

EXPLORING THE ISSUES IN OIL PRODUCTION IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA SECURITY CHALLENGES AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

The Niger Delta is the oil capital of Nigeria and the region has been having a lot of problems based on the production of the oil in the region. This research dwells on the Niger Delta question in detail, exploring the problems which the oil production is bringing into the region. Before the discovery of oil, the Niger Delta had their means of survival, which were abandoned and focused solely on oil production oil, which in turn caused a regional environmental degradation, thereby dashing a big blow to the people of the land, who are no longer able to practice a successful agriculture, fishing and their likes. As a result of the high rate of poverty in the supposed land 'flowing with milk and honey' protests and violence ensued. The question how can a regions resources which is causing huge development to other regions, in turn become a curse to its inhabitant is what many researchers are trying to answer and also bring a permanent solution to this disheartening pandemonium. This works aim at suggesting solutions that can bring to an end to all these problems being brought on by oil production in the region. There are a lot of measures which have to be taken and these measures includes the issue of ending the conflict and more inclusion of the region in governing Nigeria, as the region feels that they are being marginalized therefore there is need to have a better inclusion of them in the governance of the country.

Keywords: Oil Production, Niger Delta, Rentier State, Natural Wealth, Poverty.

Introduction and background to the study

This paper focuses on the impact of oil production in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Nigeria is a Sub-Saharan African country which is blessed with many natural resources and one of the main resources to grace the West African Nation is oil. Nigeria has so much oil that the oil sector is very dominant in the Nigerian economy to the extent that since its discovery it has brought in a lot of revenue for the country and has actually improved the general ratings of the country from all over the world.

Nigeria's oil production has come on top to be rated as the best oil producing country in the world. "It has produced more than 2.1 to 2.6 million barrels of oil per day for the past 18 years making it the biggest oil producing country in Africa and is rated number 13th in the whole world on oil production" as reported by Carpenter (2015: 1). The oil sector has brought many employment opportunities and also a huge amount of revenue to the Nigeria as a whole due to the big reserves in the country which are ranked second largest in the whole of Africa. This is due to the rentier state system that Nigeria is operating on.

This has generated more revenue as stated above for Nigeria. Although with the supposed generated income, the primary communities that the oil is designated in their locality are not well compensated, instead they are neglected and left for the ruins in the country while those in power cut change them. Most of the oil being produced in Nigeria comes from the Niger Delta region which is in the south part of the country. The Niger Delta region has the biggest oil reserves of the country and most of the oil which is extracted in the country stems from that region. Unfortunately the people of

the area have suffered a great deal despite the fact that the oil is extracted from their region which has remained poor and suffered even because of the oil production.

Most of the people of that Niger Delta region have shown disgruntlements over the oil issue as the oil has not improved their lives in any way and it is actually making their lives worse through environmental degradation and even health issues due to pollution caused by excretion from the oil mining operations. In other words it can be asserted that the discovery of the oil in the Niger Delta has been more of a curse than a blessing, because instead of improving the lives of the Niger Delta citizens it has worsened the lives of many. General rights of many citizens of the region have been violated due to the oil extraction in the region at large as reported by O'Neill (2007: 1) that

“Oil fouls everything in southern Nigeria. It spills from the pipelines, poisoning soil and water. It stains the hands of politicians and generals, who siphon off its profits. It taints the ambitions of the young, who will try anything to scoop up a share of the liquid riches—fire a gun, sabotage a pipeline, kidnap a foreigner.”

All these sufferings which the Niger Delta people are suffering due to oil gets us back to the notion that the oil has made people suffer instead of improving them. This makes the paper raise the important question whether the oil has been a curse for the Niger Delta people instead of being a blessing for them. The Niger Delta oil question has been ongoing for many years in Nigeria and has caused a lot of discontents throughout Nigeria that a huge number of scholarly articles have been penned on the matter. A lot of activism both diplomatic and violent has been done to deal with the issue with the core purpose of getting the Niger Delta people recognized and then benefitting from the oil in their region. A lot of activists have been involved in the fight against inequality being peddled by the oil production and some of the most notable names include Ken SaroWiwa, Asari Dokubo among many others.

The Niger Delta region in Nigeria is supposed to be the main beneficiary regarding the rentier state policy, however, they are those who suffer from the oil policy of the country. This has led the indigenes fight for their right as it is disheartening for them to watch more and more benefits of the foreign companies and the government at their expense. The oil extraction in the region has impacted in a very negative way on the citizenry of the region and the environment of the region at large. Shah (2010: 1) reports that “the region has gained the attention of environmentalists, human right activists and fair trade advocates around the world. The Niger Delta issue has caught the global attention with many human rights activists around the world joining in solidarity with the Niger Delta people in advocating for their human rights which are being violated by these oil companies operating in their region.

Most of the companies operating in the region are actually huge oil cooperation which are foreign to Nigeria and are playing little roles in protecting the environment or the livelihoods of the citizens as they care more about their profits other than the livelihoods of the locals. “Operations of big corporations like Chevron, Mobil, Agip, and Shell have raised criticisms and concerns that is noticeable worldwide” Shah, (2010: 1). These companies have reportedly done little to even help or improve livelihoods of the Niger Delta people.

The Nigerian government is also reportedly to be blemish on the issue due to the involvement of the military on the issue by violently curbing and suppressing the voices of the activists. Different regimes which have ruled Nigeria have been corrupt and suppressive with the aid of support from western countries which benefits from the oil through oil corporations as reported by Shah, (2010: 1). The government has reportedly been influenced by bribes from the huge corporation to suppress the voices of the Delta people and the most notable example is that of Ken SaroWiwa and the government has also used the military to do so.

Aims and significance of the paper

Base on the above background, the main purpose of this paper is to evaluate how the oil business and its exploitation affects the Niger Delta region; causing more harm than good to the general livelihoods of the ordinary citizenry of the Niger Delta of Nigeria. It also aims to show how it would be possible for the Niger Delta people to gain from the oil business. This paper also tries to verify the damage that oil production has caused to the Niger Delta region and its people in terms of the regional environmental and health problems.

In this framework, this paper attempts to be a significant contribution to the literature on the subject with an emphasis on the need of solution which would eliminate the regional inequality between the locals and the outsiders. In this framework this paper will discuss possible ways which can be initiated to solve the inequalities including community

ownership schemes. By referring to specific initiations this paper will try to show that changes are already being practiced and viable ideas are being implemented to ensure progression of the Delta Region. As its strengths the method can give us an insight on the experience and feelings of the individuals. More specifically this method would give us the ability to get the experiences of the population of the Niger Delta where the oil we are talking about is being mined.

