by the exploration and exploitation of oil resources in the area. In this sense, Mark Arikpo (1998) argues that “the communities of the Niger Delta from whose land oil is produced are excluded from oil wealth” (p.7).

The import of this quotation is that the people of the Niger Delta are socio-economically neglected; they are not sufficiently benefitting from the oil proceeds, considering the fact that oil is extracted from their region. Instead, the people’s original sources of livelihood have been paralyzed due to environmental degradation caused by the activities of oil exploration.

The peoples’ consciousness of the fact of degradation, exploitation and pollution of their environment without due compensation from the oil companies, or the Federal Government responsible for the company’s operations in the region, compels them to resort to violent conflicts and militancy, as ways of getting their existential problems resolved. For in-depth understanding of the Niger Delta crisis, it is important to trace its historical background.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CRISIS

The Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria has passed through five important historical phases, namely:

- (i) The colonial or pre-independence period that ended in 1959.
 - (ii) The early secession/Isaac Boro phase (1960-1970)
 - (iii) The early civil society phase (1970-1985)
 - (iv) Saro Wiwa phase (1986-1995); and
 - (v) Confrontation/Post Saro Wiwa phase (1996 to date)
- We shall elaborate more on each of this phase accordingly.

- i) **The Colonial or Pre-Independence Period:** The Niger Delta crisis of the pre-independence era took two dimensions. At the beginning, it was an agitation against colonial subjugation and exploitation. Later, it became grievances expressed against the perceived domination, “peripheralisation” and marginalization by the dominant ethnic groups. In 1957, a year before the beginning of oil exploration, the Niger Delta communities had complained to the Willink Commission established to tackle problems that emerged during negotiations for the country’s independence. Their complaint was that they were neglected by the regional and central government in the allocation of resources, social amenities and political appointments. This complaint did not yield any positive result but only led to the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board (NNDB) meant to cater for the developmental needs of the region. The military coup of 1966 and the thirty months civil war led to the dissolution of the NNDB.
- ii) **The Early Secession/Isaac Boro’s Phase (1960-1970):** This period emerged with a new dimension in the demand for equity in the allocation of federal resources. Precisely, on the 23rd February 1966, Isaac Adaka Boro declared the southern part of the present Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states “The Niger Delta Peoples Republic”. This happened when in a relative sense oil did not play a major role in the nation’s economy. However, the declaration was according to Ikporupo (2007) an “expression of the dissatisfaction of the people of the Niger Delta about the control of the oil resources of the region” (p.207-215). Though this period was short, it was and remained very significant in the historical analysis of the crisis in the Niger Delta. This is because it was the first time a Nigerian made an attempt to lead a separatist group after independence, with the intention of threatening the unity of the country. However, the revolt was brought under control within twelve days. Despite this, agitations by the people of the Niger Delta continued, taking different shapes, but continued to be treated lightly.
- iii) **The Early Civil Society Phase (1970-1985):** This phase did not experience any rancor and destruction. It was a period that featured advocacy that arose mostly from civil society organizations. It emerged after a long period of calmness and inactivity, shortly after the civil war when the Nigerian Government was engaged in its policy of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Of all organizations formed, the

Association of Minority Oil States (AMOS) was the most recognized. Ikporupo (2007) observes that “it spoke against the negligence of the principle of equity in the distribution of resources in the country” (p.215). This took the form of negotiation and consultation with all the stakeholders. Although the agitation took a peaceful dimension, the Federal Military Government employed repressive method and abolished the organization, thereby preventing further discussion with the aggrieved oil producing communities. Nevertheless, the repressive and nonchalant attitude of the Federal Military Government did not stop further agitations and protests by the Niger Delta communities. Rather it worsened the situation as agitations were intensified and popularized in subsequent phases.

- iv) **Saro Wiwa Phase (1986-1995):** This phase was characterized by the intensification and internationalization of ethnic minority agitation and non-compromising stance of the oil producing communities. Ogoni ethnic group was the most prominent. Ogoni embarked on a campaign organized by the “Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People” (MOSOP). This campaign was masterminded by the late Ken Saro Wiwa. Basically, the movement approached matters in terms of advocacy and protest march. The agitation was against the perceived injustice and unfair treatment of the Ogoni people in the distribution of the state resources, and abject neglect of their region in spite of the long years of petroleum exploration.

