DEMOCRACY AND RESOURCE CONFLICT RESOLUTION: MAKING A CASE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC SOLUTION TO THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS

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ABSTRACT: *It is an incontrovertible fact that the Niger Delta is a region of great and troubling paradox – it is a location of immense wealth as well as inhuman poverty, misery and hardship. This vexed situation has over the years engendered volatile protests and struggles against perceived injustice, disinheritance, marginalization and even exclusion perpetrated against the region by agents of the Nigerian State. As a result, the region has become a veritable laboratory for all sorts of interventionist and conflict resolution mechanisms. All these including the present amnesty program are woefully inadequate to bring about durable peace to the region because they are all devoid of the much needed democratic ingredients. It is against this back drop that the paper is advocating a democratic solution to the Nigerian crisis located in the Niger Delta region. Emphasis here is given to consociational model of democracy that takes into consideration the rights of the ethnic minorities of the region to participatory decision making and governance. Our conclusion is that for Nigeria to experience sustainable peace in the economy jewel of the nation, genuine and determined effort should be made to initiate and institute robust democratic decision making processes and structures in the region as well as the Nigerian nation.*

KEYWORDS: Democracy, Resource Conflict Resolution, Niger Delta Crisis, Consociational Democracy, Marginalisation, Participatory Governance, Amnesty Program, Illiberal, Undemocratic Interventionist Mechanisms.

INTRODUCTION

The oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria is no doubt a region of protracted and intricate violent crisis or what some scholars have aptly described as "oil - resource wars" Alapiki (2008); Ibeanu (2008). Extant literature has attributed this complex conflictual situation to several interrelated variables: these ranges from distorted federalism and unjust politics of revenue allocation in Nigeria Ibaba (2005); Okoko & Nna, (1997). Long years of criminal neglect, mis - governance and corruption culminating in visible poverty and misery of the region Inokoba & Imbua (2008); Ikelegbe (2008): environmental injustice and state orchestrated genocidial human rights violations Aaron (2006); Alapiki (2008): the failure of corporate social governance on the part of the Multinational Oil Companies (MNOCs) Ikelegbe (2008); Aaron (2008); Okolo, (2014) : and to issues of socio – political and economic injustice, disinheritance, marginalisation and even exclusion perpetrated against the

oil rich region by agents of the Nigerian state (Okolo, 2004; Okowa 2007; Enweremadu 2008; Ibeanu 2008).

As a result of this desperate security situation in the region and it severe implications for socio – economic and political health of the Nigerian state, the Niger Delta has become a veritable laboratory for all sorts of security and peace building measures. These include several federal government instituted commissions such as the 1957 Willink Commission; establishment of several interventionist agencies such as the NDDC; Upward review of the derivation fund from zero to present day 13 percent; consistent employment of brutal and massive military force against the region; elevation and appointment of indigenes of the region to different political offices at the federal level; and more recently, the federal government amnesty programme geared towards demilitarisation, demobilisation and rehabilitation of repentant militants Ikelegbe (2010), Okolo, (2014).

However, from all indications the post – amnesty security situation in the region has left much to be desired in the area of sustainable peace and security. Sporadic violence and restiveness is still part and parcel of life in the oil rich region as exemplified in the December 2010 invasion of the Ayakaromor community. Thus the paper seeks to critically examine why genuine and sustainable peace and security has eluded the region in spite of all these conflict resolution measures. The central argument of the paper is that all these peace building measures including the 2009 amnesty programme have failed to ensure enduring peace in the region because they were conceived, designed and implemented without regard for democratic ideals, structures and processes. Hence our objective is to examine and investigate the role democracy could play as a tool of conflict resolution in the crisis ridden Niger Delta region. In doing this, the paper shall explore the nexus between democracy, peace and development. Our contention is that peace in the region will continue to be elusive if democratic governance does not translate to bread and butter issue for the people of the region. The argument in this paper has been developed into five sections including the introduction. Section two focuses on the theoretical and conceptual clarifications of the key variables in our discourse, such as democracy and conflict resolution. Section three seeks to explore and expose the undemocratic character of previous and existing confidence and peace building structures. Section four examines the illiberal nature of the fourth republic democratic governance as an explanatory variable for the escalation of conflict in the region, while section five concludes with the way forward.