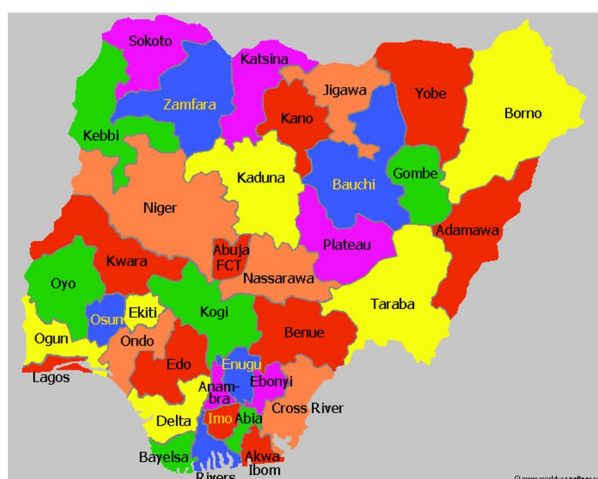
Methodology

This paper used secondary data by referring to different academic journals and scholarly material written about the Niger Delta. Therefore, Narrative review of literature was conducted from November 2016 to May of 2017. The researcher searched the following database sources: Google scholar, Google, and web of science. The paper is divided into three sections. The first section focuses mainly on the historical overview which gives us an insight on the specific details of Nigeria and the Niger Delta at large. The second section would highlight the rentier states theory and the problems being faced by the region as the result of the rentier state system and other problem caused by production of oil in the region. The third section provides solution mechanism on the ways to curb the problems and inequalities. The chapters will be discussed in detail by giving illustrations, examples, maps, tables, and graphs whenever it is necessary. In this framework, the paper argues that the oil has brought to the Niger Delta locals more problems than benefits. More specifically, the oil has been a curse to the local people rather than a blessing to them.

Historical overview of Nigeria

Nigeria is a huge country in the western part of Sub-Saharan Africa. The country is one of the most populated countries in the world and one of the biggest in terms of its land mass. The country is actually reported to be the most populated country in Africa with citizens which reach up to above 150 million in number, according to Worldometers (2016: 1), Nigeria current population is about 186,188,244 as of Wednesday, May 4, 2016. This makes Nigeria population about 2.48% of the population of the whole world. Nigeria's population is so much that it is actually ranked as number 7 on the list of the most populated countries and also almost 50% of its population lives in the urban areas of the country as also reported by Worldometers (2016: 1). The country has up to 400 ethnic groups and 450 languages.

The country has 6 geopolitical zones which are the South, South, the "South East", "South West", "North East", "North West" and the "North Central". The country has 36 states which are all governed by different governors who are voted into power by citizens of each state respectively. The governors rule these states on behalf and with the directive of the federal government. The federal government is headed by a president who is elected into power by the majority voters with tenure of 4 years. The last presidential elections were held in 2015 meaning the next elections will be done in 2019 and the current president of the federal republic is Buhari of the APC party who is actually a northerner and a Muslim by religion. Map 1 below shows Nigeria with all its states.



Map 1.1 Map of Nigeria indicating the States
Source: Nigeria High Commission UK 2016.

Nigeria has a lot of natural resources inside it. The country is blessed with varieties of natural resources which range from minerals to agricultural resources. The minerals of Nigeria include gold, coal, limestone, oil and gas. The

agricultural resources include cassava, palm, cocoa and many other agricultural produces. The country has a lot of resources but then it has largely been dependent on oil production. The country has actually abandoned all other minerals at the expense of oil production. The country has literally given up on any other resources and instead channels all its energy on oil production as oil brings quick revenue since it has readily made markets like USA who buys oil on a daily basis. Therefore the Nigerian government has literally dumped most other resources to concentrate all the energy on oil production. The oil in the country is largely concentrated in the Niger Delta which includes Ondo, Delta, Edo, Imo, Rivers and Cross River. The country is dependent on oil production and it generates most of its revenue through oil production. Oil is the largest foreign currency generator in the country as reported by Natural Resource Governance Institute (2016: 1) that

“Nigeria is Africa's largest oil exporter, and the world's 10th largest oil producer, accounting for more than 2.2 million barrels a day in 2011. Oil revenues totalled \$50.3 billion in 2011 and generated 70% of government revenues. Nigeria's hydrocarbons sector is at a crossroads as the current administration attempts to pass the controversial Petroleum Industry Bill.”

The country is actually the biggest oil exporter in Africa and ranks in the top 20 oil exporters in the world. Nigeria depends on this oil for foreign exchange because the country is an importing country as in Nigeria imports almost everything from other countries, as production is very low in the country. Therefore they need that foreign currency from oil to be able to import basic needs and necessities for the daily life of the citizens of the country. The oil market is the ever ready market. Therefore oil is the quickest way for the Nigerian government to make money and be able to use that money to import basic needs for the citizens of the country.

This has also prompted the country not to be able to fully exploit all its resources as some of the sectors like agriculture are being neglected at the expense of oil production. Since some of the sectors need time to become mature enough to be sold in the market and to garner notable revenues. However oil is ready for sale after drilling which led to the neglect of many other sectors in the country. The oil that provides much foreign currency for the country is mainly situated in the Niger Delta region of the country which is still underdeveloped and poverty stricken despite its oil reserves. Although the whole country's economy is steered by the oil from the Niger Delta region, it is still one of the regions of Nigeria in poverty.

Historical Overview of Niger Delta Region

The Niger Delta region is a region in the South South of Nigeria which is situated along the Niger River near the Atlantic Ocean. The Niger Delta region, which is a massive region with a lot of states inside it, is one of the largest delta areas in the world. It is rich in the flora and fauna and account for about 90% of Nigeria's crude oil, which produces most of the oil of the country. The area has also been marred with series of violence as the inhabitants of the region fought the government in protest of their suppression on the issue of the oil considering that their region is still underdeveloped, however, the government benefits from the oil at the expense of those Niger Delta inhabitants. The government of Nigeria actually calls those fighters insurgency militants. However, in the region, those fighters are deemed as heroes and freedom fighters as they fight against repression of their land and their kith and kin. The map 2 below by Laccino (2015: 1) shows the Niger Delta map. The states in the dark shade on the map are the states constituting the Niger Delta region in the South, South area of Nigeria.



Map 1.2 Map indicating the Niger Delta Region
Source: L. Lacino, International Bussiness, Times 2015.

The Niger Delta Pre-Oil Economy

Oil was discovered in Nigeria in the 1956. Before then the country was involved in many other forms of production. The discovering of oil suddenly changed the whole face of the nation as it is reported that Nigeria had all the makings of an uplifting tales. Poor African nation blessed with so much wealth, whose vision of prosperity enhanced with the discovery of oil in the marshy grounds of Niger Delta in 1956 (O'Neill, 2007: 1).

That discovery of oil actually changed the whole economy of Nigeria as other sectors of the economy had to be dumped in order to maximize the utilization of the readily sellable black gold. Before the oil was discovered, the Niger Delta used to base its economy mainly on agriculture and fishing. The Delta people used to be fishermen and farmers. They based their livelihood mainly on those two factors of production to be able to feed their communities and also sell some of their produce to other communities surrounding them respectively.

We cannot talk about the pre-oil economy of this region without mentioning the means of livelihood and survival of these people. Their activities are part of their cultural heritage. Agriculture played a huge respective role in ensuring that the economy of the Delta region kept on floating and it was evident that agriculture played a huge role in the economy of the Delta region. A lot of people were employed in the agricultural sector in the Niger Delta and the sector ensured a decline in unemployment rates throughout the region. Agriculture was one of the main drives of employment generation in the region before discovery of oil. Full utilization of agriculture also ensured food security for the region and it also provided raw materials for the industry in the region. This was very important as it increased productivity of the industries in the region at large. Agriculture also helped in food supply and provision of raw materials in the agro-allied industry (Snapps and Samuel, 2010: 1).

