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**THE DYNAMICS OF NIGER DELTA
IN NIGERIA'S CULTURAL POLITICS**
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Introduction

The Niger area prior to colonialism consisted of a large number of large ancient kingdoms and other independent small autochthonous societies. The boundaries of what was to be called Nigeria were drawn as a result of trade and overseas territorial ambitions of Western European powers in the nineteenth century. The territories of north and south of Rivers Niger and Benue Boroughs were assigned to Britain, then the name Nigeria was suggested in 1898 by Flora Shaw who later became Lady Lugard to designate the British Protectorates on the River Niger. Contact between the people of Nigeria and Europe began in the fifteenth century through various commercial explorers (National Commission for Museums and Monuments 1985). The entity Nigeria came into existence in 1914 after the amalgamation of both the Southern and Northern protectorates by Lord Lugard. Historically the reason for the amalgamation was perhaps due to economic reason as the Southern Protectorate had more viable resources than its Northern Protectorate counterpart even as Lugard himself documented in his book, *The Dual Mandate*.

The Niger-Delta is a delicate region covering some 70,000 square kilometres. The region is ethnographically diverse with minority ethnic groups. It is the goose that lays the golden egg for Nigeria, contributing close to 90 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings and 80 percent of federal revenues from its oil reserves (Ile and Akukwe, 2001:1). Estimates put reserve of oil in the lands, creeks and shores of Niger Delta to about twenty-billion barrels of oil (Ile and Akukwe 2001).

The Niger Delta region has been variously defined initially as the geographical area of the defunct 'Western Ijaw Division in (Western Nigeria) and the Rivers provinces but excluding Ahoada and Port Harcourt in Eastern Nigeria (Nigeria Year Book, 1959: 41, Willink's Report, 1958: 3-8 and Ambily, 2010). This defined territory is what is referred to as the present Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States of Nigeria (Etekepe, 2009: 1-2.). Besides this, the definition of the Niger Delta was

altered and redefined when the Military administration of General Ibrahim Babangida promulgated the Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) decree in 1993 which made the region synonymous with the south-south geo-political zone that is Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta, Edo, Akwa-Ibom and Cross River states of today due to the geographical contiguity. However, it was further redefined in 2000 when the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Act came into being. The NNDC Act equated the region with oil production, thus including Imo, Abia and Ondo state beside the south-south states.

The early exposure of this part of the country to the Europeans, gave the people an advantage politically and economically in its relationship with the rest of the country especially the major ethnic groups that inhabit the hinterland. In other words, the cultural politics of European encroachment into the Niger area provided the environment for the coastal ethnic groups of the Niger Delta to dominate affairs at this initial stage of the formation of the Nigerian state.

The deepening of and entrenchment of European colonial adventure, brought in the era of constitutional engineering that followed agitations by Nigerians for greater participation in their own political affairs. This process of constitutional engineering led to the introduction of regionalism and federalism as well as some degrees of democracy that turned the dynamics of Nigerian politics against the Niger Delta groups and brought an era of majority domination in the country. It was this scenario that was obtainable in the run up to independence from colonial hegemony and the implication of continued domination sparked up agitations in the Niger Delta for greater participation and representation in the impending structure of Nigerian politics. At this point the foes were their majority neighbours the Igbo and Yoruba who dominate the affairs in the eastern and western regions respectively and it became expedient for the Niger Delta groups to enter into alliance with bigger ethnic groups outside of their regions for national visibility.

The discovery of oil in the late 1950s and its emergence as the main sustainer of the Nigerian economy had a significant impact in the dynamics of politics in Nigeria and the Niger Delta in particular. The oil and wealth that accrued to the country for many years did not reflect commensurately with the condition of life in the Niger Delta. The environment and living conditions of the communities in the Niger

Delta was a misery tale of unparalleled proportion owing to the effects of oil exploration (Ile and Akukwe 2001). Essential services such as good drinking water are denied the people due to pollution of the rivers and rivulets. The productive population of the area lacks gainful employment because their traditional source of livelihood has been destroyed and so have been surreptitiously consigned to abject poverty, whereas basic infrastructure is virtually non-existent inspite of the wealth generated from oil in that region. The tension generated from this unjust treatment of the region, had undoubtedly turned it into the most obstinate source of Nigeria's political destabilization and threat to national security and economic development. These have arisen from disputes over the management of the oil wealth. The consequence is the emergence of protection syndicates, exponential increase in destruction of oil installations and state sponsored military reprisals against insurgent groups and renegade militia movements. The repercussion of this state of affairs reverberates far beyond the boundaries of the country. However, the realization that this state of affairs must not linger, has led to the introduction of many programmes and palliatives aimed at accommodating the Niger Delta and ensuring the continued stability of the country's economy. The consciousness these regimes of agitations brought to the Niger Delta region, the emergence of civil society groups and empowerment from these policies and programmes further turned the tide in Nigerian politics especially of the fourth republic that has made the Niger Delta region a powerful bloc in the ongoing unfolding cultural politics of Nigeria. This paper examines these issues surrounding the Niger Delta and its relation to the oil economy. It also examines the implication in the socio-political development of the Niger Delta region and the country at large.

Niger Delta and European Contact

Historically the people of the Niger Delta had an established kingship pattern and autonomous communities or even kingdoms. European contact with the region started even before colonial period with slave trade in 1442. The Portuguese adventurers were the first merchants to Niger Delta region and later other Europeans particularly British merchants who took over from them in 1840 and eventually colonized the country from 1900s. Before colonization, the European

merchants had direct contact with the Niger Delta people particularly few ethnic minority groups living along the coastline like the Ijaw, Itsekiri and Efik communities who acquired power over majority ethnic groups and enjoyed superior/ higher status compared to the major or majority ethnic groups in the hinterland such as the Igbo, Ibibio and Urhobo. Another reason is because the Europeans depended on the coastal leaders for securing trade and safety. In the words of Ekeh (1996), there were historical instances of dominant minorities that ruled and exploited majorities over whom they exercised substantial power. In fact coastal Niger Delta was the gateway to the hinterlands in pre-colonial period with most of them transformed into vibrant trading areas before the table turned against them after colonization.

The arrival of Western European sailors and traders in the coast of West Africa particularly the Portuguese in the 1480s brought in its train startling developments that transformed the Nigerian Atlantic coastline (Ekeh 1996). This perhaps might not be unconnected to inherent geographical advantages as they act as middlemen between the European merchants and the indigenes especially those from the hinterland. To protect and sustain their trade, the British merchants interfered in the local politics and commerce which included slave trade (Etekpe Ambily 2008). In 1831-1899, the Royal Niger Company (RNC) of Britain exploited and prevented the people from benefiting from their legitimate trade in palm produce, as the RNC unilaterally fixed prices of agricultural produce. They forced the people to sign the not too balanced treaty of friendship and protection with Her Majesty's British government in 1863. They dethroned chieftains of Kingdoms that opposed them, sent them on exile. The kingdoms in these regions could no longer endure the unfair monopoly of trade by the British, King Williams Koko of Nembe in Bayelsa State, particularly could no longer endure. He organized twenty-two war canoes and attacked RNC Depot at Akassa, as a way of resisting the undue exploitation and subjugation of the British Colonialists. In retaliation the British merchants attacked Akassa, Okpooama, Nembe and Brass and killed over 2000 people, mostly women and children. This raid marked the first organized resistance against repression by a community in Nigeria. According to Ilagha (2007) the 1895 Akassa raid in Brass (now in Bayelsa state) was a veritable case in point.