Theoretical issues: the Interface between Democracy and Conflict Resolution
The central variables used in this study are democracy and conflict resolution. The focus of this section basically is to investigate the nexus between democracy and conflict resolution by examining related extant scholarship on the selected concepts.

Investigating the interface between democracy and conflict resolution invariably means examining democracy as a platform for effective governance, peace building and development. However, the debate on the interrelatedness between democracy and conflict resolution is yet unresolved in either academic or policy discourse, especially in the African context.

One explanatory model holds that there may not necessarily be a causal link between democracy, development and conflict resolution as such, especially in relation to the East Asian Tiger nations, which experienced accelerated growth while at the same time labouring

under extreme forms of authoritarianism. The irony in Africa is that the immediate aftermath of political independence in many countries also ushered in authoritarian forms of governance, yet unlike East Asia, African authoritarianism failed woefully to trigger economic growth and peaceful social relations (Khabele, Jorgen & Bertha, 2009; O'Sullivan & Stewart, 1998; Ibaba 2008; Okolo, & Akpokighe, 2014).

Conversely, scholars that belong to the peace through democracy and development thesis contend that democracy is a fundamental prerequisite for good governance, development and peace (conflict prevention and resolution) throughout the world. (Matlosa, 2009; IDEA, 2006; Rogers & Hull, 2003; Ake, 2000; Okolo, 2004; Kotze, 2010; Etekpe & Okolo, 2011, pp. 424 - 434). It is the contention of these scholars that for democracy to serve as an instrument of conflict resolution, it must be able to deliver good governance and socio – economic development to the people. In line with the above view points, the working hypothesis of the paper is based on the three related assumption namely, that democracy (conflict in the Niger Delta or put differently poverty in the region) is directly and positively correlated with democracy; therefore that democracy and socio – economic development provides a filling structural basis for resolving and preventing conflict. In essence, the nature of democracy is the deciding factor whether it could serve as medium of conflict prevention and resolution or not.

According to Huntington (1991) democracy can be viewed from two broad perspectives. One is the intrinsic or procedural perspective in which democracy is valued as an end in itself, and people value its political freedom and rights. Scholars such as Adam Przenworski and Larry Diamond are apostles of this theoretical position on democracy. The second perspective on democracy which is adopted by the study is the instrumentalist or substantive perspective. According to Jon Elter, Claude Ake and Attahiru Jega who ascribe to this explanatory model, democracy is valued as a means towards other ends, mostly as instruments to alleviate socio – economic conditions, address general fears, concerns and aspiration as well as promote political inclusiveness, equity and participation. In this sense, the credibility of democracy as political arrangement increasingly depends on how it works and on what (whether) it delivers. In other words, it is crucial that democracy be able to move beyond the formal realm of electoral politics to the substantive one of enabling human rights, human security issues, physical well – being and human development (IDEA 2006). Genuine democratic practice is the link between the people and their government: giving voice to "root causes" and grievances in a way which helps to address them will in turn contribute to the more effective realization of human development and human security.

It is in line with the above reasoning that Ake, (2000) opined that the concept of democracy in its classical sense is not synonymous with liberal democracy. Although, liberal democracy is related to the concept of democracy, they do not imply the same thing. According to Claude Ake, democracy in the classical sense connotes popular power. It is not just about delegated authority, or representative governance, but about popular expression of power by the people. Popular power in Ake's view is the essence of democracy. Equating liberal democracy with democracy in the classical sense is to devalue and trivialise the concept of democracy Adejumobe (2004). While democracy in the traditional sense seeks the realization of human potentialities through active participation in rulership, liberal democracy only offers protection. The former enables and empowers; the later prevents and protects.

In support of Ake's theoretical postulation, Jega, (2006) in his conceptualization of democracy gave emphasis to the concept of substantive democracy. To him, it is about actual, real and genuine popular empowerment of the people, such that they become active and committed participant in the management of their daily affairs, and in the development of their societies, and in meeting their fundamental needs and aspirations. Substantive democracy is a process in which there is truly responsive and responsible governance, aiming at the satisfaction of the fundamental and basic needs and aspirations of the citizens.