Agriculture has seen a massive decline and its decline has been due to the discovery of oil. This decline in agriculture has caused a lot of problems in the region as it has caused massive unemployment and it has also caused problems in food security as the sector is now underutilized. Therefore, the sector is not producing on maximum capacity and there is no adequate food security due to the lower performance in agriculture than it is expected. Considering those problems, the agricultural sector needs to be revisited and then modernized to reach to its maximum performance in the Niger Delta economy and to be able to guarantee food security for the region.

Before the discovery of oil, the region was heavily involved in the production of palm oil. The region was actually the capital hub of palm oil in the whole of Nigeria and the colonial Britain also took the colonial advantage of exploiting that palm oil from the region. This shows that exploitation of resources in the region did not start with oil. Rather, it was continuing for longer times. Before the British took over the control of the region, palm oil farming was being done on low scale levels with most people doing it to be able to feed their families and few neighbours surrounding them. It was not yet commercialized but was just being done in the spirit of subsistence. As Tamuno and Gowon, (2012: 115) state it "the production of palm oil was seasonal and subsistence".

The palm oil was the traditional income generating source for the villagers and was the means of exchange for the people as it was used for customary and cultural purposes or even luxuries which varied. Palm oil was also utilized for social prowess like purchasing goods and marriages. During these times the oil was produced by using machinery made by the villagers. It was not complicated in any way and most of the work done during the production of the oil was done manually by the people in their villages or communities throughout the region. This shows that the palm oil was of great importance to the Niger Delta people before the independence of Nigeria and before the discovery of mineral oil. Besides the oil itself the tree of the palm was also useful to the people in the form of shelter and as the food for the domesticated animals. The palm nut fruit was and is still useful for the people as well.

The British came to Nigeria in the late 19th century and they colonized the country. The Africans tried by all means to resist these colonial machinations but they were not successful in doing so. Rather they bowed to the pressure and the British took over the county. During this period the palm oil changed from being subsistence into commercialization as the British capitalized on the new commodity they had found in the land of their new colonies. Therefore they began producing it in large scales introducing machinery to do so which made the production easy and ensured the production of the commodity in large quantities as mentioned by Tamuno and Gowon (2012: 115) that when the British took over the power and land from the locals they also took over the palm business entirely. Moreover,

“From 1910, the colonial administration began direct involvement in the oil palm industry in the region as government policy started to unfold. British economic policy towards the oil palm industry in the Niger Delta region was influenced not only by the general agricultural policy of Britain in Nigeria”.

The British began exploiting the oil in tandem with their agricultural policies on their colonies and this was the time exploitation really started in Niger Delta. The people from that region suffered a lot from being exploited off their resources by the British. Moreover, the Nigerian governments which have been working in cahoots with multinational Oil Corporations to exploit the oil in the Niger Delta region left the region dilapidated with all the profits going to the politicians who are being bribed by those multinational corporations. The multinational corporations have always been gaining the real profits in the region. In that sense, it can be argued that the people of this region have been exploited both by their governments and by British colonists. This moment can also be considered as the beginning of today's similar problems seen in the form of exploitation of the region by the government in cooperation with the multinational corporations.

In the pre-oil period, the region was also involved in cassava production and it was one of the best producers of the crop in the whole of Nigeria. Even, the region was one of the best cassava producers in the world by the help of its vast fertile farmlands and also by the help of the geographical factor having wetlands as advantage for cassava production. However the cassava production dwindled with the discovery of oil in the region as the discovery of oil shrunk the efforts on all other sectors of production due to the maximum exploitation of oil. Fishing was one of the major economic production sectors and one of the main sources of income in the Niger Delta before the discovery of oil. Most fishermen used to fish in water bodies surrounding the region and mainly the Niger River. Most of them shifted from agriculture to fishing during rainy seasons as they would not be able to work in the farms due to the rains and also that fish were easy to catch in bulk during rainy seasons.

Besides the above mentioned sources, trade was also one of the main economic activities of the region before the period of exploitation of oil. Even before colonialism slave trade was actually done mostly on the ports of the region as ships of the slave buyers used to come through the harbours of the region. Therefore trade had always been rampant in the region. Due to the region's richness in palm oil the region also oversaw the trade in palm oil through its harbours as well as many traders would come from various destinations to buy palm oil from the region. Even when the British colonized and took over Nigeria as a whole they utilized the Niger Delta harbours for their palm oil trade and they made a lot of money from this trade on the harbours of the Niger Delta region.

Before the discovery of the oil, the region engaged in many revenue generating activities which made sure that the economy of the region would keep on going. After the colonialists came they also joined in and took over on those activities which the Niger Delta people were doing to sustain themselves. Unfortunately the colonial British people took over in a crude and suppressive manner. They ended up oppressing the Niger Delta people exploiting their oil. The situation has not changed much for the Niger Delta people who are still under intense exploitation. It is, however, no longer the colonial British, rather it is their own fellow African politicians who suppress the local people by collaborating with big foreign companies to exploit oil from the Niger Delta region. Therefore we can note that this is not the first time the Niger Delta people are being suppressed on their own resources but it is actually one of the many times the Niger Delta people have been suppressed on the natural resources. The British took over and enjoyed the production of palm oil and now the greedy politicians have also currently taken over and are now enjoying the production of oil and exploiting the regional mineral oil at the expense of the Niger Delta people.

The History of Oil Production in the Niger Delta

Nigeria as a country on its own is blessed in terms of the possession of natural resources including oil as the most important one among many others. Nigeria has too much oil that it is one of the best producers of oil in the world and it is actually the biggest oil producer in the whole Africa. Nigeria's oil production is so important to the world at large that any disturbance to its production can be felt by the whole world as it alters oil prices all around the world. As it was seen before, when oil production was disrupted in the country due to the issue of subsidies in 2011, this disruption caused disturbances in the oil prices of the whole world.

The oil in Nigeria is actually in the Niger Delta which is part of the South South region of the country. Port Harcourt is the oil capital of Nigeria located in Niger Delta. It is the place where most of the oil is then transported to different destinations. In this framework, this part of the paper will discuss about the history of the oil production in the Niger

Delta region in detail referring to possible illustrations whenever it is necessary. The real search actually started in 1903 and this was mainly comprised of small companies that is why it does not have much publication. As it is reported by Steyn, (2009: 5) that

“The search for oil in Nigeria officially started in 1903 when two companies, Nigeria Properties (Limited) and the Nigeria and West African Development Syndicate (Limited) commenced exploration for bitumen, coal and oil”. These two companies were given two concessions to explore and these concessions covered the “territory of 400 m2 in the Agbabu-Mulekangbo area in the Lekki Lagoon region of Southern Nigeria”.

However the activities of these concession holders were very limited in the region. They were also joined by a third concession holder but still this did not even improve their activities at all as their activities kept on being on a low key. In 1905 a certain British businessmen called John Smith Bergheim showed some interests in the oil exploration of Nigeria. He had experience in oil and had keen interests in oil exploration as he had also been involved in oil deals in many other countries. Therefore he established a company to explore the oil in Nigeria as stated by Steyn, (2009: 8) that “The Nigeria Bitumen Corporation was founded in November 1905 with the aim to acquire and work the exploration concessions of Nigeria”. This company bought concessions of many other companies which had tried to explore the oil in Nigeria and then it became the major holder of the concessions of oil mining in Nigeria. Steyn, (2009: 8) claims “the Bitumen Corporation was not a German company as stated by many authors but was actually a British company”.