Before colonization between 1900 and 1960; the Europeans had direct relationship with the people of Niger Delta, with whom the Europeans entered into treaties of friendship and protection. In other words, these minority communities namely the Ijaw, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Isoko, Ekoi and Bini enjoyed a higher status when compared to the majority ethnic groups in the hinterland, such as the Igbo. But with colonization the higher status enjoyed by the minority groups dwindled in the last fifteen years of the 19th century, during the so called European scramble for Africa. British people were in a hurry to move into the hinterland and thus established contacts with the majority groups, the Igbo, Urhobo and Ibibio people who were now able to deal directly with the new British rulers without intermediary of the coastal communities. With colonization, the British colonial government led by Lord F. Lugard gave recognition to the majority ethnic groups, marginalized the minority ethnic groups that prospered as middlemen, having big control of trade with the hinterland. This led to loss of glory by the minority groups. According to Etekepe (2008), this singular action either by commission or design set in what may be referred to as 'minority politics' that is still posing as a big challenge. He further stated that colonization changed the peace equation in the region due to unfair trade practices and marginalization of the people and the region. In the intervening years, successive Nigerian governments, military and/or civilian, have continued such practices that degrade the ecology and means of survival of NDR leading to the current situation being experienced today in the area. Omeje (2006), has posited that the Nigerian federal state and the considerably nationalized oil sector have been dominated by a loose coalition of ethnic majority elite at the expense of the bulk of the ethnic minorities, including those of the oil producing Niger Delta region.

History of Niger Delta Agitation

The apparent fact that the initial advantages that people of the Niger Delta had over their majority neighbours in the hinterland was not going to last long, started to emerge as European colonial adventure deepened but sparking off demands by the colonials for greater participation in their own affairs. The process of constitutional engineering which started in 1922 with the promulgation of the Clifford Constitution that introduced elective principle in Nigeria was the

catalyst that laid the foundation for the ultimate altering of the cultural politics of Nigeria against the Niger Delta groups. The enactment of the Clifford constitution opened an avenue for Nigerian natives to participate in their affairs through elections and this had the capacity to empower the major groups. Though the Clifford constitution only granted four positions to native Nigerians in Calabar and Lagos, the regionalization of the country by the Richards Constitution of 1946 which divided Nigeria into three unequal administrative units fuelled the ethnic conflict and marginalization. That exercise split the ethnic groups in the Niger Delta into the Eastern and Western regions where the Igbo and Yoruba formed the absolute majority respectively. Furthermore, the introduction of Federalism which devolved powers to the regional centres by the Mcpherson constitution of 1952 compounded the woes of Niger Delta groups who started to struggle to find their feet in those regions now virtually captured and monopolised by the major ethnic groups (Nnoli 1998). This dominance was made possible through the ethnically based political parties of the pre-independence and First Republic era. For instance, the Action Group which held sway in the Western Region was transformed from a Yoruba socio-political organization, the '*Egbe Omo Oduduwa*', whereas the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons which was initially a national party gradually receded into an Igbo controlled party. The minority ethnic groups within these regions had to form their own parties such as the Dynamic Party, the Niger Delta Congress and United Nigerian Independent Party among others that were virtually suffocated in the regional politics of the First Republic by the major parties controlled by the majority ethnic groups.

The minorities of the Niger Delta region intensified their agitation in the 1950s as independence approached. First it was against marginalization, neglect and the politics of exclusion by the ethnic majority based ruling political parties and governments of the then Eastern and Western regions. This snowballed into the minority agitation for the creation of separate regions, which the Willinks Commission of 1958, rejected and rather provided constitutional guarantees in the form of fundamental rights. The Commission also granted a special developmental status in the form of a Niger Delta Development Board. The emergence of commercial oil production from

the region in 1958 and thereafter raised the stakes and sparked off a struggle by the indigenes for the control of oil resources. Further the new oil economy generated an intense ethnic majority rivalry and regional hegemonic struggle particularly between the ruling Hausa/Fulani hegemony, the Igbo who dominated and ruled the Eastern region and the Niger Delta minority groups. This in part, contributed to the Nigerian Civil War of 1967–1970.

The creation of states in 1967 satisfied the initial aspiration and ensured that the Eastern segment supported the federal side in the civil war. But that support, the federal victory and the subsequent northern hegemony were to be an albatross to the second agitation. The northern hegemony taking advantage of military dictatorship began a regime of near total appropriation of the region's oil resources through an intense centralization and concentration of power and resources in the federal government. Oil resources were a major target. By decrees, oil and gas became the exclusive preserve of the federal government and progressively, the regions entitlements by way of derivation based allocation declined from 50% to just 1.5% in 1984 and later 3% in 1999. Further, the region was marginalized and in fact neglected in the developmental efforts that followed massive oil revenues. The region in the 1990s was one of the least developed and poorest (Obi 2002, Okoli 2007). But more unfortunately, increasing oil exploration had made the region economically and socially prostrate, courtesy of extensive environmental degradation and ensuing socio-economic disruptions and poverty.

The Willinks' Commission and the Niger Delta

The colonial legacy that left Nigeria with three regions dominated by major ethnic groups has always been resisted by the minority groups in the country. Where this resistance was most intense is the Niger Delta area that falls in the Eastern and Western regions of Nigeria. It was as a result of the agitation spearheaded by the Ijaw Rivers Peoples League that led to the creation of the Rivers Province in 1947 from Owerri Province. It was during this period that Harold Dappa-Biriye founded the Niger-Delta Congress (NDC) to fight for equality for the disadvantaged people of Niger Delta.

The agitation of Dappa-Biriye and several others in the Niger Delta was premised on perceived fears of domination, neglect, insecurity and discrimination by the major groups. This necessitated the setting up of the Willinks' Commission of Inquiry in 1957 to "enquire into the fears of the minorities and the means of allaying them". The report which was presented in 1958 based upon evidence and personal experience of members of the panel in the course of enquiry observed that:

- The needs of those who live in the creeks and swamps of the Niger Delta are very different from those of the interior.
- It is not easy for a government or legislature operating from inland to concern itself or even fully understand the problems of a territory where communications are so difficult, building so expensive and education so scanty in a country which is unlikely ever to be developed
- There is no doubt that a feeling of neglect and lack of understanding was widespread in both regions of western and eastern Delta.

The panel went further to recommend that the Niger Delta should be accorded special treatment because the area is poor, backward and neglected (Alamieyeseigha 2003).

Even though the motive for the agitation was for creation of a Niger Delta region which was not to come by, the Willinks Commission's recommendation that the Niger Delta be given a special treatment was neither implemented by the receding colonial government nor the succeeding Nigerian administrations. Even when oil was discovered in the region the Niger Delta communities became victims.