Accordingly, the IDEA (2006) opines that democracy is a prerequisite for the promotion of human security issues because a well – designed and inclusive political institutions and processes are the keys to both preventing violence and managing conflicts constructively, and because respect for human right and public participation are essential in meeting human development objectives. This is in line with one of our working premises: that violence, especially resource related conflicts may have their origin in human insecurity; insecurity is linked to exclusion and lack of access to resources and power. The concept of human security emphasizes the protection of people from grave threats to their lives, safety from harm and violent conflict, and empowerment against such social threats as disease, unemployment, poverty, homelessness and crime.

And according to the UNDP Report (1997 & 2001) and IDEA (2006) it is only through good and effective governance that democratic practice empowers the people and links them to critical development outcomes, such as education, healthcare, and opportunities for livelihood. Good governance flow logically from the concept of governance. It is through this medium that development is promoted and enhanced for the betterment of the society.

However, according to Roger and Hull (2003) the degree of inclusiveness, accountability, transparency, predictability, responsiveness and participation determines whether the governance system is good or bad. Poor governance leads to increased political and social risk, institutional failure and rigidity and a deterioration in the capacity to cope with shared problems Akpan, (2010). Some scholars have shown that there is a strong causal relationship between better governance and better development outcomes, such as higher per capita incomes, lower infant mortality and higher literacy (Kaufmann, Kraay & Zoido – Lobaton, 1999). Good and effective governance is an essential tool of conflict prevention and management because of its ability to address human security issues. (see Okolo, & Etekpe 2011; Etekpe & Okolo, 2011).

Again according to Adejumobi (1999) good governance is not about the type of polity, or a procedural arrangement, but a holistic and consequential variable. It is not about forms of government, but the result of governance. It is not the process or course of a political rule, but its effects; it is about effective and productive governance. In essence, good governance is about engendering public welfare and promoting the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. This is where the nexus between democracy and good governance meets the issue of development and until democracy through the platform of good governance is able to promote socio – economic well being, social equity and development, it cannot serve as an instrument of conflict resolution. It must be able to provide socio – economic well being, political stability, social order, social equity and justice, communal harmony, fair allocation of societal resources, efficient and honest administration Huntington, (1997).

And to ensure that fears and concerns of the minority nationalities of the Niger Delta are adequately addressed, the study gives emphasis to the consociational brand of democracy. This is so because western individualistic values that liberal democracy embodies are seen to be subversive of the cultural values of the heterogeneous African society Bujra & Molutsi, (2000). Bujra and Molutsi contends that while western style liberal democracy is based on the exclusive concern for individualism, competition and accumulation, values devoid of social welfare, whereas deep social affection, and collectivism that promotes social well being are the core values of Africa. This is where consociational democracy becomes relevant to the discourse. Consociational democracy as propounded by Lijphart (1997) recognises group differences and external collective rights in addition to individual rights. This form of democracy as practiced in Switzerland, Belgium, and Canada allow the intergenerational preservation of cultural communities and function according to the principles of co − nation between majority and minority, minority rights, ethnic autonomy for the minority, proportionality in resource allocation, power − sharing, veto power that enables the minority to block any decision detrimental to its vital interests, and politics of accommodation, compromise and indecision Bujra & Molutsi, (2000).

Evidently from the foregoing theoretical exposition, it is clear that there is a causal linkage in the democracy − development − conflict resolution triad. And that for democracy to serve as an instrument of conflict prevention and resolution it must be able to deliver the much expected dividend of democracy through good and effective governance.

Undemocratic Interventionist Mechanisms to the Niger Delta Situation
We have argued in this paper that consociational democracy is the bedrock for the resolution of the Niger Delta Crisis. It is not an incontrovertible fact that the approach by government(s) and the multinationals (MNOC) to the development of the Niger Delta in the past have been half- hearted. The various development efforts largely did not take into account of the local populations and people's and their environment through the planning stage to the actual delivery stage. It can be said that these approaches are not participatory in nature and content.

Thus, from the Willink's Commission; through the NDBDA; OMPADEC, to the NDDC; and the upward review of the derivation fund from zero percent to the current 13 percent and the present amnesty programme towards demilitarisation, demobilisation and rehabilitation of repentant militants did not significantly involve the local peoples of the region.

When oil exploration began in the Niger Delta in the late 1950s, the people expected that it would make a huge difference to their lives. The massive machines and technology that they saw indicated that their lives would change positively. However after ten, then thirty and then fifty years, they realized that oil had brought misfortune and misery. Their natural resource had become a curse (Ikelegbe, 2010; see also Okolo, 2004; 2008; 2011; 2014).