All the communities were mobilized and gathered at Bori, the major town on 26 August, 1990, where the “Ogoni Bill of Rights” was adopted. According to Suberu (1996) “the bill represented the classic example of the use of written memoranda to articulate the cause of the oil producing minority communities (p.33)”. Suberu (1996) further said that the bill required among other things the “right to control and use a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development” (p.33).

On 4th January, 1993, another significant protest march, involving about 100 thousand people from all parts of Ogoni land was carried out. These two protests attracted international sympathy in support of the minority oil communities. Going further in their protest, the Ogoni ethnic group decided to boycott the June 12 presidential election in 1993. Subsequent revolts among some Ogoni groups led to the killing of four Ogonis and the subsequent hanging of the “Ogoni Nine” including Ken Saro Wiwa, the renowned playwright and environmentalist by the military regime of the late dictator, General Sani Abacha. This marked the end of this phase and the beginning of a new phase rich with non-compromising stance and terror strategies. In the words of the *Human Right Watch* (1999), “the hanging of Saro Wiwa in November 1995 could be said to be the turning point in the politics of the Niger Delta” (p.35).

- (vi) **The Post Saro Wiwa Phase (1996 to date):** This is the phase in which violent attacks and bombing of oil installations, kidnapping, hostage taking and assault have been the order of the day. It is a period that has exposed the Nigerian state to a higher degree of security risk and challenges, like the time of the civil war. Ikporupo (2007) describes the

period as “the wilderness phase” (p.209). Inestimable loss of lives, jobs and homes are credited to this phase. Most of the affected people are from the minority ethnic groups. This situation led to an increase in the socio-economic and environmental challenges already posed to the people by the unregulated activities of the oil companies. The loss of leadership caused by the “judicial killing” of Ken Saro Wiwa raised the peoples’ consciousness of the need to support unflinchingly any group or leaders of any group claiming to be their representative, liberator or freedom fighter. This led to further proliferation of militant ethnic groups which constitute the significant features of this phase. The most prominent among these groups were:

- (i) Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP)
- (ii) Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)
- (iii) Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)
- (iv) Movement for the Reparation to Ogbia (MORETO)
- (v) The Chicoco Movement
- (vi) Movement for the Survival of Ijaw Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEN)
- (vii) The Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA)
- (viii) The Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV)
- (ix) Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF)
- (x) Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA)

The formation of these militant groupings further increased security problems in the region. The discussion above shows that the struggle for the control and allocation of oil resources and a fight against the environmentally degrading activities of the oil companies are the antecedents of the Niger Delta crisis.

It is important to note that the crisis in the Niger Delta is not restricted to the activities of the militants. It also extends to the obnoxious operations of the Joint task force deployed to the region to control the crisis. Their unregulated operations have led to the killings of innocent people in the region. Sampson, in the *Nation Newspaper* (2008) of December 3, reported that soldiers invaded Ogoni community at 3.00am of a certain morning, destroyed houses and killed two Ogoni youths (p.1). Another example was the bombardment of Ijaw communities by the JTF on February 15, 2006. According to Ajaero (2006) though Major Hammed, public relations officer, JTF, claimed the operation was targeted at the illegal oil bunkerers and not the community, it was obvious that the entire residents of these communities were seriously affected. Let us at this point consider some factors that aggravated the crisis.

SOME FACTORS THAT AGGRAVATED THE CRISES IN THE REGION

The increased rate of militancy in the Niger Delta region could be blamed on three important factors: the attitude of the oil companies, the attitude and policies of the federal government and the greedy behavior of some militants. We shall highlight these factors piece-meal to see the extent to which they heightened terror in the region.

First, it has been argued repeatedly that oil companies operating in the Niger Delta are not carrying out their social and environmental responsibilities appropriately. Their oil exploratory activities are not environmentally friendly since it involves the indiscriminate destruction of marine life by explosives used in seismic surveys. The pollution of water, land and vegetation from oil well, and the devastation of crops and trees by the intense heat resulting from gas flaring are serious issues. These have not only rendered the region inhospitable but have also significantly hampered human development. These exploitative activities are viewed as frustrating the welfare of the oil producing communities. Udo Etuk (2001) captured these when he submitted thus:

The fall-outs from the activities of the oil companies leave their farm-lands either dug up or devastated by fires; their rivers and fishing creeks are polluted by massive oil spillage both accidental and from sabotage, which leave their fishing grounds bereft of aquatic life. Even the very air they breathe is contaminated with pollutants from gaseous emissions; the rain which falls on their land is acid rain which destroys instead of nourishing their crops, which thus become susceptible to strange pestilence (p.5).