It was this injustice against the Niger Delta people that provoked Isaac Adaka Boro, an ethnic Ijaw to lead the first violent revolt against the Nigerian state, when he proclaimed the Niger Delta Peoples Republic and launched a guerrilla war from Tautoubau a sacred forest in Kaiama against the Federal Government in January 1966. The armed revolt, led by Isaac Adaka Boro, was predicated on the brazen oppression of the minority Ijaws in the then Eastern region of Nigeria, specifically in the form of the underdevelopment of the region. The

more immediate factors however was the January 1966 coup d'état in the country led by those the Ijaws considered to be regional oppressors against a northern leadership seen to be an ally of the Niger-delta in the quest for an autonomous region.

The Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVS) began operation on 23rd February 1966 by declaring a Niger-delta Republic comprising the Ijaw area and territorial waters. The declaration further demanded the cancellation of all crude oil related agreements and directed the oil companies to stop exploration (Boro, 1982, 118-123). The NDVS took over Kaiama, Yenagoa, Imbiana, Oloibiri, Nembe, Patani, Odi, Sabama and numerous other communities and closed oil installations and pipelines. After encounters with federal troops, the NDVS men surrendered, they were tried for treason, convicted and sentenced to death in June 1966 but were released from jail by the federal government in August 1967 as the Biafran war raged. Adaka Boro's revolt only lasted for twelve days before he and 159 comrades were overpowered by the forces of the Nigerian state.

Besides this bold statement, the minorities of the Niger Delta region have been agitating since the 1950s. First it was against marginalization, neglect and the politics of exclusion by the ethnic majority based ruling political parties and governments of the then Eastern and Western regions. This snowballed into the minority agitation for the creation of separate regions, which the Willinks' Commission, rejected and rather provided constitutional guarantees in the form of fundamental rights and a special developmental status in the form of a Niger Delta Development Board. The emergence of commercial oil production from the region in 1958 and thereafter, raised the stakes and generated the struggle by the indigenes for control of the oil resources of later years. Further the new oil economy that came to dominate Nigeria generated an intense ethnic majority and regional hegemonic struggle particularly between the ruling Hausa/Fulani northern hegemony, the Igbo who dominated and ruled the Eastern region and the Niger.Delta minority groups. This in part contributed to the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970.

The Niger Delta Question.

The stark reality in the Niger Delta region that stares any visitor to the area is typified by Oloibiri community, the first place oil was struck in commercial quantity in 1956. In spite of all the wealth generated from the place, its state of development is still rudimentary. Diepreye Alameyeseigha, who was governor of the area, refers to it as a ghost town and carcass rejected by the hounds who laid her bare in the first place (Alameyeseigha 2003). This state of affairs at Oloibiri struck the Niger Delta people that this may reflect what holds in future for the rest of region, where 75 percent of the people are living in rural areas without pipe borne water, electricity and roads. Again, it is a place where the land has been devastated by oil exploitation, waters polluted by almost daily oil spillage and air poisoned by eternal gas flare has been neglected by the federal government which controls the oil wealth (Osezua 1999). The issues surrounding these problems have been articulated as the Niger Delta question and constitute the core of the agitations from that region against the federal government.

The Niger Delta question is a parody that illustrates the paradox of scarcity in the midst of plenty, the resource curse, the shadow state syndrome and the debilitating effects of oil politics in Nigeria (Obi 2002). It encompasses the economic exploitation of a region's vast crude oil reserves by oil multinationals and narrow-minded state officials under a spectre of environmental devastation, excruciating poverty and rule of impunity (Onduku 2001). The Niger Delta questions are numerous and would certainly be inexhaustible in a paper like this. It is however, imperative to clearly highlight some of the core issues in detail for a better appreciation of the dynamics that have shaped the current militant struggles championed mainly by the youthful elements of the populace in the Niger Delta region (Onduku 2001, Emmanuel 2006).

Environmental degradation is perhaps the most critical issue that borders on the Niger Delta question. Elevated to the front burner of discourse by the Ogoni struggles of the 1990's led by Movement for the Survival of Ogoni Peoples (MOSOP), the ramifications of the assaults on the Niger Delta environment and the ecosystem is quite monumental. Starting from oil spillage which is a common feature, to gas flaring that seems everlasting, the impacts are disturbing. For example, oil spills on the surface of the earth and surrounding water kill plants, de-fertilize the

earth, harm animals, pollute farmlands and destroy aquatic life. The consequent effect from these is that, farming and fishing vocations which are the major sources of economic sustenance in the Niger Delta suffer irredeemably. Apart from this, oil spillage also pollutes natural freshwater reservoirs which serve as sources of drinking water thus exposing the inhabitants to potential health risk. Several decades of oil multinationals' activities in the Niger Delta have damaged much of the ecosystem of the region (Ojefia 2004). Official estimates of the NNPC, between 1976 and 1996, shows that a total of 4,835 incidents have resulted in the spillage of at least 2,446,322 barrels of oil of which an estimated 1,896,930 barrels were lost to the environment. Another estimate says 1.07 million barrels of oil were spilled in Nigeria from 1960 to 1997, the largest being an offshore blowout in January 1980 that saw 200,000 barrels of oil (official DPR figure claims 400,000 barrels of oil) spewed into the Atlantic Ocean from Texaco facility destroying about 340 hectares of mangrove. The mangrove forest is very vulnerable to oil spills, because the oil soaks up like a sponge that is released every rainy season, thereby damaging a wider area of fishing waters and agricultural lands (Sagay 1993).

The Nigerian state has not been keen to the problems of the Niger Delta; as little efforts are made to compel the multinational oil companies to improve upon their operations and eliminate the recurring decimal of environmental degradation. This weakness seems very obvious in the area of gas flaring, Nigeria flares about 75 percent of its total gas production and 95 percent of associated gas, a by product of crude oil extraction from reservoirs (Ile & Akukwe, 2001). These figures are far more than what is obtained in any other part of the world. Much of the flared gas is methane which has a high warming potential and poses negative health consequences. The populace of the oil producing communities have complained that the gas that is flared, results in acid rain which corrodes metal roofing sheets atop houses, increases soil temperature and damages vegetation thereby causing adverse effect on the lives of the Niger Delta inhabitants (Ile & Akukwe, 2001). Gas flaring also brings about a situation where unburned carbon is transported into homes and working areas causing destruction to vegetation around, rendering the soil infertile and resulting in tremendous heat that creates hardship and discomfort for the people

(Ojeifa, 2004). Even though Nigeria has had laws since 1969 that require multinational oil companies to utilize this gas, nothing much was done. Several times, the government has issued deadlines to the companies to stop flaring gas but to no avail. First was 1985, then 2004 and again 2008 but pronouncements have always hit deaf ears as government is again forced to review the deadline. It is imperative to reiterate that up till this moment, it does not seem this target of zero flaring will be met by these Oil majors.