Land was taken for exploration, exploitation, pipelines and platforms. The much that was left were polluted and degraded by numerous oil spillages. The rivers were polluted. The peoples land was no longer arable and the rivers had been deserted by fish colonies. The air was polluted by gas flares and acid rain was tormenting their house roofs just as the people had become plagued by numerous diseases. The people had become under-employed and unemployed.

While immersed in the negative externalities of oil, there were no benefits or if there were, too few and trickle. The oil companies completely ignored and disregarded the communities and their people. They had to protest to be heard or for anything to be done. When they protested, massive repression and abuses were visited on them. At the level of the government, derivation based fund share of the federation account which was 50% by the early 1960s plummeted to 1.5% by the 1980s. Even within the oil producing states, the oil producing communities (OPCs) were neglected and marginalized. The OPCs became angry, disenchanted and frustrated. Protests became militant and disruptive.

The initial demand in the region was for developmental attention, because of seeming neglect and difficult terrain. The demand has persisted because of persisting under-development in spite of trickle, poorly funded, centralized and poorly performing interventions such as the NNDB, OMPADEC and NNDC. As the state directed development demands failed, the communities turned to the TNOCs. This has become a major source of community-TNOC conflicts since the 1970s .

Thus, the content of their demands also became volatile and political resulting in the shift from mere development to issues of self-determination, resource control, federal restructuring to guarantee regional autonomy and self-development, environmental remediation and corporate responsibility. A critical analysis of the demands, reveal a shift from accommodation to direct challenge of the Nigerian state project and confrontations with the state (Ikelegbe, 2010; See also Ibaba & Okolo 2009; 2011).

Within this context, the struggle for resource control began to gather momentum. The Niger Delta people have been disinherited from resources in their own land, thus seek more benefits and even control of their own resources. The struggle was at diverse levels. Now spearheaded by the youth, the people sought to compel benefits from the oil companies. Secondly, the people sought greater benefits from their oil from the federal government. The demands ranged from 50% to 100% ownership and control. Thirdly, a reformed and re-structured federal state to guarantee regional autonomy and resource control was sought. Fourthly, there was a struggle by communities to directly benefit from the increased derivation funds. This yielded results in the form of development commissions in Delta and Ondo States.

There have been four dimensions of the Niger Delta Struggles. These are: political agitation, communal and ethnic agitation, civil agitation and militant agitation. The struggle started as a political agitation, it became a civil agitation conducted by community, women, the youth, and cultural and civil society groupings. The political agitation has emerged again since 1999. Militant insurgency first occurred in 1966 and has dominated the struggles since 1998.

Intense protests and agitations in Niger Delta began in the mid 1980s and had passed through distinct phases. Owugah (1999:5-8) has identified four phases.

> *The First phase could be roughly put between the early and mid 1980's. The dominant strategy in this phase was that of legal actions by the communities against the oil companies to pay adequate compensation for damages to their property... the second phase was characterized by peaceful demonstrations adequate compensation or to fulfil their promises to provide communities... the oil companies responded by calling in the police and military .The intervention of these operatives often resulted in destruction of life and*

> *property... the resistance thus assumed a desperately militant form in the third phase... mid 1990's to 1998... characterized by the militant strategy of forceful occupation and shutting down of flow station, kidnappings of oil workers, seizure of thug boats and other vessels belonging to the oil companies... the forth phase is the demand for resource ownership and control. (Owugah, 1999: 5-8; see also Ibaba & Okolo: 5, 2009).*

Ibaba & Okolo for example drew an inference from the above reference, thus, for them

> *Firstly, militia conflicts in Niger Delta emerged over a decade, but perhaps were unnoticed, or did not attract serious attention because it did not significantly affect oil production. Secondly, militia conflicts emerged because of the failure of the state to address the objective conditions that set in the agitations in the first place, and the state's violent responses to protests in the Niger Delta.(Ibaba & Okolo: 5, 2009)*

The militant agitation was a forceful attempt to compel oil based benefits, redress grievances and seek resource control and self-determination. It was essentially a rebellion against state and corporate mis-governance and a determined effort for reforms. Furthermore, apart from the 1966 Adaka Boro incidence, the militant agitation was a forceful response to militarization, repression and state violence in the region. At the general level, the militant agitation was directed at compelling the Nigerian State and TNOCs, to dialogue or negotiate on the critical issues in the struggle. More specifically, it objectives were to cut or destabilize oil production; to draw international attention to the plight of the region, and to compel the withdrawal of the TNOCs, to restrain, checkmate and demoralize the military and militarization through attacks, or counter or reprisal attacks on security agencies, and compel concessions and benefits from the Nigerian state and TNCs.

