

Marginality and Crisis
*Globalization and Identity in
Contemporary Africa*

Edited by Akanmu G. Adebayo,
Olutayo C. Adesina, and Rasheed O. Olaniyi



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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

PETROLEUM, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND THE ECONOMICS OF NATIONALISM IN THE NIGER DELTA

SHERIFF FOLARIN AND HENRY OKODUA

The Niger Delta conflict has come into global limelight for some time. The indigenes of the area have agitated over the sordid acts of ecocide and the absence of physical development. In recent months, several factors have added a dangerous twist to the crisis. They include organized militia formations, the most notorious of which is the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND); expanding nature militia operations, including their attacks of Niger Delta and non-Delta targets of national strategic importance such as the oil installations; the July 2009 attack of the Lagos Atlas Cove; and kidnapping of expatriates working in the oil fields. This chapter reviews the various dimensions and manifestations of the crisis and makes a number of recommendations.

Introduction

The Niger Delta crisis has, in very recent times, taken a much more dangerous dimension, underscoring the degeneration of the issue due to the failure of governments at all levels and other non-state actors, including the multinational companies (MNCs), to bring the crisis to an end. The emergence of militia and cult groups among the communities in the last three years points to the aggravation and deterioration, rather than resolution, of the conflicts. The government's

seeming complicity and protection of the MNCs, using instruments of coercion to protect the foreign companies, has multiplied illegal means and instruments to fight the cause of "economic and social emancipation," as some militants claimed in February 2007 in an interview by Jeff Koniange of the American Cable News Network (CNN). This study examines the protracted Niger Delta crisis, exacerbated by oil, ecological, and socio-ethnic factors, and its implication for Nigeria's external relations. It does this by revisiting the many unresolved issues, including the Ogoni crisis, which explain the escalation of the crisis.

While social and relative deprivation is considered primary and environmental issues are looked at as the secondary causes of the problem in some studies (in some, it is reduced to political and some ethnic or communal), the impact of the Niger Delta problem on Nigeria's relationship with the international community is the only consideration in some others; efforts to situate the environmental issues and the eventual world attention are infinitesimal and insignificant, or almost non-existent. This chapter attempts to correct that by reexamining the activities of the oil companies which have created enormous ecological problems in the region, in addition to the abjection of the people, thereby leading to internal strife.

This study therefore considers the role of environmental issues in the Niger Delta crisis. The link between the environmental issues and conflict in the Niger Delta is established, while the role of government in the crisis, its protection of the multinational oil companies at the expense of its own people, and elimination of environmental activists including Ken Saro-Wiwa in mid-1990s, are discussed. However, the emergence of vicious militant groups, such as the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and their many incursions on the economic and resource base of the region which constitute a setback to Nigeria's economic development, coupled with the huge environmental crisis in the region, represent the economic cost of the phenomenon and also explain the international dimension of the crisis.

Backgrounds to the Niger Delta Crisis

The Niger Delta region covers an estimated area of 20,000 km² within wetlands of 70,000 km² formed primarily by sediment deposition. It is located on the south-south geographical region of Nigeria and has a population of about 20 million people made up of many ethnic nationalities. The region comprises of nine states which include Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers. However, the core Niger Delta region includes the three states of Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers. The Delta environment is made up of four major ecological zones which include: mangrove swamp forests, freshwater swamps, coaster barrier islands, and lowland rainforests. Thus, the well-endowed ecosystem of the Delta is simply incredible as it naturally can sustain

more species of freshwater fish, economic trees, and a wide variety of crops than any other ecosystem in West Africa.

In 1956, Shell British Petroleum (now Royal Dutch Shell) discovered crude oil at Oloibiri, a village in the Niger Delta, and began commercial production in 1958. Today, there are 606 oil fields in the Niger Delta, of which 360 are on-shore and 246 off shore (EIA, *Nigeria Country Analysis Brief*, 2005). Nigeria is now the largest oil producer in Africa and the sixth largest in the world, averaging 2.7 million barrels per day (bbl/d) in 2006. Nigeria's economy is heavily dependent on earnings from the oil sector, which provides 20 percent of GDP, 95 percent of foreign exchange earnings, and about 65 percent of budgetary revenues (CIA World Fact Book, 2005, cited in Nwilo & Badejo, 2006).