A disturbing dimension to the ecological devastation from oil exploration is the occurrence of sedimentation and siltation in the region. This process is caused by an increase in tidal wave action which results in narrowing of the creeks and reduction in creek depth. The semi-diurnal tidal regime ensures two high tidal floods and two low ebb tides within the course of each day wave action along the coastline, resulting in both depletion and loss of sediments in the beaches. A typical example where this has occurred being Koluama (1) and (2) where the facility operated by Chevron Texaco which was once on land is now an off-shore well (Alameyesiegha, 2003).

Where the greatest impact of the rape on the Niger Delta region is felt most is on the impoverishment of the masses of the region. The destruction of land and waterways deny the people of the area their major source of farming and fishing livelihood (Darah, 2003). The abject poverty in which these indigenous people of oil bearing region are subjected is diametrically opposed to the relative affluent lifestyle of the oil workers in their midst, whose penchant for frivolous and imprudent spending, compounds the economic situation and further strangulates the communities. The bottom-line being that, families in these communities find it difficult to cater for their children bringing about intergenerational poverty, passed from one generation to the other (Ile & Akukwe, 2001). The ripple effect is the creation of frustrated children who would constitute the bulk of recruits for militant groups and later turn against the oil companies thereby posing security problems to smooth oil exploration. The mass poverty in the region is re-inforced by the lack of government presence and the irresponsibility of the multinational oil companies to the welfare of their host communities. The only visible recurring government presence in the Niger Delta area are police stations and military patrol units armed and ready for action to

contain the raging agitation in the region (Osuka, 1999).

Aside the ecological devastation of the Niger Delta region, there is also a political marginalization of the people and oppression by the government in alliance with the multinational oil companies operating in the region. The manifestation of this is clearly seen in the massive lukewarm participation in government by Niger Delta people. Inequitable distribution and utilization of natural and mineral resources made worse by the perversion of Nigeria's federalism since the end of the civil war as well as discriminatory policies in the construction and allocation of social amenities and infrastructure and discrimination in appointment and employment of personnel, lend credence to this (Ekuerhare, 2004). Niger Delta activists have cited the promulgation of Petroleum Decree 51 of 1969 as one of the instruments purposely used to deprive the region because it expropriated all petroleum resources in the country and set the tone for the abrogation of the principle of derivation in the sharing of political assets in the country (Obi, 2002). Derivation principle had hitherto been the foundation of resource sharing in the country prior to 1969.

Related to this is the view that the directive given to oil companies to move their head offices to Lagos by the federal government was a ploy to deny the Niger Delta economy the growth stimulant. Other laws such as the Offshore Oil Revenue Decree of 1971 that empowered the federal government to appropriate all minerals in the continental shelf and the Land Use Decree of 1978 that transferred the right of ownership of all lands in Nigeria from communities to the federal government, a culture alien to majority of the peoples of Nigeria especially in the south including the Niger Delta people who were specifically deprived of the oil resources. This view finds support in Obi (2000), who argued that since most of the oil was contributed by the minority ethnic states of Midwest and south-eastern Nigeria, the abandonment of derivation was interpreted as a treacherous ploy of denying those states the full benefit of their contributions to the federal purse. Similar to this is the Lands (Title, Vesting, etc) Decree 52 of 1993 that makes the Federal Government the sole owner of any land within 100 meters of coast or watercourse or river throughout the country. Analysts see this law as mainly targeted at the Niger Delta, a region that hosts about 500 rivers translating to over 90 percent of the rivers and

waterways in West Africa (Darah, 2003). The implication of this is that fishing ground and marine resources in the rivers and their banks have become the property of the federal government thereby turning the communities to tenants in their lands (Darah, 2003).

Apart from treating issues that concern the Niger Delta with levity, statistical evidence suggests that the political space reserved for the people from this area to participate in the Nigerian polity is very slim. In other words, the people have been schematically shutout from participating effectively in the governance of Nigeria. The number of states and local government in the area compared to other regions of the country attests to this. The ramification reflects in the number of senators and assembly men as well as other positions at the centre determined on the basis of this which is insignificant in spite of the fact that the resource that sustains the country is generated from their lands and waters. This exclusion from decision making positions in the Nigerian state coupled with ecological devastation of their environment and neglect by government has led to despair and disillusionment among the people engendering the perception of second class citizens of Nigeria by Niger Delta peoples, thus fermenting the ground for reaction including the increasing militant actions in that region. The violent dimension in the Niger Delta is seen by certain elements as the best way of correcting the perceived injustice against the region (Aderemi & Osahon, 2008).

The increasing militancy which intensified in the region shortly after the 2003 General Elections in Nigeria has assumed dangerous dimension. Armed militia groups under the umbrella of MEND through their activities have created conditions of instability that is negatively affecting the economy of Nigeria (Ebiri & Etim 2009). Militia activities have forced stoppages in oil production and made it difficult for contactors to undertake development projects in the region. Report has it that average production drop of 1.46 million barrel of crude oil per day as at July 2009 was recorded owing to militia activities. The negative implications showed glaringly in the 2009 Nigerian budget which is predicated on earnings from oil that was put at 2.2 million barrel at \$45 per barrel (Igbikowobo, 2009).

MOSOP and Niger Delta Resurgence

The end of the Civil War ushered in an era of national visibility of the Niger Delta groups as a result of their support for the federal government against the Biafran secession move, which significantly contributed in the defeat of the Biafran rebels. That victory brought an initial incorporation of Niger Delta elites as allies of the Northern elites who held sway in Nigeria. Beside this also, the civil war marked a turning point in Nigeria's federalism ushering in an era where the power of the centre grew astronomically, including the appropriation of a significant chunk of the nation's revenue base through the petroleum act that transferred oil resources to the centre and abolished the policy of derivation in revenue sharing. This policy jolted the Niger Delta groups who felt that their support for the north was not appreciated, but the Nigerian political landscape dominated by military overlords of northern orientation did not create the environment for ventilation of grievance.

The circumstance led to a slow heightening of the second struggle from a mild renewal of agitation in the 1970s to widespread community based protests in the 1980s. By the 1990s, the region was mobilized enough by a flowering of civil society, intense identity mobilization and ethnic nationalism, community activism and youth mobilization to commence a broad regime of extensive active resistance. Further, what began as mere articulation by the region's elites had become a mass protest whose content of demands, methods and strategies of struggle had been transformed considerably. First, there was a re-orientation of the struggle to that of a struggle for group rights to self-determination, equity and justice and to issues of the national question, state reforms and corporate governance. Second, there was an emphasis of mass communal, ethnic and pan-ethnic mobilization and the creation of linkages and platforms for general mass action by youths, women and community members. Third, there was a change from the culture of accommodation of the region's elites with the state and MNCs, to that of direct challenge and confrontations. Fourth, there was an enlargement of the methods of struggle to include the extra-constitutional, extra legal and cultural tactics.

However, there were agitations in the Niger Delta region driven by perceived injustices which were often suppressed by the sheer

coercive might of the state. However Ken Saro Wiwa, a writer was able to organize his Ogoni kinsmen in 1990 to challenge the Nigerian state over environmental degradation of Ogoniland and deprivation of Ogoni people of their resources (Isumoha, 2004). The Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) which he founded articulated Ogoni demands in a document called the Ogoni Bill of Rights. That document was signed by thirty traditional rulers and eminent persons of Ogoniland on behalf of Ogoni people and presented to the government and people of Nigeria in November 1990.