The militancy and insurrection in the region is a classic case of the primacy of grievances in conflict causality. A prominent leader of the region put this succinctly in an interview recently; *the boys are fighting for their survival. They are fighting unemployment, criminal negligence of their area, the dehumanization of our own people (Newswatch 2008:08:04; 16-26, see also Ikelegbe, 2010; & Okolo, 2014, pp. 91 - 99).*

This clearly, suggests the need to adopt more useful strategies of conflict resolution and peace building. This paper therefore examines these strategies by analyzing three fundamental questions:
1. What role can democracy play in the resolution of militia conflicts in the Niger Delta?
2. What strategies can democracy adopt to enhance the resolution of the Niger Delta crisis?
3. Can the current Amnesty strategy bring about sustainable peace and development in the Niger Delta?

Democracy indeed is government of the people by the people and for the people. It is against this background that we argued in the beginning of this paper that consociational democracy would guarantee sustainable peace and development, Democracy is participatory in nature and content, it takes along the people's views from the perceptions of project planning stages through execution to monitoring and evaluation stages and consociational democracy has the

potency of guaranteeing sustainability and largely participatory in nature, thus would set in transformation of the region.

The design and the makeup of the amnesty programme largely were to only produce a temporary lull and not durable and sustainable peace. We are making this assertion as a result of the following reasons: One, it is a top –to bottom conflicts resolution mechanism. It is not democratic and participatory. Secondly, it is not holistic and comprehensive enough. It is only one little portion of the recommendations of the Ledom Mittee led Niger Delta technical committee's report. Thirdly, the federal government obviously was not prepared in the first instance for the post –amnesty phase of the programme. Fourthly, although there is semblance of peace prevailing today in the Niger Delta we state that it is not sustainable for the following reasons:

i. Cash or bribe for arms is a dangerous precedent especially for youths that are educated, but unemployed and peaceful.
ii. Secondly, the region is still under military siege –there is still the presence of military forces in all oil facilities, sites as well as water ways.
iii. Thirdly, post amnesty phase has been a period of sporadic arms insurgency involving the Nigerian military and different militant groups for example: the Nov, 2010 attack on the country home of the then Special Adviser to the President on Niger Delta Affairs and coordinator of the Amnesty programme; the Dec, 2010 attack on the Ayakoromor community by the Joint Task Force (JTF) in a bid to flush out John Togo is yet another clear example.

Again kidnappings for ransom are still very much rampant in the Niger Delta. This clearly indicates, the failing nature of the amnesty programme and that these attempts at addressing developmental challenges of the region were undemocratic in nature and content thus, are said to be largely illiberal to the peoples of Niger Delta region.

ILLIBERAL DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND THE ESCALATION OF THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT

In our discourse on the output of governance in the Niger Delta region, our focus is on the way governance is carried out or conducted under the Fourth Republic democratic dispensation. The basic question we attempted to answer in this section is that: Do governance at the region (state and local governments) since the advent of the Fourth Republic reflected the irreducible tenets and ideas of democracy and how has this impacted on the socio – economic development of the regions and by extension the lingering crisis of the oil rich delta?

With the inception of the Fourth Republic in May 1999, after long years of failed dictatorial military regimes, it was widely expected by most Nigerians that democracy will usher in better deal for them, in terms of improving their pitiable standard of living. However, after more than ten years of formalistic democracy, Nigerians seems to have experience more of pains than gains. More than a decade of uninterrupted civilian administration has visibly failed to approximate the expectations, dreams and yearnings of Nigerians. The Nigerian ailing democracy has failed to address the problem of dearth of basic needs of life such as good roads, functioning health amenities, quality education, improved wages for workers, restructuring of the petroleum sector, uninterrupted power supply, genuine electoral reform,

freedom of information, equitable distribution of power, wealth and justice Inokoba & Kumokor (2010).