The Niger Delta Crisis is unarguably related to environmental problems in the area which surprisingly is closely linked to the activities of its oil industry. The problem of oil spills, deliberate destruction of the mangrove to pave way for pipelines, disappearance of the aqua life again due to oil spills and frequent movements of heavy ships, etc. are common occurrences in the Niger Delta. Communities in the region had ventilated their grievances through political and constitutional means against the marginalization and environmental abuses of their soils and waters from independence (Seminitari, 2006). In more recent times, particularly from the 1990s, they had become more restive and violent in their protests against the activities of foreign oil companies, notably Royal Dutch Shell (Shell Petroleum Development Company). The 1990s witnessed the outburst of violence against transnational oil corporations, the government's seeming conspiracy with them, and the use of one ethnic group against another, or infiltration by transnational corporations TNCs/government of ethnic groups with black sheep, which bred grave intra- and inter-ethnic hostilities (Agbese, 2002).

The government's complicity in the crisis found manifestation in the deployment of heavily armed military personnel to fight and dislodge the militants; guard oil facilities, operations, expatriates and the MNCs (Ikpat, 2001). In addition, oil companies have had to recruit jobless local youths to watch over oil interests, thus setting local people against themselves. The official reason given, however, was that the presence of heavy security would act as deterrence to aggressive communities from destroying oil installations. The rationale behind this was controversial as it also showed insensitivity to the fundamental causation of persistent conflict, namely abjection and denials.

Impact of Oil Industry on the Environment in the Niger Delta

Some of the major environmental concerns of the negative exploration activities of oil companies in the Niger Delta include oil spillage and gas flaring in the area. The net effects of these shortcomings have expectedly made life extremely difficult in the region. Nwilo and Badejo, (2006), in support of the foregoing, pointed out that since the discovery of oil in Nigeria in the 1950s, the coun-

try has been suffering the negative environmental consequences of oil development. Akpofure et al., (2000), cited in Nwilo and Badejo (2006), claim that when there is an oil spill on water, spreading immediately takes place, with the gaseous and liquid components evaporating.

Other studies have also shown that oil on water surfaces also interferes with gaseous interchange at the sea surface, and dissolved oxygen levels will thereby be lowered. This no doubt reduces the life span of marine animals. Microorganisms also degrade petroleum hydrocarbons after spillage (Atlas, 1981; Leahy & Colwell, 1990; Atlas & Bartha, 1992). Oil spill incidents have occurred in various parts and at different times along the country's coast. According to Nwilo and Badejo (2005), several major oil spills in the coastal zone were the GOCON's Escravos spill in 1978 of about 300,000 barrels, SPDC's Forcados Terminal tank failure in 1978 of about 580,000 barrels, and Texaco Funiwa-5's blowout in 1980 of about 400,000 barrels. Other oil spill incidents are those of the Abudu pipe line in 1982 of about 18,818 barrels, the Jesse Fire Incident which claimed about 1,000 lives, and the Idoho Oil Spill of January 1998, of about 40,000 barrels. The most publicized of all oil spills in Nigeria occurred on January 17, 1980, when a total of 37 million liters of crude oil got spilled into the environment. This spill occurred as a result of a blowout at Funiwa 5 offshore station. Nigeria's largest spill was an offshore well blowout in January 1980 when an estimated 200,000 barrels of oil (8.4 million U.S. gallons) spilled into the Atlantic Ocean from an oil industry facility, which damaged 340 hectares of mangrove (Nwilo & Badejo, 2005). Table 17.1 below provides a summary of oil spill incidences in Nigeria between the period 1976 and 2005. These are official figures which, in most cases, may not adequately report all incidents of oil spillage.