The Ogoni struggle and the organizational prowess of Ken Saro Wiwa was not only able to raise the consciousness of the entire populace of the Niger Delta to the neglect and destruction oil exploration has brought to the region but also the internationalization of the plight of the Niger Delta peoples. As Osezua (1999) observed, the advent of the phenomenon of mass protest in Nigerian politics which was marked by the rise of MOSOP came not only in the passionate demand for justice in the distribution of national resources but also in the wake of demand for a fundamental restructuring of the Nigerian state. Central to the quest for political restructuring are issues of changing those who control oil power and the establishment of an equitable basis for distributing oil revenue (Obi 2002:104).

The Ogoni revolt not only internationalised the environmental degradation of the Niger Delta region but also succeeded in forcing the multinational giant, Shell, to suspend operation in Ogoni land for many years. Though Ken Saro Wiwa paid the supreme price in 1995 when he was hanged by the military administration of General Sani Abacha on charges of the murder of four prominent Ogoni chiefs, the flame of agitations and activism in the Niger Delta which the Ogoni struggle sparked instead of abating intensified across the region.

Drawing from the Ogoni, the Ijaws, under the auspices of Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) launched the Kaiama Declaration, the Oron came out with Oron Bill Of Rights, and the Urhobo proclaimed the Urhobo Economic Charter and the Ikwerres in Rivers state came out with Ikwerre Charter of Demands and the Akalaka Declaration among several others. The primary focus in all these documents were demands for resource control, self determination, true federalism, environmental and economic justice and reparation for damages that have been

inflicted on the people by several decades of oil exploration.

Among all the groups in the Niger Delta—the Ijaw, the largest ethnic group in the region, has taken the struggle to another level beyond where the Ogonis left it. The Kaiama Declaration on December 11th, 1998 changed the texture of the struggle in the region. The declaration had called for the immediate withdrawal from Ijaw land of all military forces of occupation and repression posted by the Nigerian state. It warned oil companies not to employ services of Nigerian Armed Forces to protect its operation; otherwise they will be viewed as enemy of the Ijaw people. It was also demanded in the document that oil companies should stop all exploration and exploitation activities in the Ijaw area because of gas flaring, oil spillages and blowouts among others that result from their operations. Staff and contractors of oil companies were advised to withdraw from Ijaw territory by the 30th of December, 1998, whereas Ijaw youths in all communities in the Niger Delta were admonished to commence the implementation of the Declaration by the 30th of December 1998. It was this that laid the foundation for the militant struggle that pervaded the Niger Delta region in the turn of the century.

The Style of the renewed Niger Delta Agitation

The style of the Niger Delta resurgence was multi-pronged. The successful activities of MOSOP activated a lot of civil society and community based groups with various agenda. Militancy as a strategy came into the fore at the dawn of the fourth republic in 1999 but got intensified after the 2003 General Elections following the success of MOSOP activism. These changes have resulted first in more extensive actions against the multinational oil companies and the Nigerian state, including the disruption of oil production, occupation and shutting of oil facilities, abduction of expatriates, hijack and seizure of oil companies helicopters and boats, stoppage of production, and related activities were undertaken by youths, women and community activists in the 1990s. According to Arnold (2000), as at September 1999, about 50 Shell workers had been kidnapped and released. The objective for this kind of action was centred on the view, 'if they do not benefit from the oil output, then they will stop the oil from being produced' (Arnold 2000: 224). The regime of violent and armed resistance by youth militias and

militant groups was principally in response to state repression and corporate violence, and as part of actions to compel concessions in respect of self-determination, regional autonomy, resource control and greater oil based benefits.

Civil Society and Social Movements in the Niger Delta

The endless transition to civil rule of the 1990s and state repression by the military overlords that held sway in Nigerian politics saw the emergence of an avalanche of civil society groups as the intellectual arm of the Niger Delta struggle. Most of them ethnically and community based, arose to demand for better deal in the socio-political and economic environment of Nigeria. The avalanche of civil society groups in the Niger Delta were motivated by varying agenda that range from environmental advocacy, to demands for greater political participation in the Nigerian political process. These civil society groups have complemented the region's struggle through advocacy, influence, opinion and political engineering plank by constructing numerous platforms for concerted regional action, which from the early 1990s had centred on regional autonomy, federal restructuring, resource control, ethnic and minority rights, equity and political representation. The central grievance of these socio-political groups is neglect and marginalization in terms of political representation and developmental attention, deprivation and disinheritance arising from poor benefits from the oil economy and more specifically the decline in the proportion of derivation-based allocation from the federation account.

Though numerous civil society groups had existed since the 1950s in the region, recent groups that emerged in the 1990s are pan ethnic and comprised of top elites of the region. They include; the Organization for the Restoration of Actual Rights of Oil Communities, Southern Minorities Forum, Ethnic Minority Rights Organization of Nigeria, Conference of Traditional Rulers of Oil Producing States, Association of Minority Oil States, The Niger Delta Peace and Development Forum, Movement for the Protection and Survival of Oil Mineral and Natural Gas Producing Communities of Nigeria, Niger Delta Professionals, Niger Delta Patriots, South-South Empowerment Forum, South-South Peoples Assembly, South-South Peoples Conference, South-South Peoples Forum and the Union of Niger Delta

(Ikelegbe, 2005).

Apart from this pan ethnic civil society grouping, some purely ethnic groupings have also emerged and the prominent ones are the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People, the Egbema National Congress, Movement for the Reparation of Ogbia, the Urhobo Political Stakeholders Forum, Movement for the Survival and Advancement of Ekpeye Ethnic Nationality, Oron National Forum, Old Ahoada. Joint Consultative Forum, Egi Ethnic Coalition, the Ijaw Elders Forum, Elimotu Movement, Isoko Community Oil Producing Forum, Ijaw National Congress, Isoko Development Union and Urhobo Progress Union (Ikelegbe, 2005).

Included in this listing is what Ikelegbe has termed elder/elite movements which are described as systemic movements, which make demands for certain socio-political changes within the existing political framework. These movements engage in a form of interest group politics and have generally advocated as solution to Niger Delta problems, separate or own states and local governments (Ikelegbe 2001). Even though elite agitations produced results in the form of creation of more states, from two (Rivers and Cross River) in 1967 to four (Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Cross River) in 1995 and five (Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom Cross River and Delta), such solution has not achieved the satisfactory results envisaged because of the erosion of the fiscal and jurisdictional powers and weakened governance capacities of state governments relative to those wielded by the former regions.

The unsatisfactory results of “separate or own states and local governments” solution is what spurred the forceful demands from elite for political solutions that would strengthen the jurisdictional and fiscal capacities of Niger-delta states. The actions of these elder elites signalled a new phase in the Niger-delta struggle, the elevation of the struggle from purely developmental issues to political ones that include demands such as federal restructuring, resource control and resolution of the National Question through a conference of ethnic nationalities and asking that the south-south or Niger Delta region produce the next president after the term of Olusegun Obasanjo in 2007.. A good example of such movement is the Southern Minorities Movement (SMM) and the South-South Peoples Assembly (SSPA).