Because of the negative impacts of the activities of the oil companies on the peoples' environment, their major occupations of farming and fishing declined severely. With these hazards and without appropriate compensation, some indigenes of the Niger Delta region seriously aggrieved resorted to violence as one of the last options (since peaceful agitations were ignored) aimed at attracting the attention of the oil companies and the federal government to their problems. Suffice it to say that the selfish motive of the oil companies in their oil exploration and undue disregard to the dangers their activities posed to the oil producing communities, contributed in no small measure to the violence experienced in the Niger Delta.

Second, the federal government had failed to bring out an equitable sharing formula in the distribution of oil proceeds, thus placing the oil producing communities at a disadvantaged position. Research reveals that when oil was not the main source of the nation's income, the percentage allocated to derivation stood at 50% but when oil became the major source of income to the nation, 50% derivation formula was relatively slashed by the nation's various political administrations. Suberu (1996) states that at present, it is left at 13%, as entrenched in the 1999 constitution. Considering the huge contribution of the communities' resources to the nation's economy and the damages done to these communities by oil exploration, the percentage seems a very poor palliative.

Furthermore, the federal government neglected its legislative responsibilities that would have regulated the activities of the oil companies and reduced damages to the oil communities. Taking gas flaring as an example, not only did the Federal Government failed to put appropriate legislation in place to terminate it, but the penalty for gas flaring in terms of insignificant fines was rather an incentive to encouraged flaring. This perhaps explains Udo Etuk's (2001) worry that "the deadline to end gas flaring was 2004, and later extended to 2008. Today, gas flaring

continues, showing that the Federal Government is not living up to its legislative responsibilities” (p.10).

In addition, repressive tendency of the federal government contributed immensely to the heightening of terror in the Niger Delta. Instead of engaging in a continuous dialogue with the aggrieved Niger Deltan’s, the Federal Government in many cases attempted and even used its military powers to suppress the militants. This only worsened the already bad situation as militants vowed to continue their activities. The *Nation Newspaper* 2010 of November 18, reported that the Joint Task Force (JTF) on November 17, 2010 launched a massive operation against militants, as directed by the Defence Headquarters, aimed at uprooting militant camps still operating in the Niger Delta. Reacting to the attack, one of the militants, Paschal, as reported by O’Neil (2010) said:

You may destroy camps but you cannot stop this war because the people are still alive with their guns. You cannot fight militants and win because people are being recruited every day. We advise the Federal Government to call the JTF to stop this war because we would fight to the finish (p.1).

The above view reveals that the attempt by the federal government to use force on the militants, instead of continuous and sincere dialogue aggravated the crisis. Third, greed has been identified as contributing factor to the crisis in the Niger Delta. This factor is manifested in kidnapping and hostage taking. Apart from the militants engaged in kidnapping in the creeks, youths in the cities and villages have bought into the business, which has come to be viewed as the quickest and most handy means of poverty alleviation.

From agitation for resource control and compensation for environmental hazards, the militants diversified into kidnapping adults and children for pecuniary gains. Sagay (2007) in the *Newswatch Magazine* of August 13, observed:

We have people kidnapping three-year-old baby, people kidnapping grandmothers and so on. These people are pure criminals. I do not think we have to mince words about that. They have no interest of the Niger Delta at heart. They are only interested in making money (p.14).

Between 2005 and 2010, over 500 kidnappings were recorded in the Niger Delta. Only about 10 percent of this was for political reasons. Agbo (2006) reports that when a kingpin in the business in River State was approached to dissuade him from bringing the struggle into disrepute through hostage-taking, he told the delegation that he was not interested in the Niger Delta struggle; that what matter to him was only his stomach.

This kind of greed debases the struggle for the emancipation of the region from socio-economic bondage. We had hinted above that the federal government’s role is one factor that had sustained

the crisis. Although we had highlighted some points on these, we intend to look at this role in greater detail.