It is important to note here that spilled oil is most of the time lost to the environment. For example, Nwilo and Badejo (2006) pointed out that available records for the period of 1976 to 1996 indicate that approximately 6%, 25%, and 69% respectively, of total oil spilled in the Niger Delta area, were on land, swamp, and offshore environments. Also, between 1997 and 2001, Nigeria recorded a total number of 2,097 oil spill incidents.

It must be recognized that oil spillage is not new. In fact, oil spills have been part of the history of oil production globally. "And it is not peculiar to Nigeria. The only difference, however, is that in other climes, response by both governments and the oil companies are usually swift" (Nairaland.net, 2006). In addition, oil companies and the Nigerian government need to be concerned about the economic and environmental impacts of oil spills, and to swiftly deploy "spill containment facilities" whenever spills occur. These include "oil skimmers used to recover and eliminate oil spills, oil spill containment devices, emergency spill kits, crude oil sludge control systems, stem jet refrigeration, bio-remediation product distribution, chemical clearing solutions" (Nairaland.net, 2006).

Table 17.1: Record of Oil Spill Incidents in Nigeria, 1976-2005

YEAR	NO. OF OIL SPILLS	QUANTITY OF OIL SPILLED (BARRELS)	(%) OF QUANTITY OF OIL SPILLED	QUANTITY RECOVERED (BARRELS)	(%) OF QUANTITY RECOVERED
1976	128	26,157.00	0.84	7,135.00	27.28
1977	104	32,879.00	1.05	1,703.01	5.18
1978	154	489,294.00	15.67	391,445.00	80.00
1979	157	694,170.00	22.24	63,481.20	9.14
1980	241	600,511.00	19.24	42,416.83	7.06
1981	238	42,722.00	1.37	5,470.20	12.80
1982	252	42,841.00	1.37	2,171.40	5.07
1983	173	48,351.30	1.55	6,355.90	13.15
1984	151	40,209.00	1.29	1,644.80	4.09
1985	187	11,876.60	0.38	1,719.30	14.48
1986	155	12,905.00	0.41	552	4.28
1987	129	31,866.00	1.02	6,109.00	19.17
1988	208	9,172.00	0.29	1,955.00	21.31
1989	195	7,628.16	0.24	2,153.00	28.22
1990	160	14,940.82	0.48	2,092.55	14.01
1991	201	106,827.98	3.42	2,785.96	2.61
1992	378	51,187.96	1.64	1,476.70	2.88
1993	428	9,752.22	0.31	2,937.08	30.12
1994	515	30,282.67	0.97	2,335.93	7.71
1995	417	63,677.17	2.04	3,110.02	4.88
1996	430	46,353.12	1.48	1,183.02	2.55
1997	339	81,727.85	2.62		
1998	399	99,885.35	3.20		
1999	225	16,903.96	0.54		
2000	637	84,071.91	2.69		
2001	412	120,976.16	3.88		
2002	446	241,617.55	7.74		
2003	609	35,284.43	1.13		
2004	543	17,104.00	0.55		
2005	496	10,734.59	0.34		
Total	9,107	3,121,909.8		550,232.9	22.80

Source: Egberongbe, F.O.A, P. C. Nwilo, & O. T. Badejo, 2006 (based on data from Department of Petroleum Resources, Nigeria).

The other major negative consequence of oil exploration and exploitation is gas flaring. This is a practice whereby the associated gas accompanying the production of crude oil is burnt off so as to maximize the production of crude oil. However, the prevailing consensus worldwide regarding gas flaring is that it is wasteful economically and environmentally. The burning of gas by flaring leads to the emission of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas.

Venting of the gas without burning, a practice for which flaring seems often to be treated as a synonym, releases methane, the second main greenhouse gas. It is therefore very disturbing to note that associated gas flaring continues unabated in Nigeria.

For instance, a report by Friends of the Earth (2005) shows that "more gas is flared in Nigeria than anywhere else in the world. Estimates are notoriously unreliable, but roughly 2.5 billion cubic feet of gas associated with crude oil is wasted in this way every day. This is equal to 40% of all Africa's natural gas consumption in 2001" (p. 13). The same report further disclosed that "the flaring of associated gas (AG) in the Niger Delta is a human rights, environmental and economic monstrosity."