Bergheim worked hand in hand with the British government and he also applied for financial assistance from the British state to be able to finance his operations in 1906. This was the norm by many oil companies as oil exploration is very expensive, they need strong financial assistance. The government was the only financial contributor and assistance for them. The British government, however, turned down the request by Bergheim. Bergheim did not give up on his quest to get financial aid from the British government and kept on persisting on his demands until the government granted him financial assistance. Although it was not enough for the whole work, this initiated the start by him. “The British government only approved the loan of £25,000 towards the end of 1907 and the first instalment was paid in February 1908” (Steyn, 2009: 10). He managed to secure this loan due to his persuasive nature and also the fact that his quest also had the support of the Sir Walter Egerton, Governor of Southern Nigeria where the oil was situated.

The Bitumen Company commenced its work in the Niger Delta region in 1906 in the Lekki Lagoon area and it established its headquarters in that region. It changed so many things in the region as the environment had to be altered to pave way for shelters and many other things. This fact also caused many atrocities in the region due to the environmental consequences of oil drilling. The company’s main aim was to search for both oil and bitumen but abandoned the search for bitumen and concentrated on the search of oil. Oil was struck in November 1908 at well no. 5, which was drilled with their new oil rig purchased with their government loan.

The Bitumen Company found it too difficult to explore for the oil in the region as their equipment were not as up to par with the expectations. The explorations were not being profitable. The company was having difficulties to separate the oil from water. The company also did not have much information about the region. The community locals were unwilling to share information with the company on the areas whereby the company could be able to maximize their yields. The reason behind this unwillingness is the annoyance of the locals by the environmental degradation which was being caused by the company on its oil drills and generally the annoyance being caused by colonization in general. Thus, the locals did not cooperate mostly because of all those complaints.

These difficulties prompted the company to enter dire financial constraints and then this was also coupled by the death of Bergheim. Before his death the company was in severe financial problems. By 12 July 1912 the company ran out of funds and collapsed within 6 months. Bergheim applied for another loan from the government but then he died before the loan was approved and that loan was never approved despite support of the governor. The reason behind this rejection is the perception of the government that Bergheim would not be replaced with a strong and powerful figure as leading the company. The main supporter of the oil venture after the death of Bergheim was Egerton who was then transferred to be the Governor of British Guinea leaving the oil venture without any viable supporter. Because of all these reasons, Bitumen was dying slowly and naturally mostly due to the liquidation problem (Steyn, 2009: 11).

Apart from the Bitumen Company there were also many other companies who explored oil in the Niger Delta region in the early 20th century but most of them were less successful and influential. This led to the lack of sufficient publications about them. After the World Wars the demand for oil rose and many companies came back to see if they could find luck in the Niger Delta. So that they could be able to acquire oil in the region to meet the increasing demand

which appeared as the result of the increased uses of automobiles, airplanes. One of the most notable companies was the D'Arcy Company which came with their serious interests in the oil of the region in the 1930s. The company came on with a partnership with the Royal Dutch Shell which was later renamed as Shell. The main reason D'Arcy took the Niger Delta seriously is because of their geologists saying that the coastal line along that region was rich in oil and had a lot of oil deposits.

The two companies started operations in Nigeria. They also had operations of oil explorations in Tanganyika and Kenya. They suspended their operations, on the other hand, in two countries to concentrate more on Niger Delta. Due to the outbreak of the Second World War the explorations of oil in Nigeria were suspended. However these two companies resumed their operations in 1946 as soon as the war ended. They received vast support from the British colonial government in Nigeria and they continued their operations in the Niger Delta Region until the major discovery of the Black Gold in the region by the British Petroleum and the Royal Dutch Shell in the 1950s. The locals challenged the oil explorations and this was a major hurdle for the oil companies. In order to become stronger and resist the challenges, Shell and D'Arcy combined their forces and became a single company.

The company continued drilling of the oil in the Niger Delta region and they drilled their first deep well at Oweri in 1951 but this well was very dry. It continued drilling deep wells. In 5 years, "between 1951 and 1956 they drilled about 18 wells" (Steyn, 2009: 30). Oil was finally discovered at Akata in Calaba in 1953. However, it was not much and was not enough for commercialization. Oil for commercialization, on the other hand, was finally discovered in January 1956 by Shell and D'Arcy at Oloibiri situated 72 km of Port Harcourt and also more was discovered at Afam which is also near to Port Harcourt (Steyn, 2009, pg.32).

The detrimental aspect of oil production in Nigeria

The oil question has really been a serious issue in all over the world. The so called developing countries which were formally termed as the third world are mainly the top oil producers in the world. Africa and Middle Eastern Asia are the world's biggest producers of oil in the world taking seven places in the top 15 of oil producers in the world. However, they have nothing of significance to prove it except for a few connected people and politicians who has all the wealth derived from the rented oil revenues. This fact brings us to the question whether oil is a curse or a blessing in these Middle Eastern and African countries.

There are a lot of significant examples showing that those regions possess oil resources which, however, have become a curse instead of being a blessing. Among many other countries, this paper is focusing on Nigeria and particularly the Niger Delta area where oil production has become curse. The people of the area have benefited little to nothing because of the oil in fact they have incurred a lot of damages due to the oil production. Poverty is still rampant in the area. The environmental degradation continues daily, the locals are suppressed by the government and cannot complain about anything. Problems keep on piling each and every day in that area and deteriorate the situation because the oil question has now caused violent confrontations leading even to the deaths in the region. Therefore, as this paper shows the discovery of oil and its production in Niger Delta has been a curse to the ordinary people in the region instead of being a blessing.

Some have even termed the Niger Delta as one of the world's most polluted regions and nothing of significance has been done to address this problem. The health of locals is an issue of concern amongst the Delta people as reported by News Watch Times (2013: 1) that

"The environmental degradation is causing people to be sick and die at earlier ages with most beginning top experience strokes at the ages of 45 and dying relatively younger than the life expectancy of Nigeria in general."

These health issues equally highlight the plight of the people in terms of the oil being also a curse to them as their life expectancy has been shortened by the environmental issues being brought on by the oil production in the region. Oil spills are also another menace and these cause massive land degradations and this hugely affects farming as also reported by News Times Watch (2013: 1) that "Warri head of Department for oil spills reported that a week doesn't go without an oil spill in the region..." Oil spills causes a lot of trouble and this also highlights that oil is indeed a curse in the region as the ordinary masses are suffering from these oil spills.

Those examples prove that the Niger Delta people have suffered immensely due to oil production in their region and this brings us to the conclusion that the oil in the region is indeed a curse to these people. Instead of the fact that oil is a means of improving their lives, it has even worsened it by leading to the new problems.