Suberu (1996) has identified three measures taken by the federal government to ensure peace in the Niger Delta. These are redistributive, reorganizational and regulatory/repressive policies as well as the recent presidential amnesty programme. Let us consider them piece-meal.

- (i) **Redistributive Policies:** Redistributive policies can be viewed as conscious decisions of the state to allocate valued resources to a group at the expense of other groups that are also claimants to these resources. Revision in the federal revenue sharing arrangements have been the most important redistributive policies designed to contain ethnic minority agitation in Nigeria. For instance, the regime of Babangida (1985-93) which inherited at its inception 2 percent of oil revenue derivation for the oil producing states and 1.5 percent of the same derivation for the oil producing areas slashed both down to 1 percent. But because of intensive agitation, the statutory allocation for the mineral producing areas was increased from 1 to 3 percent of federally collected revenue.

In an effort to create peace in the Niger Delta region, Obasanjo's civilian administration, through the 1999 Nigerian constitution, further reviewed the derivation principle of revenue allocation to 13 percent to oil producing states. Nonetheless, the increase failed to resolve the crisis in the region, as the people of the region still felt exploited and marginalized.

Other steps taken include the establishment of special commissions and federal agencies to tackle specific developmental problems in the region. For example, Shagari administration (1979-83) set up a presidential task force in 1980 known as "The 1.5 Percent Committee" to ensure that the development peculiarities of the region were given urgent attention. Unfortunately, the committee had no memorable record. Later, Babangida's regime came out with the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC). This commission was given the mandate of improving substantively the situation in the Niger Delta. The commission could not also perform to expectation due to corruption and inadequate funding.

Because of its ineffectiveness, OMPADEC was dissolved at the inception of Obasanjo's civilian administration in 1999, and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was set up. The commission was expected to fast track an even and sustainable economic, social, political and environmental development in the region.

The president in his speech, also charged the commission to make the people of the Niger Delta have a sense of belonging, by uplifting their standard of living through the implementation of life-touching projects. The inability of this commission to achieve significantly its aims and objectives led to the establishment of the Ministry of the Niger Delta by the political administration of the late president, Yar' Adua. The Ministry had

among others the role of strengthening and supervising the operations of the NDDC. The Ministry is yet to impact tremendously on the lives of the Niger Delta people.

- (ii) **Reorganizational Policies:** According to Suberu (1996) this involves the effort of the state to restructure political or administrative institutions and relationship in order to provide for group demands or ensure the effectiveness of centralized state power. This is manifested in the creation of states and local governments as a response to ethnic agitations.

Responding to intense clamour for additional constituent units in the Niger Delta, the federal government created nine states in the region. These are Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Ondo and Rivers. However, the creation of states and constituent units failed to eliminate crisis in the region because of factors highlighted earlier, as well as general poverty and poor management of the available resources by the states and local governments within the region.

- (iii) **Regulatory/Repressive Policies:** The Federal Government of Nigeria has from time to time applied regulatory and repressive methods to control crisis in the Niger Delta. These include promulgation of decrees during the military era and Acts of Parliament during the civilian administration. For example, the military regime of Babangida promulgated decree No. 21 of May, 1992 among other decrees as sanction against ethnic minority agitation. This decree empowered the president to dissolve and sanction any organization or groups of persons considered to promoting the political, religious, ethnic, tribal, cultural or social interest of a group against the peace, order and good governance of the country.

Another measure taken is constitutional engineering. In recent times, the legislative arm of government has deliberated on two bills captioned: (i) "An act to Prohibit Terrorism" and (ii) "Prevention of Terrorism Act". The first bill prescribes life imprisonment for those involved in hostage-taking, kidnapping and related activities, while the second bill prescribes a maximum of 20 years jail term for offenders of such terrorizing nature. The bills also recommend the establishment of anti-terrorism agency in the country; there is now prevention of terrorism act 2011.