Nowhere else in the world have communities been subjected to it on such a scale. It is estimated to cost Nigeria US \$2.5 billion annually, whilst "the roaring, toxic flares affect the health and livelihoods of Delta inhabitants" (Friends of the Earth, 2005, p. 13). In terms of how much is flared, the Friends of the Earth (2005) report estimated that for the first 20 years or so of the industry, almost all the AG was flared: 2.1 billion cubic feet per day (bcf/d) or 92% in 1981, for example.

Gas flaring in Nigeria is widely believed to have contributed more emissions of greenhouse gases than all other sources in sub-Saharan Africa combined. The World Bank (2002) sums up the scale of Nigerian flaring as follows: "The most striking example of environmental neglect has been in the oil sector, where natural gas flaring has contributed more emissions of greenhouse gases than all other sources in sub-Saharan Africa combined" (p. 23).

Within the Niger Delta, there is a common but firm belief that gas flaring is damaging the health of the local people. This stems from the fact that flaring of AG from oil production facilities is like setting a match to a large container of petrol. The enormous heat they emit simply would not permit any life (plant and animal) around them to survive. Exposure to these pollutants impacts human health adversely. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (Friends of the Earth, 2005, p. 26): "Many scientific studies have linked breathing particulate matter to a series of significant health problems, including: aggravated asthma, increases in respiratory symptoms like coughing and difficult or painful breathing, chronic bronchitis, decreased lung function, and premature death" (p. 24). Also, according to the U.S. EPA: "It has been clearly established and accepted that exposure to benzene and its metabolites causes acute nonlymphocytic leukemia and a variety of other blood-related disorders in humans" (cited in Friends of the Earth, 2005, p. 27). Gas flaring is thus considered to be a likely cause of premature deaths and cases of leukemia in the Niger Delta.

One other well-established health-damaging consequence of gas flaring includes high incidences of acid rain, which the Delta residents have long complained about—particularly how their corrugated roofs have been corroded by the composition of the rain that falls as a result of flaring. The primary causes of acid rain are emissions of sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x),

which combine with atmospheric moisture to form sulfuric acid and nitric acid, respectively. Acid rain acidifies lakes and streams and damages vegetation. In addition, acid rain accelerates the decay of building materials and paints. Prior to falling to the earth, SO₂ and NO_x gases and their particulate matter derivatives, sulfates and nitrates, contribute to visibility degradation and harm public health. In the Delta, an oily hue is often observed on collected rain water (Friends of the Earth, 2005).

The report further added that the observation that gas flaring in the Niger Delta is causing acid rain is also backed by the U.S. government's Energy Information Administration, which states, "The continued process of gas flaring has not only meant that a potential energy source—and source of revenue—has gone up in smoke, but it is also a major contributor to air pollution and acid rain" (2005, p. 26).

Niger Delta Conflicts, Global Response, and Nigeria's External Relations

By 1970, about 300,000 barrels of crude oil had been spilled in the Niger Delta area (Earth Action, 1994). According to Shell, the spillage was an act of sabotage by the Biafran army as they were losing in the civil war (Shell, 1995). Shell figures also show that from 1985 to early 1993, 5,352 barrels of oil were spilled in 87 incidents in Ogoniland after their staff had been withdrawn (Shell, 1995, p.12). The tendency had been for state officials and oil companies to blame the problems on sabotage by local communities. For instance, Shell claimed that out of 87 instances of oil spillage in Ogoniland between 1985 and 1993, 60 (about 70 percent) were sabotage acts; the figure tallied with government claims that out of 11 incidents in Ogoniland in 1990, eight or 73 percent were due to sabotage (Okerenta, 2006).

Damages to the environment in Ogoniland went along with deprivation. Consequently, local leaders protested these injustices. The regime of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) reduced public spending, subsidies to goods such as petrol, which led to the rise of pump price of petroleum products from N0.75 per liter in 1986 to N11 per liter in 1996. These severely affected standards of living and hardship everywhere, which were more pronounced in the oil-producing areas. Evidence of conflicts began to show before 1980, but the situation worsened in the second half of the 1980s and 1990s.