The SSM for instance, submitted a memorandum to the military government of General Abacha's 1994/95 constitutional conference demanding a minimum of 50% derivation formula and the creation of six political zones, including one for the Niger-delta with substantial devolution of powers to the zones. The actions of SMM and similar organizations such as MOSOP and SSPA drew great support from within and outside the Niger Delta and heightened the tempo of mobilization within the region. The success of the movements as expressed in approval of the six zone formula and increased international scrutiny of the activities of oil companies in Niger-delta.

The dynamics of the situation in the Niger Delta region has changed the Nigeria cultural politics and affected socio-economic, environment and development facets of not only the region but also the country. The presence of these numerous ethnic militias have not increased their level of insurgency in the area but made Nigeria to lose several billions of Naira every year, lower Nigeria's international diplomacy, but equally transformed the landscape of the Niger Delta region in recent times, drawing attention nationally and internationally.

Insurgency in the Niger Delta

In the Niger Delta area, the emergence of militant groups calling for an end to injustice, environmental degradation and deprivation, emerged from state repression (Obi 2002). Though, agitation in that region of the country, predates the era of military administration and even independence, it was the non-violent campaign led by Ken Saro-Wawa and his Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni Peoples (MOSOP) in the early 1990s that prepared the stage for ethnic militants in that region(Osezua, 1999, Emmanuel, 2006).

That agitation took a violent dimension with the formation of a youth wing of MOSOP called National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), that challenged state authorities and the establishment class in their midst. This posture contributed to the death of four Ogoni leaders accused of collaborating with government, leading to the militarization of the area when the government deployed a joint police/military detachment called internal state security force. Notwithstanding, Ken Saro Wiwa and some of his comrades were hanged by the Abacha military junta. The activities of MOSOP/NYCOP succeeded in stopping

oil exploration in Ogoni area attracting national and international attention to the Ogoni cause, because they laid down a foundation of intellectual struggle, anchored on a well articulated document called the Ogoni Bill of Rights (Isumoha, 2004). That document which was signed by thirty traditional rulers and eminent persons of Ogoniland on behalf of the Ogoni people and presented to the government and people of Nigeria in November 1990 was what gingered the youths into taking violent options to realize the objectives enunciated in the document.

It was the Ogoni struggle, coupled with the organizational prowess of Ken Saro Wiwa that helped to awaken the entire populace of the Niger Delta to the neglect and destruction oil exploration brought to the region. In addition, the plight of the Niger Delta peoples was internationalized (Osaghae, 1995). As Osezua (1999), rightly observed, the advent of the phenomenon of mass protest in Nigerian politics marked by the rise of MOSOP came not only in the passionate demand for a fundamental restructuring of the Nigerian state. The Ogoni revolt succeeded in forcing the multinational oil giant, Shell, to suspend operation in the area for many years (Obi, 2004:104). Though Ken Saro Wiwa paid the supreme price in 1995 when he was hanged by the military administration of Sani Abacha on charges of the murder of four prominent Ogoni chiefs, the flames of agitation and activism in the Niger delta which the Ogoni struggle sparked off in the area instead abating, rather reverberated across Niger delta and increased in intensity. It was this impetus that was arrived by the Ijaw, who came out with the Kaima Declaration on December 11, 1998.

The immediate reaction of the Nigerian government to that declaration was to unleash violence and manhunt on the masterminds of the historic event. However the youths of the area with memories of the Ogoni struggle were undeterred but rather determined to carry on with their resolution. The result was the different approaches to mass protest from the Ogonis. The violent militant approach has led to the formation of rebel groups that are confronting the Nigerian state. The Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and the movement for the emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) are the foremost militant groups operating in the area with trail of clashes with security operatives since the return to democratic dispensation in Nigeria (Jason, 2006).

The group's strategy apart from confrontations with police and

other security operatives also include kidnapping, raids and asking for ransom, sabotage, bunkering and terrorism, that have reduced the state and the oil companies explorative capacities. It was this declaration and confrontational disposition that drew the line for the government to launch clampdown on the arrowheads behind that gathering, an action that further militarized the area, leading to the deployment by government of a joint police-military operation called 'Operation Restore Hope' (Ramsome-Kuti, 1999:10). The Ijaw fired up by the Kaima declaration has formed many splinter ethnic militia groups prominent among which are the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Even though the Nigerian Government of Olusegun Obasanjo's administration was able to arm-twist Asari Dokubo, leader of NDPVF into surrendering, MEND, which emerged from this repressive approach adopted 'formlessness' in their activities to assert claims on the Nigerian state. Emmanuel (2006), posits that this was necessary because the group realized that since Asari, the arrowhead of NDPVF was identified, it was easy to immobilize him and hence his group. The long incarceration of Asari who was released shortly on assumption of office by Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in June 2007, was enough to transform MEND's activities into what may be categorized as insurgency as noted by Jason (2006). MEND a loose federation of armed camps headed by semi autonomous leaders across the Niger Delta became more daring in not only disrupting oil exploration in the region, but engaging in illegal bunkering, refining of oil and other illegal business that impacted negatively on the Nigerian economy, reducing oil export from 2.5 million barrel per day to mere 800,000 barrel. In 2006, MEND attracted local and international media attention by kidnapping and holding hostage some expatriate oil workers, blowing up oil installations and attacking security personnel in the Niger Delta. These militia groups were partly the result of the militarization of the public space and discourses of resource control, the organised large-scale theft and sale of oil tapped from oil pipes (illegal oil bunkering), and the struggle for power by the Niger Delta elite with links to the Nigerian State and the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). These violent groups provided alienated, unemployed and marginalized youth, some of them university and high school graduates, with a platform to

challenge the federal and translational hegemony over oil, tap into a groundswell of anger against the State and the Oil

State Reaction to the Niger Delta Crisis

The approach of the Nigerian state to the Niger Delta question has been two-pronged; using the carrot and the stick. Given the position of oil in the political calculus of Nigeria, those who hold fort at the helms of power see agitations from the communities that bear this oil as affront that threatens their interests. As such, the immediate conceivable measure in the mind of these ruling elites is to visit agitators with the heavy might of the state in order to crush them so as to guarantee their survival. The penchant is to brood no opposition to anything that threatens the free flow of oil and accumulation of wealth. Most of the time, the government and the multinational oil companies work in alliance to ensure that oil flows freely without interruption that come through agitation by intimidating the communities (Adebanwi, 2001). As Osezua (1999) had observed, the Nigerian government is prepared to drown the country in blood for oil. This line of action is pursued in order to safeguard exploitation of oil and the wealth that accrue from there. Bloodshed has been part and parcel of government oil policy and this has manifested severally in the history of oil exploitation in Nigeria.