The flaw in these efforts was that the opinions of the oil bearing communities were not accommodated because of government illusion that ultimately it is the sole custodian of answer to the crisis. The last major attempt at tackling the crisis was the presidential amnesty programme of late President Yar'Adua (2007-2010) who felt that repressive approach was not the best means of tackling the Niger Delta crisis. It, therefore, granted pardon to the repentant militants, who surrendered their arms within the stipulated period. The amnesty package was unveiled by the President on June 25, 2009 after a meeting of the Council of State. The presidential amnesty programme provided for the rehabilitation, education and training of the repentant militants for capacity building. This became the

most crucial step towards bringing peace to the region in recognition of the futility of repressive mechanisms and the need for responsible leadership as panacea for the crisis.

However, the amnesty programme only brought partial peace because of corruption and mismanagement by the relevant agencies. Limited numbers of militants were allowed to register in the camp; and ghost militants were registered at the expense of the real ones. Substantiating on the limitation of the presidential amnesty programme, a militant, Col. Paschal, as cited in the *Nation's Newspaper* of November 18, 2010, confessed:

Our resolve to return to the creeks stem from the side-lining of many true fighters and replacing such with ghost militants. They have failed to resolve this issue, why should they be calling for the number of militants to be registered in the amnesty programme? You see, we have no choice but to return to the creeks to ensure that no oil flows from the region (p.2).

It is obvious from the above assertion that even the amnesty programme can only be described as near success. Corruption remains a very serious threat to the amnesty project. How this is handled is one of the decisive factors of the success of the programme. The verdict for now is that the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria has only been abated; militancy is under control while oil theft and vandalization of oil facilities are on-going. However, the crisis has brought to the fore many moral problems and lessons that are worthy of note for the prevention and avoidance of similar crisis in future. This consideration shall engage our attention at once.

SOME MORAL LESSONS FROM THE NIGERIAN NIGER DELTA CRISIS

From whatever perspective the Niger Delta problem in Nigeria is viewed, the moral implications and lessons are enormous. Taking morality from the viewpoint of the rightness or wrongness of actions, there is no doubt that conflicting moral principles have been in vogue from the onset. Though the discovery of oil and the subsequent exploration had a utilitarian foundation, egoism or outright selfishness became the dominant principle of operation. Yet this selfishness or greed was perpetuated under a utilitarian covering. Not only was the repressive policies of government justified on the grounds of Nigeria's interest, but the demand for equity was interpreted as serving purely parochial interest at variance with the national interest. The so called 'national interest' was no more than the interest of an exploitative cabal. By the enthronement of extreme or unenlightened egoism, neglect and agitations were made necessities that time alone was to unveil since this neglect evidently suppressed the spirit of justice, equity and fairness, and in its place marginalization, deprivation and environmental degradation were promoted with impunity.

Hence, on a moral balance, the Niger Delta Crisis manifests one of the clearest examples of the inhumanity of man to man. Not only was life brutish, nasty and short, following Hobbes, "man became a wolf to man". This inhuman treatment started by the immoral activities of government and their oil explorers, and non-explorers collaborators against the oil communities, was later to be idealized and used by the militants. This found expression in vandalism, kidnapping, rape and

robbery. By the principle of like begets like, these immoral activities were driven by greed and selfishness, but again with a utilitarian shield namely, a defense of the rights or welfare of the exploited communities. Hence the exploited became an exploiter and the exploiter exploited. This brings to fore the moral truth that selfishness and greed never settle disputes but rather subject men to the condition of a war against all. Again, those to whom evil are done, do evil in return. But as Theodore Roosevelt would say, no man is justified in doing evil on the ground of expediency. The immoral nature of the principles of action involved in the Niger Delta Crisis is displayed in the failure of these activities ensuring the impartial harmonization of the conflict or checking the discriminatory or selfish advancement of interests before the amnesty programme.

Also the crisis teaches that dishonest leadership is a social catastrophe that needs overlooking only at a country's peril; and that failure or absence of moral leadership accounts virtually for most of Nigeria's problems. In other words, the Niger Delta crisis exemplifies a moral crisis not only of the Niger Delta region but Nigeria as a whole. This national crisis manifests in dishonesty, lack of accountability, the placement of selfish or sectional interests over national ones or sectional interests disguised as national ones, corruption and general disrespect for the rule of law and equity.