However, because oil exploration by multi-national oil corporations had increased with the expanding space of squalor, the Niger Delta people began to hold oil companies and the government responsible for their deprivation. They lamented, for instance, the failure of the two institutions to construct new or at least rehabilitate existing roads, schools, hospitals, and provide opportunities for employment, support for farming, and indeed do everything to improve their livelihood. Oil companies and government insisted that these claims were exaggerated as they were sometimes outrageous and indecorously demanded (Rowell

& Kretzmann, 1999). In response, Shell, government, and seven other neighboring oil-producing communities like Asa-Ndoki, dismissed these claims (Shell, 1995; *Daily Champion*, 1994; *The News*, 1995). However, it was relative deprivation, the gap between expectation and actualization, like the one in the foregoing claims that explain why men rebel (Gurr, 1974), and more importantly, that explicates the Niger Delta conflicts. Osaghae (1995a) argues that the approach of minorities in their demand for better living hitherto were passive, namely by delegation and petitions to the state and oil firms. The failure of these means to engender meaningful changes may explain why the Ogonis decided on a different line of action in the early 1990s. Precisely in 1990, a non-political organization comprising Ogoni elite and traditional rulers, known as KAGOTE whose origin dates back to the 1970s, drew up and presented to the state the Ogoni Bill of Rights. Among other things earlier highlighted, they demanded political autonomy within Nigeria and a fair access to and use of oil revenue derived from Ogoniland to develop their homeland and language, as well as protection from Shell. As an instrument to pursue the actualization of the demands in the Bill of Rights, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) was set up in 1990.

MOSOP followed the Bill of Rights up with intense campaigns at both the national and international levels with a view to publicizing the Ogoni predicament. In that effort, the Bill was presented to the United Nations Sub-Committee on Human Rights on the Prevention from Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, the African Human Rights, and several other non-state actors such as the General Assembly of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organization at the Hague in 1993 (Okonta, 2000). The government and Shell initially responded to the Bill with indifference. However, as MOSOP began to secure public and international support, the state reacted by banning ethnic and other similar organizations, such as MOSOP and the Ethnic Minority Rights Organization of Africa (EMIROAF), both led by Saro-Wiwa. These two organizations and the National Youth Council of Ogoni People were the three main organizations which spearheaded the Ogoni insurrection.

Attaching it to the Bill of Rights, MOSOP wrote to Shell, Chevron, and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) in December 1992, asking for a favorable disposition to Ogoni demands or evacuation from the land. Other demands included the payment of \$6 billion in accumulated rents and royalties for oil exploited in Ogoni fields from 1958; reparation of \$4 billion for soil, water, and air pollution; cessation of gas flaring; and commencement of negotiation with Ogoni people. According to Osaghae (1995b), the significance of the letter to the companies was that it showed the people's loss of confidence in the state. According to them, it was time for "the Ogoni to fight for their own salvation because there is no government to deliver us" (p. 46).

It is pertinent to note that in contemporary global politics, human rights and the environment are no longer issues of domestic concern. Because such issues may explode the international system, world leaders and states intervene positively and swiftly to put it asunder. This explains the limits of sovereignty in

international organizations, particularly when states are contracting parties to some conventions on human and environmental issues. The defense by the then Nigerian Minister of External Affairs, Tom Ikimi, that the world had no business in the happenings in Nigeria and the government handling of the Ogoni crisis was, as such, a ruse.

Nigeria's handling of the Ogoni crisis was a clear violation of the Harare Declaration on Human Rights in 1991, to which Nigeria was a contracting party that compelled the Commonwealth to suspend Nigeria in 1995. Also, as a member of the UN, Nigeria was aware of existing treaties and conventions on fundamental human rights and freedoms to which it was bound by being a signatory. Perhaps the Ogoni issue might not have elicited much passion and concern if not for the fact that the problem of environmental pollution and degradation had become a global concern. The world had come to terms with the fact that the environment was the common heritage of mankind and that environmental degradation in any country could not be overlooked because it carried trans-border harm across nations. The focus on the environment thus brought the global searchlight on the activities of multinational oil corporations, whose relentless drive for oil exploration and the attendant unscrupulous drive for profit often culminated in environment abuse and unconcern for their host communities, especially in the developing countries. In the Niger Delta, the activities of the Royal Dutch Shell oil company had to come into sharp focus because it was the main culprit in Ogoniland (Okereanta, 2006).