The situation in the Niger Delta region is even less palatable as following pages will reveal. The performance of the Fourth Republic leadership at the state and local government levels across the oil and gas rich region leaves much to be desired. What is obvious is that more than one decade of democratic rule, instead of lightening the yoke of poverty and want on the necks of Niger Deltans, the political leadership of the region has struck to the old Nigerian ways of grand standing, ineffectual leadership, unrestrained misappropriation of public funds, abuse of power, repressive and brutal use of the coercive instrument of the state against dissenting or opposition elements and lack of concern for the suffering of the masses Inokoba & Imbua (2010)Etekpe & Okolo, (2011), Okolo, (2014).

Generally, governance at the Delta can be referred to anything except democratic: it lacks all the irreducible principles and tenets of democracy such as fair and credible election, rule of law, separation of powers, independence of the judiciary, fragrant abuse of court judgements and checks and balances between the arms of government. The political system of the region is highly mal – functional: the reason, the constitutional framework only exists in paper and not in practice. It is absurd that the democratic presidential system which Nigeria claim to practice, the executive arm could comprehensively dominate other branches such that the governors of the region have become repository of the three branches put together. Consequently, the legislature goes to the governor to ask for money, instead of the other way round.

The Niger Delta like the larger Nigeria political space is dominated by corrupt, greedy and desperate elites who will stop at nothing just to acquire political power. Corruption has been institutionalized by the ruling elites in Nigeria; hence, political leaders embezzle most of the money accruing from the sale of oil. The former anti – corruption Czar, Mr Nuhu Ribadu while granting an interview to the BBC in 2006 said "more than $380billion has either been stolen or wasted by Nigerian Governments since independence in 1960" Courson, (2009).

While there is an abundance of extant literature devoted to oil and violence in the Niger Delta, there has been a dearth of studies highlighting the roles and linkages of corruption in the protracted conflict of the region, yet the persistence, the increasing frequency and the intensification of corrupt act among political actors, community leaders and private oil companies operating in the Niger Delta, have for some time been the hallmark of politics in the region Enweremadu,(2009). It is therefore less surprising that today Niger Delta governors and public officials are seen as the most corrupt in the country. Out of the four immediate past governors of Nigeria's major oil producing states (Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Delta and Rivers), three have either been convicted for large scale corruption. One has been convicted and jailed for plundering the resources of his state on a massive scale (Alamieyesegha of Bayelsa State). A second was arrested and charged on 105 counts of looting up to 10billion Naira from his state (Ibori of Delta state) Enweremadu, (2009). The same former governor was extradited from Dubai to United Kingdom for money laundering offences tried and convicted, and is currently serving jail term in the UK. The third former Niger Delta governor under close investigations over the same offences though protected by the court is Dr. Peter Odili, and of course the former Governor Timipre Sylva of Bayelsa State between 2007 and Feb., 2012 has also been engulfed with wide scale corruption scandals.

Again, how best can you describe the situation where the current government of Rivers state Rotimi Amechi presents the States 2014 budget inside government house on the same days and the budget got passed first, second and third reading and signed into law. This goes a long way to explain the nature and manner of desperation politicians / so called political leaders in the region. How about the members of the Rivers state house of Assembly how do we describe them? Only time will tell, but there is the absolute need for a change, and that change is now.

To strengthen our discourse, on the relationship between mis – governance, poverty and violence in the Niger Delta, we shall have a close look on how Peter Odili of Rivers state (1999 – 2007) recklessly spent the state's 2006 budget. The Rivers states' 2006 budget which was estimated at 160billion naira ($1.2billion), governor Odili spent 10.7billion naira to maintain his office. This sum excluded the 500milion naira spent on 'gifts' and 'souvenirs' for his visitors, the 4.3billion naira used as 'Grants' and 'Donations' and the hefty 5billion devoted to security vote. In the same budget, Governor Peter Odili reserved for himself 3billion naira to take care of his frequent trips overseas, which is even far above what the President of Nigeria gets. The 32 members of the Rivers House of Assembly also got 690million (about $5.4million) naira for their travel, $2.8million of which was meant for foreign trips. This is separate from the $2.8million given to the legislature as sitting allowance (not salaries), Enweremadu, (2009). However, Odili Generosity never extended to social services, which would benefit a greater number of Rivers state citizens. A meagre sum of 2.8billion naira was all that was given to the state ministry of health out of a budget of 160billion naira, in spite of having been coined a 'priority ministry' Enweremadu (2009). It is therefore less surprising that Dr. Peter Odili ran the most expensive presidential campaign in 2007.