Theoretical underpinning; Rentier state theory and the problems caused by oil production in the Niger Delta

Rentier State

The idea of rentier states has gained much interest since the inception of oil. In economic theory, the term rent means the excess or surplus of produce after the production cost of a particular resources or product has been met. Then, the surplus was given to the owner. Malthus, (1815: 34) defined rent as the quota of overall value of the product in the land. For example, when a land is rented out to farmers, they pay rent to the owner of the land from what their produce worth in the market. This is after all the necessary expenses have been highlighted in the overall income of the sales.

There are a number of characteristics that are particularly associated with rentier oil states. For example, in a scenario where the government is the major and vital employer, the establishment is frequently full and unproductive – and thus look like a rentier class in society. Furthermore, local laws frequently stand as a barrier for foreign establishments to operate independently in another country. This brings us to the situation where foreign organizations have to make use of a local sponsor to do business. The local sponsor would give the privilege to the foreign establishment to carry out their business in the name of the local company and, in return, get a percentage of the profits. This is also another type of rent. In addition, the oil rent leads to secondary rents, usually stock market or real estate speculation (Beblawi et al, 1990: 92).

Although the rentier state theory was claimed by Hossein Mahdavi in relation to the pre-revolutionary Pahlavi Iran in 1970, the idea was drawn from the Middle Eastern Arab World oil exporting and oil-transiting countries. According to Mahdavi, (1970: 42) this idea a rentier state is referred to those countries that get a substantial amount of their economic rent, on a regular basis, from the export of the natural resources. In this perspective, a rentier state can be defined as a state which gets its revenue from renting its natural resources to foreigners. Many developing countries are in this situation whereby they get most or all their revenue through leasing out their natural resources to foreign firms. Only few developing countries in the world have shunned that anomaly, for example Zimbabwe has set up a 51% ownership scheme to locals implying that the foreign firms would only get 49% ownership.

Nigeria is also in the rentier state business due to most of its revenue being derived from the oil which is being explored by foreign clients including Chevron, Royal Dutch Shell and BP. The Nigerian state is leasing out its resources to foreigners at the expense of the masses in Niger Delta which are the local oil-bearing communities. Some elements of defining a rentier state are;

1. According to Mahdavi (1970: 428) an economy that is termed as rentier economy or state is one that heavily relies on a good amount on external rent. This is because an internal rent cannot fully sustain the economy except there is a large scale of domesticated production sector.
2. In a rentier state only few are directly part in the creation of the wealth (rent). This element points out the government at the sole beneficiary or the principal recipient of the external rent that is been generated by the economy.

Referring to above characteristics, Nigeria can be accepted as a good example of rentier state because its main revenue is mostly coming from oil and scarcely from the other sectors. The main problem with the rentier state system in Nigeria is that the state is becoming richer and richer while the local masses are becoming poorer and poorer. The revenue from renting external clients goes directly to the state and little or none ever reaches to the door step of the ordinary citizens in the Delta villages. However, the oil is actually on their doorsteps and this has somewhat led to violent confrontations by disgruntled locals. According to Omeje (2005: 47), the state employs the unmitigated paraphernalia of law and public policy to privilege itself and its business partners primarily within the oil industry. This leaves the local oil-bearing communities with limited breathing space, hence, their massive resort to violent protests.

Nigeria does not have functioning oil refineries to refine crude oil on its own so that external companies would not venture in to exploit the black gold from the country. Something seriously needs to be done soonest to quash this rentier state anomaly considering that the rentier state is causing more damage to the masses as the foreign clients, the huge oil corporations, have political connections with powerful government and military members. Therefore they are

untouchable to the masses. The Arab oil state revenues fully depend on external rent. Their revenue highlights more than 90% of their budget while 95% is in exports. This has led the nation and states in the Arab world to be affected positively by the accurate appropriation of the generated revenue.

Unlike the Arab world, Kuwait who distributed part of their oil wealth to its population created a state of welfare. This made the role to be defined as sharing or distributing of its oil wealth among the population. This was introduced by the Sheikh Abdullah al-Salim families. As seen from other countries, the rentier state system is taken seriously by the government and the generated income is speared among the citizens. This can be the case of Nigeria if those in power would allow the revenue generated from rentier state system to go round.

The only viable and best solution to stop this for Nigeria is to rekindle its own oil refineries and make them functional so that the country would refine its own oil indigenously without renting the oil out to foreigners who have little regard for the local masses. Those foreigners would only care about their profits and continue capitalizing on the corrupt government to further stamp on the already suffering masses by bribing the corrupt government.

Problems Caused By Rentier State System and Oil Production In the Niger Delta

As a result of the lack of direct access by the people of Niger Delta to the rented oil revenue, the problems have emerged. These problems further compounded the problems already existing in the region as the result of oil production. This part of this work will explore the problems caused by the rentier state system and how it affects the people of this region and the environment there as well. These problems are tried to be evaluated below.

Poverty amidst Natural Wealth

The Niger Delta is the richest region in Nigeria. The region has a lot of resources one of which is oil. Nigeria's economy actually depends on the oil of the Niger Delta region. Unfortunately the people in the region are suffering despite the fact that the place is the richest place in Nigeria. The people in the region have not benefited anything from the richness of the region and from the oil. This is because the top stots that get the Niger Delta percentage of the revenues generated from oil from the foreign oil company would rather hold back the money and give lesser percentage to the local chiefs of this region as a "shut up tips)", than to create a means whereby the people can benefit as well.

Poverty still exists in the region and seems that it will even continue to exist. Poverty has also been increased by the environmental degradations caused by the oil production in the area. Oil spills in the region has caused vast damages to farming and fishing in the region and this has increased the poverty levels of the people in the region. Since people do not have any other sources of livelihoods apart from farming and fishing, the discovery of oil in the area has made it difficult for them to continue their trade leaving them with no other sources of livelihoods.

To make matters worse the natives of the region have benefited a little from the oil production in the region as the oil companies do not even employ them to work in the oil companies. The insufficiency of food security is another problem in the region which emerged from the lack of agricultural produce and food shortages. Food shortage is actually the climax point of poverty referring that food is a basic need which is supposed to have adequate amount on daily basis.

The inequality is unbelievable with most areas in the region in terms of the lack of health facilities than those in other regions of the country. For example Abuja has good and commendable health facilities that are being sponsored by money earned from the oil in the Niger Delta region. This is obviously another indicator of poverty in the region. Another indicator of poverty in the area is unemployment, corruption and looting of public treasury (Egebgulem et. al, 2013: 1). The rates of unemployment in the area are very high. Unemployment is actually caused by the lack of other sources of livelihood in the area due to the decrease in farming and fishing which have for centuries been the sources of livelihood for the area. There are no jobs anymore in the area and the oil companies do not employ locals.

The people of Niger Delta are reported to be among the people with the lowest living standards in the whole of Nigeria as majority of them are subjected to lives without roads for motors, without electricity (Egebgulem et.al, 2013: 2). Basic sanities are lacking in the region and this is very unfortunate and disheartening considering that the region is the richest in the country. The inhabitants of the region are among the poorest in the country and have been subjected to abject poverty due to the exploitation of their region by greedy politicians in cahoots with a number of international oil companies led by Shell.