Rather than take the necessary measures to assuage the wounded feelings of the Ogoni people, the Abacha regime embarked on a ruthless military pacification by establishing and deploying the notorious Rivers State Internal Security Task Force in Ogoniland. The regime took steps that further made it lose credibility in the international system. For instance, it set up in November 1995 a 50-man National Committee of Traditional Rulers and Leaders of Thought to advise it on sensitive diplomatic problems.

The timing of the execution of the Ogoni Nine which coincided with the Commonwealth Summit in Auckland, New Zealand, in 1995 was embarrassing to a global community that had pleaded for clemency so much and had been assured even by Ikimi at the Summit that the Abacha regime was redressing the issue. Nelson Mandela had even staked his personal integrity to persuade the Summit not to take a hard-line action against Nigeria, having been assured by General Abacha that all would end well (Fawole, 2004).

It was even more ridiculous that just when Ikimi had finished addressing the Summit and granted interviews to the world press that the Nigerian government was not going to and had not hanged the Ogoni leaders, he was confounded with the news that the nine activists had been hanged. The UN Commission on Human Rights at its 52nd session in Geneva in April 1996 condemned the regime for continued violation of human rights; the Commonwealth through its Commonwealth Ministerial Action Committee proposed the freezing of the personal assets of Nigerian rulers, imposition of a comprehensive ban on sporting activities, severance of air ties unless the regime took urgent measures towards speedy

restoration of democratic rule and showed respect for human rights. The report of the Fact-Finding Mission of the UN Secretary General to Nigeria also severely indicted the regime for gross violations of Human Rights and the rule of law and recommended a quick return to democracy, among other things (Fawole, 1999).

The Nigerian government from this time, simply sacrificed Nigeria's age-long hard-earned international respect and goodwill on the altar of incompetence and inordinate ambition to crush all local and external challenges in his quest to consolidate his powers.

The Economics of the Niger Delta Conflicts

The cost of the Niger Delta struggle/conflicts in economic terms may not really be estimable. Every party in the conflicts (the oil MNCs, the Nigerian state, the people of the Niger Delta, and of course, the international community) appears to be mostly concerned with immediate benefits to interests represented. However, the overall adverse consequence of the situation is rarely considered by any. The people who have been in the struggle over the claim to a decent living as well as a decent environment have been abused, oppressed, and suppressed by the elite using the instrument of the state. The reason for this is quite obvious; the people are of little or no economic relevance to the government. This is because the government needs not depend on them for raising any significant revenue needed to run the state. The state thus over the years has misplaced its primary responsibility of protecting lives and property to that of protecting the multinationals at the very expense of the people it is meant to govern.

The multinationals who seek more profits at the expense of the region have over the years opted for the cheaper but immoral and criminal alternative of flaring and venting gas and have in the process messed up the environment and wasted so much resources even in the midst of hunger in the faces of so many around them. As earlier stated, it is on record that a financial loss to Nigeria of about \$2.5 billion annually is traceable to gas flaring. Besides, the associated loss of lives and failing health can never be sufficiently evaluated. The international community at large is also paying heavily as these MNCs contribute their unsolicited fair share of toxic emissions to the environment thereby increasing the problems of global warming and rising sea levels all over. Moreover, every disruption in the supply of crude from the Niger Delta has consistently had its adverse impact on the world prices of crude oil. What this means is that everybody all over has had to pay more for petroleum products. The international community has not done enough to stem the ugly tide. For example, the World Bank has been widely criticized over its inability to require the use of Associated Gas (AG) before approving its credit guarantees for the financing of the West African Gas Pipeline Project. Yet, the Bank has since November 2004 approved \$125 million in guarantees supporting the construction of a 678 kilo-

meter gas pipeline to transport natural gas from Nigeria to Benin, Ghana, and Togo—the West African Gas Pipeline (WAGP).