Some of the typical examples include the case of 'Umuechem' an oil producing community where a dispute between the community and Wilbros International, one of the multinational oil companies operating in the area, saw the government unleashing troops on the innocent villagers. In 1995, the government hanged the environmental activist Ken Saro Wiwa for daring to challenge the ecological devastation that has been visited on his Ogoni community through activities of oil exploration. In 1998, troops were let loose, against Ijaw youth activists who spearheaded the Kaiama declaration. The massacre in Odi and the destruction of the town in 1999 by the civilian administration headed by Olusegun Obasanjo who sent troops to the community following allegation that youths kidnapped and killed a police officer are examples (Ransome-Kuti 1999). That action of the government was to send a message to the oil bearing communities that it would brook no opposition and would not tolerate any disruption of oil production in the country (Amnesty International, 1999, Osuoka, 1999).

A similar action was taken by the civilian administration headed by Umaru Yar'Adua in 2009, when he sent troops into Gbaramatu community accusing them of harbouring militants. This behaviour is seen by observers as state terror, which is usually carried out with the connivance and sometimes financial backing of the oil companies (Obi 2002). *The London Observer* confirmed this in 1997 by their report stating that Shell purchased arms to equip the Nigerian Police guarding its installations. Shell had in response to mounting condemnation to this revelation disclosed that it was not the only oil company given to the practice of supplying arms to the police. Before the agitations in the Niger Delta assumed militant dimension, that made it a high risk for security personnel deployed to guard oil installations and personnel, it used to be a thing of prestige of which officers lobby to be deployed to oil companies (Obi, 2000).

The aspect of the carrot which the government has used as approach to solving Niger Delta question has been tokenistic. Measures that are not usually deep enough to assuage the feeling of the Niger Delta people to the perceived injustices are occasionally dished out. Some analysts have argued that the Niger Delta question and the crisis it had generated during the Fourth Republic would not have escalated to the proportion it assumed if the major ethnic groups that controlled the levers of power had implemented the recommendation of the Willinks Commission (Alameyeseigha, 2003, Hosiah, 2006). The commission had recommended that "there is an overwhelming need for a special Ijaw area consisting mainly of the Ijaw people in Eastern region and taking in from the Western region the western Ijaws, consisting as it does mainly of the delta of Niger, and that it should be regarded rather as a special development area requiring particular economic assistance". What came out of this was the setting up of Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) in 1961 originally intended to address the special problems of Niger Delta area but was to be perverted by 1976, when it was proliferated all over the country with that meant for the development of Niger Delta starved of funds and made redundant (Alameyeseigha 2003).

What befell the NDDDB and rendered it inoperative and unable to achieve its objectives has also befallen similar agencies of the federal government which have been set up at one time or the other to solve the

developmental challenges of the Niger Delta region. For instance the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) was set up by the Babangida administration in 1991 to coordinate development projects in the Niger Delta area just like the NDDB. However, the agency turned out to be a cesspool in which billions of dollars disappeared into the private pockets of commission operatives and soldiers (Jason 2006). The colossal failure of OMPADEC to address the issues it was set up to tackle, meant that the incoming democratic administration in 1999 to devise something better to deal with the Niger Delta problems.

In response, the democratic regime apart from setting up the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) by act of the National Assembly and the Coastal States of the Niger Delta, the Presidency has also increased derivation principle of oil revenue from 3 to 13 percent. The implication is that the revenue collected by the states in the Niger Delta has tremendously increased. Yet these responses have not effectively stemmed the tide of agitation and militancy in the region. In fact, agitations and militancy have become uncontrollable in the Niger Delta. Critics argue that the Niger Delta agitation under the current democratic dispensation is misdirected given the huge resources collected by state governments in the Niger Delta. However the elites of the Niger Delta have been frivolous in handling these resources and the huge pie has made competition into political positions in the region highly volatile, leading to increased militia activities in the region to the zero sum game by Niger Delta political actors to have their hands in these resources. Reports by Transition Monitoring Group and the European Union Election Observer Mission confirm the high level of violence in the region during the 2003 General Election. The boys who were armed by the politicians were to become the major players in militia camps that dotted the Niger Delta. This position was confirmed during the Rivers State Truth and Reconciliation Commission sittings in Port Harcourt and Abuja in 2008 where prominent politicians were linked to importation of arms.

The state did not only employ the carrot, it also employed the stick in terms of the heavy militarization of the region in an operation called the Joint Military Task Force (JTF), that devastated most communities in the region. By the end of 2008, it was obvious that

military actions alone were not enough to combat insurgency in the region. Hence, the Niger Delta Summit was proposed and the United Nation's (UN) Undersecretary General, Ibrahim Gambari, was nominated by the government to act as a mediator in the conflict between the Niger Delta and the federal government. The rejection of Gambari's candidature by the Niger Delta groups led to the cancellation of the summit. However, an alternative suggested led to the composition of the Niger Delta Technical Committee which was inaugurated on September 8th, 2008 with the terms of reference given to the committee were to collate, review and extract various reports, suggestions and recommendations from the Willink Commission report to the time of its inauguration, and give a summary of the recommendations necessary for government action. They were also to present suggestions for dealing with challenges in the Niger Delta. It was the Committee that recommended the establishment of a Disarmament Demobilization and Rehabilitation Commission to address the Niger Delta militancy and a negotiation of amnesty for those Niger Delta militants willing to participate in the DDR programme; strengthened independent regulation of oil pollution; an effective environmental impact assessment (EIA) process; and the ending of gas flares by December, 2008.

After much delay, related to the plethora of political, economic and social issues, the government of Yar'Adua however took the bull by the horns by declaring an Amnesty Programme that required the militants to willingly surrender their arms in exchange for government rehabilitation. A Presidential Panel on Amnesty and Disarmament of Militants in the Niger Delta was instituted to implement the presidential pardon. Unlike the recommendations for open negotiations between the government and militias, consultations were at the highest levels of government, and involved members of the Niger Delta elites and other civil society leaders that had the confidence of the militants of the Niger Delta region negotiating with militia commanders.

On 25 June 2009, President Yar'Adua granted presidential amnesty to militants who had directly or indirectly participated in the commission of offences and associated militant activities in the Niger Delta, and who were willing to surrender their weapons and renounce armed struggle within a 60-day ultimatum (6 August–4 October 2009).

That exercise revealed a lot when different militia groups publicly paraded arms in compliance with the amnesty deal. Thus, the programme, succeeded in creating some kind of peace after most of the major militant leaders bought the idea. The challenge for the government however, lies in the post-amnesty programme of rehabilitation of the militants who surrendered their arms as the polarized political landscape of the region has crept into the programme (Amaize, Onah & Oyadongha, 2009). The programme covers about 8,000 to 10,000 militants. Report has it that the Federal Government has budgeted about \$63million for the rehabilitation and reintegration of these militants and this covers their allowances and running of the programmes for the period of 2 months. Each of the militants was expected to receive \$135 a month plus \$100 a month for food. A report quoting the Central Bank of Nigeria's Governor Sanusi Lamido has it that between 2009 and April 2013, the Federal Government has spent \$1 billion (N158 billion) on the Amnesty programme (Nwokoji and Amumihe, 2013). Through the Programme, militant youths were trained in Ghana, South Africa, the Philippines, Russia, Ukraine, India, among other countries. Also, more than 5,000 youths have been enrolled in formal schools and various vocational training centres within and outside the country. Available data show that no fewer than 5,067 of the total beneficiaries had already graduated in skills acquisition fields such as welding and fabrication (1,847), entrepreneurship (1,609), pipe fitting (150), carpentry & plumbing (206), oil drilling (32), electrical installation (232), ICT (125), marine related courses (564) and others (302). (Nwokoji and Amumihe, 2013).