The poverty in the Niger Delta is also attributed to the vast amounts of money involved in the oil business. The business is so lucrative that it attracts politicians to be corrupt which makes them benefit from the oil revenue. Majority of Nigerian politicians have been involved in the Niger Delta oil production on corrupted grounds by accepting bribes from most of the multinational companies operating in the region. They are involved in all corrupted activities at the expense of the masses in the region. Therefore it can also be asserted that another cause of poverty in the region is the lump sum of money involved in the oil business itself.

Many non-oil producing regions in Nigeria have been developed by the oil which stems from the Niger Delta region. However, the region itself has been left underdeveloped without proper infrastructure. The people in the region have been left to living in poverty, while other regions of the country have been enjoying prosperous scenes and development by the help of the oil produced in the Niger Delta.

This fact is unfair and suppressive by the Niger Delta region indigenes that they had to take it upon themselves to fight for their rights. It started as peaceful protests but later transformed into violent confrontations between the government and the locals who demanded for their own share of the oil which the whole country has been enjoying. The following part of this chapter discusses those atrocities and uprisings in the area.

Atrocities and uprising

There have been a lot of protests and uprisings by the Niger Delta people due to the deteriorating results of the oil production in their region. The people of this region became disgruntled over the happening in their region, apart from the fact that the rentier system does not provide them the opportunity to work in the oil companies, producing their region black gold, these foreign companies goes as far as bringing people from their various countries to work and get paid from the natural oil of the Niger Delta people, while the local languish in misery and pain. This can drive any sane person insane. As a result, the people became disillusioned which resulted to violent confrontations.

The most notable and commendable figure in the Niger Delta uprisings is Ken Saro Wiwa who was one of the most vocal figures in fighting the government in terms of the oil pollution caused by the oil production in the region. Wiwa had mostly been warning about the possibility of environmental disaster in the region in the lack of the necessary measures to be taken.

From the onset Wiwa proved to be a problem to Shell and the government. Amnesty International (2009: 3) states that Wiwa was one of the leaders of the Ogoni community and was vocal in drafting the Ogoni Bill of Rights in 1990 where the Ogoni community was complaining due to the lack of opportunities and basic needs including jobs, proper shelter and many other basics in their area. Wiwa was also a founder of the Movement of the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the movement acted as a watchdog for oil companies to clean up the environment with failure to do so being met by massive resistance from the masses (Amnesty International, 2009: 3).

This movement was very strong and vocal and its prowess. It played a role in chasing out Shell from the region. Since its departure from the Ogoniland in 1993, Shell has never been able to return to operate in the land again. The Ogoni people declared that Shell would never operate in the area and Shell itself is scared of operating in that area because of fears of being attacked and resisted by the Ogoni people. Some sections of the population still lay the blame on the execution of Wiwa and his fellows on both the government and Shell government that was working in cahoots to eradicate any strong activists. Thus, Shell would be able to penetrate into the Ogoniland again and operate in the area to extract as much oil as it can do in the region.

Wiwa was executed by the Abacha regime in 1995 alongside with 8 other members of the Ogoni land. They were accused of treason (Amnesty International, 2009: 3). Wiwa had done nothing wrong but was in fact fighting for the rights of his own people and his land. However, due to the corruption of the then government, Wiwa was charged with treason and was actually executed with his fellows Ogoni land people. His execution caused an outcry of the whole world fraternity. This issue has also led to the emergence of a global attention to the Niger Delta region.

There have been a lot of uprising groups in the Niger Delta region which started operating way back in order to counter inequalities caused by oil production in the area. Civil groups have been one of the major tools of resisting the oppression and inequalities in the Niger Delta. One of the most vocal alone among all others was the MOSOP which was led by Ken Saro Wiwa. The group could push out Shell from the Ogoni land where it was operating. The group championed peaceful protests and never involved in violence in any way.

The government responded to the operations of this group by crushing it out rightly and arresting its top leaders and also by executing its top brass including Wiwa. Ojatorotu (2009: 6) states that the “MOSOP groups used the tactic of human rights protection for themselves as their main cause of concern and this was successful as the group indeed gained international sympathy due to the way the Nigerian state was suppressing their rights and crushing their peaceful protests”. The group was popularized by the execution of its leaders which increased the sympathy to them. Even, as Amnesty International (2009) states it some US lawyers also got involved in the execution of the Ogoni leaders including Wiwa’s cases.

Apart from the MOSOP, there were also other groups from different tribes and ethnicities operating in the Niger Delta and protesting the oil production including the Ijaw Youth Council. All groups have common objectives including stopping the injustices in their region, to benefit from the oil revenues of their own region and to prevent the government and the oil companies from polluting their environment. They also demand benefits from the oil of their region which would lead to their regional improvement and development eventually. The state, however, has always been working in cahoots with the oil companies. Therefore it has been acting along with the oil companies at the expense of the regional interests. Because the politicians in the state had always been corrupt the international oil companies could be able to mine the oil by paying the politicians without any hindrance. Thus, the companies can receive state protection through state apparatuses including military which would suppress the protestors.

This was even worse during the military regime in the country. The military regime ruled as dictatorships therefore they were ruthless in dealing with any protestors. The military regimes could kill anyone and nothing would happen. This was evidenced by the execution of Wiwa and his fellows in 1995 by the Abacha regime which was a dictatorship and all the state authority rested on the military head who was Abacha. The regime was benefitting a lot from the oil companies operations therefore any disruptions to their benefits were met by strong resistance from the dictatorial state. The regime insists to weed out any protests by the Niger Delta people concerning the oil issues and was ready to use any form of measures to make it sure that their oil activities conjoined with the oil companies would not be disrupted or affected by the regional people.

After MOSOP another group emerged in the name of the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND). This group was more violent than MOSOP. The government used full wrath of law to quash this group leading to the declaration of all-out civil war by the government. MEND was declared as militants by the Nigerian government. It was using guerrilla tactics like sabotage, theft of oil from pipelines and vandalism and is very strong in the Niger Delta region. The MEND has for long been fighting against the Nigerian government and some of its most notable leaders are considered as insurgents by the Nigerian government including Asari-Dokubo.

There also emerged different sub groups all of which have been operating under the umbrella of MEND and have the objective of unsettling oil production in the Niger Delta region to make their grievances be heard. MEND has been operational in the area since 2006 and has been responsible for a number of illegal developments including kidnappings and sabotages. In order to prevent those kinds of problems caused by the MEND in the region, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan offered amnesty to the MEND which enabled it to stop fighting with the government which also promised to improve their livelihoods. The amnesty to the MEND benefited most of its members and ended the violence and conflicts in the Niger Delta region. Besides the above mentioned problem of rentier state on the people of Niger Delta, we shall as well see below, the problem the rentier system and oil production have on the environment of this region which in turn affect the people.