Conclusion

This study has been able to review environmental issues central to the Niger Delta crisis. It adumbrated the issues and subsequent conflicts within the uncommon perspective of the effective impact of domestic policies on foreign policies or external relations of a state. More importantly, the study has looked at the different costs of the emergent militant nationalism in the Delta on national development and international relations of Nigeria. The study also discovered the fact that the successive regimes in Nigeria considered the oil TNCs, with which they had personal businesses, paramount in the hierarchy of Nigeria's national interest. This probably explains the disposition of the nation's foreign policies to protecting foreign business interests and securing their stakes in the Niger Delta.

The Abacha approach seemed to have reared its ugly head again in both Presidents Obasanjo and Yar'Adua eras. The continued neglect of the Delta areas despite increased exploration activities of many new foreign oil companies, a development prodded by an aggressive campaign by the Obasanjo administration for foreign investment, exacerbated the Delta crisis. Several other militant groups have emerged, with a more ferocious approach under the Yar'Adua dispensation. Their grievances include government's seeming over-protection of the exploitative oil companies, growing impoverishment of the people, emergence of more slum settlements, increased environmental degradation, and the recklessness of the current Yar'Adua administration in combating the multiple militant groups who have been further irked by government's insincerity in carrying out the Niger Delta clause of the Seven-Point Agenda. The MEND and NDPVF, among others in the struggle, have been abducting expatriates, holding MNCs and their home government to ransom and sometimes asking for ransom fees, and have been making the same old demands: good living for Deltans, social responsibility on the part of the oil companies, and government's attention by way of physical and economic development, meaningful allocation from the huge revenues coming from the oil-producing areas, as well as the control of activities capable of destroying the ecosystem in the Delta region. It is hoped that the initial Yar'Adua-Jonathan initiative on the Seven-Point Agenda to dialogue with all stakeholders and deploy resources to the Delta for social rehabilitation and structural development would be faithfully implemented.

It is pertinent to note that the oil companies need to be more perceptive of the plight of the people and be more socially responsible by contributing to their welfare, provide jobs for them, construct good roads, build decent low-cost housing for them, increase academic scholarship awards to their children, build schools and hospitals, provide water and electricity to the communities, etc. Put

differently, the problem would be lessened when oil companies get more committed to their agreement with the government and the host communities by ensuring that they carry out their corporate social responsibility (CSR) to their host communities and avoid indulging in unethical activities.

Talking about CSR, companies and government should pay much attention to the problem of infrastructure (including roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, drinkable water, electricity, etc.) in the Niger Delta, which could experience a national emergency at any time. There is the need for both the governments at the various levels and the multinational oil companies to invest massively in infrastructure in this region just as it has been done in Lagos and Abuja. This will ensure that the environment is tidied up, made much more comfortable to live in, and that the economically idle but restive youths in the area are engaged in the mean time and of course provided some profitable means of livelihood. Further, the youth can be more profitably engaged if they are encouraged to go to school. This can be engendered by a policy of provision of scholarships (compulsory and free and qualitative education up to tertiary level) to the children from this area so as to empower them economically and make them much more useful to the state in the future.

Moreover, the question of who controls the natural resources located in a given region can be answered by the convocation of a national conference whose recommendations should first be subjected to a referendum. This will allow for a consensus by all stakeholders and a more enduring arrangement for the smooth operation of the oil industry which is urgently needed for the stability of the world market and the Nigerian economy. On the political frontier, there is the need to shift presidential power to the region so as to complete the cycle among all the geo-political regions in the country. This will allow for equity in the polity, give the people a sense of belonging, and douse some tension that is already mounting. This expectation has been partially satisfied now since the incumbent vice president of the country is from the region. However, it must be emphasized here that nothing short of the position of the President of Nigeria will adequately pacify the Niger Delta people in their quest for a taste of political office in the country.

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