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that this amnesty is not the first measure employed to curb the menace. For example in 2004, the Federal Government made an attempt to buy over some of the militants leaders like Ateke Tom and Asari Dokubo by paying them \$2,000 for each of the 360 AK-47 they surrender to the government. Despite this move, it was reported later that Mr. Ateke Tom was quoted as saying that he only turned in small fraction of his arms meaning the deal failed resulting in the increase in militia activities.

The Niger Delta Struggle and the Jonathan presidency

The Niger Delta region which remains the goose that lays the all important egg for Nigeria, has indeed suffered neglect and abandonment by those who saw the appropriation of the oil resources as part of the war booty. However, the campaign by Ken Saro Wiwa and his Ogoni lieutenants, yielded fruits in awakening the consciousness of the Niger Delta people. That consciousness which heightened activism in the region culminated in the emergence of different shades of group ranging from those that believe in non-violent means to those that hold the view that violence is the language of power assumption and recognition. This activism in the Niger Delta has significantly altered the cultural dynamics of Nigerian politics especially since the dawn of the Fourth Republic.

First and foremost, the agitation championed by MOSOP went a long way in engineering the increase of the percentage for derivation from 3 percent to 13 percent in the Constitutional Conference organised by Abacha in 1994. That decision was not implemented until the inauguration of the Fourth Republic dispensation. This singular factor catapulted most of the Niger Delta states into the elite states in terms of revenue allocation profile. States such as Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa and Akwa Ibom had revenue monthly that doubled those of the South East states put together. The implication of this was that the Niger Delta elites and politicians had access to easy money with which to fund a sustained agenda nationally. The flow of money to the Niger Delta states also made politics in the Niger Delta more volatile not only within the Niger Delta region but also nationally as the party that captures the Niger Delta states is sure to remain competitive and relevant nationally. Given this scenario and the heightened agitation in the Niger Delta it was easy to strongly persuade the rest of the country to make some concessions to the Niger Delta in a way it was not done in the past.

To this end palliative programmes such as the passing of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Bill could go through the National Assembly even when the president who sent it disagreed with the National Assembly on certain aspects that require the oil companies to contribute part of their profit. Beside this, the administration of Olusegun Obasanjo also initiated a programme that recruited Niger Delta youths into the Armed Forces, the Police and other

security organizations as a way of stemming the tide of militancy in the area. Appointments into sensitive offices in the country such as the Minister of Petroleum and Group Managing Director (GMD) of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, have been virtually monopolized by Niger Delta indigenes.

More so, in a bid to replicate the development at the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), a ministry of Niger Delta was created by the Umaru Musa YarAdua's administration. In addition to this, is the massive Amnesty Programme which involves training of former militants in schools in the country and abroad, the payment of a minimum of N65, 000 monthly to the combatants, the integration of their leaders through government patronage such as the concession of lucrative contracts involving safe-guarding of oil pipelines, which fetch millions of naira to them monthly.

Among all these gains by the Niger Delta political bloc, the most significant is the making of Dr Goodluck Ebele Azikiwe Jonathan who hails from Otuoke in Bayelsa state as the President of Nigeria. His meteoric rise to the exalted office of the Presidency owes a lot to the agitations and activities of civil society groups and militants from the Niger Delta.

Though, the campaign for the PDP ticket for the 2007 General Election was keenly contested by so many people, the leading candidates with very high media profile and visibility were from the Niger Delta. They candidates include Peter Odili and Donald Duke. In fact unscientific polling carried out by Thisday Newspaper puts Odili ahead of the pack of presidential aspirants in the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

Though Odili was poised to clinch the ticket, a powerful northern lobby group persuaded the outgoing President Olusegun Obasanjo to adhere to the unwritten agreement of rotation of the office between the north and south which implied the turning of the pendulum against southern candidate. The president using the weight of his office persuaded Odili and some leading candidates from the south to step aside. Also using the same weight, he foisted Jonathan who had already won the PDP ticket to contest the governorship of Bayelsa state to run on the ticket with Umaru Musa YarAdua ahead of other non-Ijaw Niger Delta aspirants such as Odili and James Ibori who were eyeing the

position, apparently to pacify and douse the Ijaw led militant activities in the region.

Though the Yar Adua /Jonathan ticket won the presidential election of 2007, the health challenges of YarAdua could not allow him to complete his tenure. His long stay in the hospital abroad battling over his health generated a constitutional crisis of succession as his inner kitchen cabinet and some northern elites felt short-changed to see hard won power after Obasanjo's eight years sojourn in Aso Rock, slip from them to another southerner. A Doctrine of Necessity devised by the National Assembly resolved the issue and Jonathan emerged as the Acting President. But until YarAdua eventually died in Aso Rock in controversial circumstances leading to his swearing in as president an action that enraged a wide spectrum of northern political elites who began a campaign to stop him from contesting the presidential election of 2011.

When it became obvious that Jonathan would be standing for the election, the northern elites cognizance of the incumbency factor, decided to present a consensus candidate of which all the major candidates of northern extraction agreed to abide with the committee set up by Northern Consultative Assembly. Former Vice president under the administration of Olusegun Obasanjo emerged as the candidate to challenge Jonathan. The result of that election stunned every observer and demystified the notion of monolithic north as a political bloc.

After scaling that hurdle, Jonathan went ahead to defeat Mohamadu Buhari whose appeal to the electorates was seen to be low because he concentrated his campaign only in the north. The result of the election was described by most observers as the freest since the Fourth Republic dispensation. The victory of Jonathan was the first time any individual from a minority group, could stand election and receive such massive pan-Nigerian support. The unexpected news that Jonathan is going to spend another four years sent shock waves across the north sparking off a general discontent in terms of riots and upheavals. The spiral of violence that followed the announcement of Jonathan as the president-elect saw a proportion of the north engulfed in fire and paving the way for the insecurity that pervades the north since Jonathan assumed office.

Conclusion

The Niger Delta area has remained a highly contentious region even before the colonial era. Given its location in the Imperial exploitation of capital and its natural endowment, it comes as a priced arena of political contention. This has played out in the role of the region as a bloc in the cultural politics of Nigeria. The periodic geo-political dynamics that have played out over the years has thrown up different scenarios for the Niger Delta. However, the most significant factor in the cultural politics of Nigeria is the discovery of oil in the region and the political economy of oil.

The dawn of the Fourth Republic and the accompanying changes in the cultural dynamics of the Niger Delta, given to the increased flow of oil funds and the activities of social movements and groups from the region have opened up new vistas that have made the region, especially the largest ethnic group from there the Ijaw as one of the powerful blocs in the country's political configuration.

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