Ecological degradation

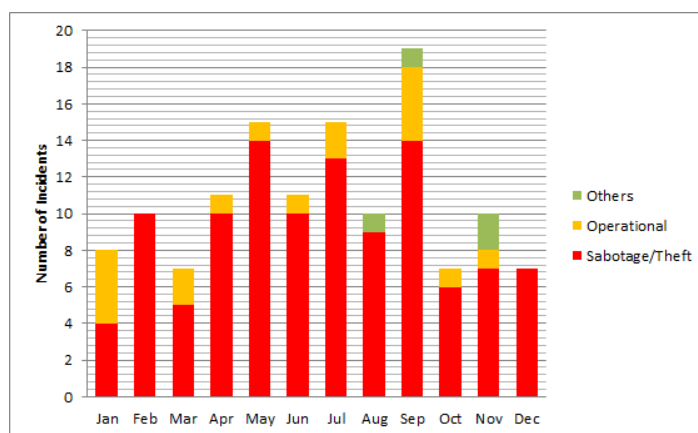
Oil drilling is really a difficult task to operate and in that task there are a lot of accidents which can be disastrous to both the environment and the people. For example oil spillage is one of the major forms of accidents related to oil production. Oil spillage has always been existent since the beginning of oil drilling all over the world. The oil spillage is a global issue that has been occurring since the discovery of crude oil, which was part of the industrial revolution. The total spillage of petroleum into the oceans, seas and rivers through human activities is estimated to range 0.7-1.7 million tons per year (Kadafa, 2012: 38).

Oil spills are very common in oil production areas. They may occur as the result of many factors which range from vandalism of pipes to oil theft, inadequate maintenance of the oil infrastructure and corrosion of the oil pipes and wastes of oil refining, (Nwilo and Badejo, 2005: 1). The oil spillage problem is so rampant in the Niger Delta region that the

government had to be forced to bring on some agencies to be able to deal with the spillages as the problem has been persistent for decades. As it is stated by Nwilo and Badejo, (2005: 1) in reducing the rate of oil spillage cases in Nigeria particularly as a result of vandalism, the Federal Government created a commission, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to be responsible for developing a master plan for the development of the Niger Delta, providing required infrastructure and creating a suitable environment for industrialization and employment.

One of the major causes of these oil spillages is actually the inadequate maintenance of the pipelines and the infrastructure at large. It is claimed that most of the pipelines are old and fatigued. Most of the pipes are always down and being repaired. These demises in the performance of the infrastructure and the pipelines have caused the breakdown of the equipment leading to oil spillages at large. Omeje (2006: 3) reports, in one of the interviews he had in Niger Delta, that he was told that some of the pipelines have been in existence for more than 40 years yet they have a 15 year lifespan. This is a matter of huge concern because it has been always those fatigued that create problems and lead to oil spills. It is pretty obvious that the pipes would end up rusting due to the fact that they are made up of metal leading to its rusting over periods of times. When it rusts, it becomes weak and that is most likely to cause fault lines in the pipelines and this will eventually cause spills. Sometimes, “the pipelines could have a shorter lifespan. The companies, however, do not replace them before their expiration (Omeje, 2006: 3).

Most of the companies which operate in the Niger Delta region suffer from vandalism, sabotage and oil theft by the locals. However this is a disputed issue due to the claims of the locals saying that the companies accuse them for sabotage in a way to evade taking responsibility of the damages they would have caused (Omeje, 2006: 3). Most of the companies which operate in the area give strong claims that majority of the oil spillages are caused by sabotage by the locals as the locals would be on the verge of stealing the oil from the pipelines, which would not be a topic if only the revenue from the oil rent is reaching the masses of Niger Delta. Some of them would be sabotaging due to discontent with the government. Some others would vandalize the pipelines just for vandalizing intentions. Shell, for example, is giving strong backed statistics on the effects of vandalism as the main cause of oil spills in the Niger Delta region (Graph 2.1). On the other hand, Shell has been one of the most accused companies in causing oil spills in the region and it has actually been taken to court by some locals due to its oil spills and the damages they have caused to the lands of the locals.



Graph 2.1 Oil incidence and their causes in the Niger Delta (2016)

Source: Shell Cooperation 2016.

There have also been a lot of incidents whereby the pipelines are attacked for the purpose of theft and this is done mainly by trained professional robbers. Sometimes it’s done simply by local residents who would just be in a verge to steal the oil. The professionals usually rob on a larger scale yet the villagers do on a smaller scale for subsistence use or sale of lesser magnitude and value. The government of Nigeria has spent a lot of money to repair and replace pipelines which would had been damaged by the thieves, (in some cases these thieves are stealing oil for the politician) as it is argued by Anifowose, et,al, (2012: 1)

“Between 2000 and 2010, the Federal Government of Nigeria lost >174.6 billion Naira (£1 = 241 Naira as at 31 December 2010) in product losses and pipeline repairs due to interdiction”.

The problem has still been on going in Nigeria though the government of the country has put up some heavy counter measures to tackle the menace which has been crippling the country’s oil business. Vandalism of pipes is one of the

main causes of oil spills in the Niger Delta region. Referring to the causes of the oil spillages, the following part discusses the impacts of the oil spills on the lives of the Niger Delta people.

Oil spills have always been a menace to the Niger Delta people. They have caused suffering of the people due to the environmental degradation in the region. The region has been well known for being an agricultural producing region. However since the discovery of the oil, the agricultural production of the region has gone on a downward spin due to its disastrous impacts on the soil and the crops. Farming has been one of the most negatively affected sectors by the oil production in the region. Oil spills damage the soil and this would have huge effects on the crops and on the food security at large. The region used to be the hub of palm oil production before. However, the oil spillages have also made the palm oil production levels dwindle. Thus, agriculture has been neglected at the expense of crude oil. The reduction in agriculture is mostly caused by oil production in the region and its destructive impacts on the fertility of the soil. Emmanuel and Gordon (2005: 34) argue that

“The spills have decreased the fertility of the soil and this has actually pushed farmers to ditch farming and then into other forms of livelihood and to make it all worse there are no other forms of livelihood for the farmers to alternatively venture into in the region.”

The specific effects of the oil spills on the crops are noted on the level of yields the crops make after they have been affected by oil spills. The yields are very limited and shoddy. As it is indicated by Emmanuel and Gordon (2005: 34) that oil spill on crops causes great damage to the plant community due to high retention time of oil occasioned by limited flow. The oil makes the soil to get low amounts of air which it would have compacted itself on the surfaces of the soil. This has high effects on the plant growth as the roots of the plants would not be receiving enough air which it desperately needs to enable its growth. This is a huge problem as air is so important for the roots of any plant to grow but the accumulation of oil on top of the soil actually affects the grow of the plants due to limited flow of air into the soil and the blockage being made by the oil particles Emmanuel and Gordon, (2005: 34).

The oil is actually too bad for the crops that in some instances it actually causes the plants to dry and wilt unceremoniously. Oiled shoots of some plants like tomatoes and pepper will end up drying and wilting due to the oil being on it or even die to the lack of air penetrating into the oil due to the blockage by oil on the sands they would have been planted on. This would cause the plants to die just like that without growing any further.

Another impact which oil spillages are having on the farming sector in the Niger Delta region is the issue of polluted water. Most of the water bodies in the region are being polluted by oil spills and this now ends up affecting agriculture at large considering that there won't be much clean water for irrigation of the farms due to the pollution of the water by the oil spillages. We also see that even animal rearing has also been affected in the sense that the animals eat from the environment and most of them like cattle fodders generally from their environment. Therefore if the plants which the cattle feed on are affected by oil spillages this would prove to be a problem to feed the cattle. Since most of the water bodies are polluted by oil spillages there would also be difficulties to find clean water for the animals to drink.