Moreover, the crisis calls attention to the truth in Hobbes assertion that the first and fundamental law of nature "is to seek peace and follow it". In the same vein Hesiod the great Greek poet saw peace as a nursing mother of the land. The Niger Delta Crisis escalated because its potentials in threatening the peace of the region and the nation at large was down played or politicized. There was no conscious and uncompromising zeal for peace through participatory dialogue. Peace must either be won or bought (by resistance or compromise) and in the case of the Niger Delta, it had to be won and bought, thus very expensive. The cost of the crisis is a needless waste that would have been avoided. Hence, a very important moral lesson from the Niger Delta Crisis is that peaceful and early resolution of disputes remains the best of all alternatives. The Niger Delta Crisis was certainly a wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with a wrong enemy.

Again, the crisis confirms the truth in the saying that the victory of evil over good is but temporal, and so long as good men do nothing about it, following Burke. Today it is glaring that a great evil and injustice had been done to the Niger Delta people despite repeated denial in the past to that effect by the perpetrators of these evils. This victory of good over evil would not have been possible without some form of affront. So while the atrocities of the militants must be condemned by all and sundry, it is difficult to dislodge the argument that since the perpetrators of the injustice recognized not the necessity of peace, justice and fairness, the crisis would have been abated when it was by any other means except violence. Martin Luther King once said that he who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it.

Finally, the crisis is a reminder that it is morally wrong, socially unacceptable and politically ill-conceived to use men as means to an end. Under no circumstances must the pecuniary benefits of a few persons provide grounds for the enslavement and inhuman treatment of others. Where this obtains, revolt and calamity are always unavoidable outcome. The moral requirement

therefore is that for any ethics of public action to be worth its tag, it must be anchored on the principles of fairness, justice, equity and what is generally morally right. This requirement fundamentally had been lacking in the handling of the Niger Delta problem in Nigeria. It is our hope that the moral lessons of the crisis in terms of the loss of freedom and human lives, economic and environmental wastage, as well as the destruction of the moral fabric that engenders unity, will always be sad reminders of the necessity of peaceful resolutions of disagreements and conflicts.

References

- Agbo, A. (2006) "Guerillas Step Up Attacks": *Tell Magazine*.
- Ajaero, C. (2006) "Those behind the Terror Gangs". *News Watch*. Vol. 43, No. 9.
- Anayaegbunam, A. O. (2000). "Niger Delta. A Case for Regional Contingency Plan". In A. Osuntokun (ed). *Environmental Problems of the Niger Delta*. Lagos: Friedrich Ebert Foundation.
- Arikpo, M. (1998). "Communal Conflicts in the East-Niger Delta: A Cultural Matrix". *Pan – African Social Science Review*. No. 3.
- Essien, E. S. (2008). *Philosophy of Peace and Conflict beyond the United Nations*. Calabar: University of Calabar Press.
- Etuk, U. (2009). "Beyond Summit and Militancy: A Humanist Road Plan for the Niger Delta" Text of Lecture Delivered at the forum on the Niger Delta. March 6.
- Etuk, U. (2001). "Social and Environment Responsibilities of Oil Companies". A Paper presented at the AKS – NUJ Press Week Seminar. November 14-15.
- Human Right Watch. (1999). *Nigeria: Crackdown in the Niger Delta*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Ibaba, S. I (2005). *Understanding the Niger Delta Crisis*. Port Harcourt: Amethyst and Colleagues Publisher.
- Ikporukpo, C. O. (2007). "The Niger Delta: The Geography of Terrorism and the Terror of Geography". A Lecture to Mark the Retirement of Professor M. O. Fulani, Organised by Department of Geography, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. June 27.
- Obasanjo, O. (2007). Speech delivered at the Presentation of the Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan at the State House, Abuja. March 27,
- OMPADEC Quarterly Report. (1993). Vol. 1. No. 1, October.
- O'Neil, S. (2010). "JTF Attacks Militants". *The Nation Newspaper*: November 18.
- Sagay, I. (2007). "Interview" *News Watch*. August 13.
- Sampson, A. (2008). "Two Killed as Soldiers Sack Ogoni Community". *The Nation Newspaper*. December 3.
- Suberu, R. T. (1996). *Ethnic Minority Conflicts and Governance in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- Willink Commission Reports (1958) London.
- World Bank (1993). "Defining an Environmental Development Strategy for the Niger Delta". In *The World Bank Report*. Vol.1.

Corresponding author's e-mail address: access.esikot@gmail.com