The above detailed account of official profligacy common among Niger Delta government goes a long way to explain why despite the fact that the Niger Delta sub – region was given ₦3.2trillion of the ₦10trillion the federal government derived from oil sales – that is three times what each of the other five geo – political zones in the country got between 1999 and 2003, the region is still ridden with visible poverty, want and dearth of socio – economic infrastructure Abbah (2009); Abidde (2010).

The question of poverty in the Niger Delta is clearly linked to the rich communities. Even by local comparison, Nigerian Oil rich states have tended to lag behind in area of socio economic development. In an independent and comprehensive evaluation of the state of governance in the 36 states of the federation carried out by the national planning commission in collaboration with some international institutions such as the World Bank, EU, UNDP as well as members of the civil society between June and July 2005, all the oil rich Niger Delta states performed below average. According to the evaluators, none of the four main oil producing states (Bayelsa 0%, Delta 45.1%, Rivers 49.8% and Akwa Ibom 37.6%) figured among the seven best performers (Enugu 62%, Ekiti 61.7%, Abuja FCT 55.7%, Kano 55.4%, Lagos 55.3%, Jigawa 51.3%, and Ebonyi 51.0%) (Ekwedike 2005). Ironically, Bayelsa was the only state that was not evaluated, having refused to submit itself to such exercise for some undisclosed reasons.

However, closer observers of the governing process in Bayelsa are aware that the state is the least developed state in Nigeria in terms of its inability to provide most basic socio – economic amenities for its people. this fact, is vividly demonstrated by the data published by

the National Population Commission in 2004, apart from its superior western educational attainment, which is largely a product of historical antecedents, Bayelsa state hardly shows any advantage in the area of socio – economic development over states with far slimmer resources or budgetary allocations such as Zamfara state (see table 1 below).

Table1: Comparative Socio – Economic Data for Bayelsa and Zamfara states (in 2004)

	Bayelsa	Zamfara	National
*Population	1,703,358	3,259,846	140,000,000
Literacy level (English Language)	59.32%	10%	442%
Rate of Primary School enrolment	96.0%	69.92%	81.19%
Access to Energy (gas/electricity)	4.8%	12.5%	32.17%
Access to Portable Water	13.17%	64.9%	50.52%

*Federal Government of Nigeria, National Population Commission, Abuja 2007
Source: Federal Government of Nigeria, National Planning Commission. The Nigerian Statistics fact sheet, 2004, Abuja.

Giving such level of poverty in the midst of plenty, the state has, not surprisingly been one of the major theatres of youth violence, kidnappings and sabotage of oil installations by local people demanding a fair share of the oil wealth became a regular feature of the social life.

What is apparent from the foregoing is that in spite of the substantial flow of oil money to states and local governments, many communities see no sign of government presence in terms of development projects. And in the words of the UNDP Report (2005), "these intensifies a sense of hopelessness and mistrust that for the most aggrieved people leads to a call to arms". Seeing it from the perspective of good governance, it is probably easier to see the core underlying factor behind the crisis in the Niger Delta is the failure of governance to deliver on its predisposed responsibilities. In the very heart of the communities, state and local elected citizens controlling the apparatus of the local economy and the means of development have practically done very little to indicate that if more resources are channelled through improved derivative formula and increased control of local resources that any remarkable difference would be achieved. Rather than serving as a source of prosperity and happiness, decentralization of oil wealth appears to have sharpened the greedy appetite of the local power elite while facilitating the abandonment of public welfare. This reality places the discourse of the Niger Delta in a totally different mode; it raises questions about the credibility of local resource control and the crave for increased revenues because one wonders who and how such increases will be appropriated, which structures will aid effectiveness and how do we ensure sincerity of state and local political elites?

The root cause of the unconscionable level of mis – governance and lack of concern for the plights of the Niger Delta by their political leadership can be traced to the manner through which they got into public offices. It is an established fact, even by foreign electoral observers that the Niger Delta is a region of no elections yet, governors, local government chairmen, representatives at local, state and national level are "elected". And since the beginning and end of democracy is centred on the empowerment of the people, we can conveniently assert that Niger Delta is a region of "no democracy".

Another established fact that is worth mentioning is that the Niger Delta region is ingloriously known for worse cases of electoral violence in Nigeria. Political competition in

the region's highly debased, combative and violent in nature as politicians' use all means whether legal or illegal to seek political power Alapiki, (2004). With the unemployed, unengaged and restive youths, politicians have been able to arm local youths many of them gang members to ensure that votes go their way. According to the Human Right Watch and the London – based Stakeholder Democracy Network, weapons flooded the region, before the 2003 poll, which in many parts of the Delta was less an election than as armed combat Robinson, (2006). The large amount of weapons in the region has a lot to do with the huge amount of money stolen by politicians from public coffers and youths that have made more money from illegal bunkering or oil theft and ransoms gotten from a very lucrative hijacking business. And some state chief executives are even worsening the security situation in the Niger Delta by bribing (amount running into several millions) these youths especially those that are engaged in the criminal, business of abduction. The motive is to quiet these boys and to give false impression to their political godfathers in Abuja and foreign investors in the oil industry that there is peace in the Niger Delta. This measure has been counterproductive as it has only led to the criminalization of militant behaviour in the region.

From what we have discussed so far, it is glaring that the anger and bloody conflict associated with the Niger Delta region is largely a product of illiberal, unaccountable and exclusive nature of politics and governance in the region. Neither the federal, state nor the local government have made any genuine attempt to democratically engage the people of the region in the process of policy formulation and as such we can boldly assert that for there to be any hope of permanently addressing the fostering conflict of the Niger Delta Region there is need for a democratic solution. Perhaps the ongoing National Conference (NC) convened by the Jonathan's Administration may provide such a platform.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The conclusion one can draw from the foregoing discourse is that the conflicts and insecurity in the Niger Delta is directly linked to lack of democratic (good and effective) governance development and equity in the distribution of resources, the people of the region are visibly alienated and excluded from the governmental process and as such do not have any means of influencing and directing the governing elites and structures to reflect their basic predicaments, needs and aspiration most worrisome as the fact that government conflict resolution initiatives such as the amnesty programme are top-to-bottom conflict management strategies that are devoid of the contributions and participation of the local people of the region. And because these peace building measures are generated and driven by government, without local inputs from the region these steps all lack sustainability because Niger Deltans do not have a sense of ownership and control over these interventionist policies.

Hence, the first step towards ensuring durable and sustainable peace in the Niger Delta is to create the right environment that would ensure democratic transparent, consultations and participatory governance processes and structures. Mechanisms that will empower the people of the region as well as enable them to own, manage and drive public policies and as well as governing processes . The role which free, fair and rule-based electoral process could play in empowering the people of the region cannot be over emphasised.

Democratic elections is the base of the social contract between the people and their governors and because the power of instituting the government rest with the electorate, elected officials are compelled to be accountable, responsible and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people . And the Niger Delta is the most sensitive region of Nigeria that is in a dare need of elections where the votes of the people should count.

Again, we order to make out democracy relevant to the genuine fear, concerns and petitions of the several ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta, there is urgent need for the infusion of the principle of consociationalism into Nigeria Fourth Republic constitution such amendment will not only give these nationalities a sense of belonging   but it would also empower them politically, as well as make them effective stakeholders in the Nigerian project.

It is also important to warn here that, no one single conflict resolution measure on its own can effectively address the security crisis of the Niger Delta Region. As such, nobody should be under any illusion that the present amnesty programme can on its own solve the Nigerian crisis in the Niger Delta what we are experiencing as peace in the region is only a lull in the violent activity of criminal elements (or although is popularly known militants) of our society our position is that the amnesty policy is fundamentally flawed in its conception , design and operationalisation and that on its own, the amnesty programme will end up engendering more serious security crisis in the Niger Delta as well as Nigeria as whole the only way out of this security dilemma will be for government at all levels especially the federal government to implement this policy alongside other peace building measures contended in the holistic and comprehensive recommendations of the technical committee report on the Niger Delta. Perhaps the outcome of the ongoing National Conference would ultimately provide the therapy and cure for the mire of tensions in the Niger Delta Region and Country at large.

Endnote:

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