Most water bodies in the region are always flooded with oil from the oil spills and this has affected fishing as the fish lives in those water reservoirs. If the reservoirs are affected by the oil spills the fish would also be affected since the water bodies are their habitats. Most of the fishes die due to the contamination caused by the oil. This does not only limit to fish, but also many habitats of the water bodies like river, dams actually die due to this contaminations This issue has also directly affected the fishing business in the Niger Delta region. The region has been known as one of the biggest fish producing regions in Nigeria but then the production has taken a nose dive due to the pollution of rivers and dams by the oil spills. Emmanuel and Gordon (2005: 37) state that, fishes have been killed in rivers polluted by oil spills. Thus, this has increased poverty in the fishing communities of the region at large. GPA (2002) also states that concentrations of petroleum contaminants in fish and crab tissue, as well as contamination of shellfish, could pose a significant potential for adverse human health effects, and until these products from near shore fisheries or aquaculture have been cleared by the health authorities, they could be banned from human consumption.

The spills have also posed to be huge threats on the health of the general populace of the region. Most people in the region have become sick due to the oil spills as oil contains some components which are not ideal for human consumption. The humans are either being affected directly or indirectly by these spills. For instance the citizens of the region might use water with oil to water their crops and this would have indirect consequences in the near future for them. In some other instances they end up using water which has oil in it for domestic uses like cooking and bathing and this also has indirect consequences to their health. In direct form the citizens will be breathing air which is already

polluted by the oil and this causes health difficulties for them in the near future as breathing air which is contaminated by oil is not healthy for any human being or even for any animals in general (Harmon, 2010: 1).

This issue of inhaling air which is already infested with crude oil is a huge menace to these Niger Delta people and this problem is inescapable for the natives of the land. The health problems also extend to even the people who would be cleaning up the pollution which the oil would have caused. These are the people who would at the most levels of risk of being affected as it is reported that, “when crude oil particles reach the skin there is high probability that they would cause irritation on the skin and also skin infections coupled with eye irritation” (MedlinePlus, 2015: 1).

The region has been marred by a series of deadly oil spillages and in this section we are going to discuss some of those major oil spillages in detail giving adequate information and also citing illustrations and references when it is possible. The oil spills in the region started a long time ago as reported by Kadafa (2012: 41). The first accounted oil spill occurred as early as 1908 in the Aararomi region which is currently called as Ondo state. Millions of oil has spilled in the Niger Delta region and is purported to be one of the most affected regions in the world to have oil spills. As also reported by Kadafa, (2012: 41)

“An estimated 9 million- 13 million (1.5 million tons) of oil has been spilled in to the Niger Delta ecosystem over the past 50 years; 50 times the estimated volume spilled in Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska 1989”.

Another major incident of spillages in the Niger Delta Region occurred in 1979 when “the Farcados tank 6 terminal in the region spilled at least 570000 barrels of oil into the surrounding areas” (Kadafa, 2012: 42). This spillage polluted and contaminated both the land and the rivers surrounding the area. Another incident happened in January 1980 when a massive spillage occurred again in the Niger Delta region. As it is explained by Kadafa (2012: 42) “Funiwa number 5 well in Funiwa also had a huge spillage and it threw at least about 421000 barrels of oil into the ocean and the surrounding areas.” After the spillage stopped, it is reported that most of the land surrounding that well in Funiwa was destroyed and the marine life inside the ocean was also affected rapidly due to those massive oil spillages.

Within a short period of time yet another incident occurred again in Yokama whereby another massive oil spill occurred in the Niger Delta region. Kadafa (2012: 41) also states that the spill occurred on 10 May and it had at least a spillage of about 30000 barrels”. It was a bit small compared to the ones which had happened before. It did not even reach hundreds of thousands of barrels in spillages. Another smaller incident also happened in the Oyshika village in the River state on August 1983 and this one had a spillage of 5000 barrels of oil. This one again was smaller compared to its predecessors. One of the most recent and most documented oil spills in history happened in Eket where Exxon Mobil caused the spillage with huge amounts of oil being pumped into the ocean. As Vidal (2010: 1) says that

“On 1 May this year a ruptured ExxonMobil pipeline in the state of AkwaIbom spilled more than a million gallons into the delta over seven days before the leak was stopped. Local people demonstrated against the company but say they were attacked by security guards. Community leaders are now demanding \$1 billion in compensation for the illness and loss of livelihood they suffered. Few expect they will succeed. In the meantime, thick balls of tar are being washed up along the coast.”

The Nigerian government forced Exxon Mobil to pay for the clean-up process since it was the company closest to the point where the oil spill occurred. Another significant and recent oil spill occurred in August 2008 in Bodo Creek in the Ogoni land. There Shell Pipe burst and huge amounts of oil spilled on the landscapes and also onto the coastal areas and the rivers as reported by Amnesty International (2009: 16). This oil spill was so massive that it prompted villages to sue Shell Company for damages to their land.

Shell is the biggest operating oil company in the Niger Delta region and has been one of the most blamed oil companies in terms of oil spillages in the area. The company has been at the receiving end of huge numbers of accusations concerning its incompetence in dealing with oil spills which occurs in this oil rich region. Many agencies which deal with oil spills in the country have put Shell on the forefront of the blame whenever it comes to spillages. However the company has denied the blame and has accused the locals of sabotage and vandalism. The locals, on the other hand, have accused the company due to its ignorance of responsibilities. The blame game has continued for decades and has led to various confrontations between the company and the locals of the Niger Delta. The company has been the one on the forefront of having the biggest numbers of oil pillages in the region as stated by Kaddafi (2012: 48) that

“The Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) since 1989 recorded an average of 221 spills per year in its operational area involving 7,350 barrels annually. From 1976-1996 a total of 4647 oil spill incidences spilling approximately 2,369,470 barrels of oil into the environment of which 1,820,410.5 (77%) were not recovered”.

The effects of the oil spills caused by Shell made the citizens have a boiling point that two communities have decided to take the company to court. The company has been taken to court by four families of farmers and fishermen who claim that the operations of the company in the area and the oil spillages have actually caused agony to them and their business and have even affected their general livelihoods. According to BBC (2015: 1) “the villagers want Shell to clean-up four villages and pay compensation to those villages for the land degradation its oil spills has caused to the land in those communities in the Niger Delta”. The farmers first appealed their case in 2013 but it was dismissed by a lower court. They appealed again and BBC (2015: 1) reports that “a judge has agreed to hear their case. The case would be heard by the Dutch court since Shell Nigeria is a subsidiary of the Dutch Shell mother company at large. Apart from these farmers other two communities have also lodged complaints against Shell and they are actually suing the company in London as it is stated by Watkinson (2016: 1).

Shell has also been blamed for not doing enough to clean up whenever there is a spillage of oil at any given time. Shell is blamed for claiming that it would have cleaned enough. However, the clean-ups done by Shell are always shot down by the villagers that they would not be enough or adequate to sanitize the environment completely. Dummet (2015: 1) who had travelled to Niger Delta says that

“We visited another three locations which Shell said it had cleaned-up but which also remain visibly contaminated. Incredibly, the pollution at one of these sites, Boobanabe, also in KegbaraDere, dates back to a fire at a Shell oil well in 1970”.

Besides causing those kinds of problems which date to decades back, Shell also has not done enough to address them. When a fire broke out in 2009 due to leakages caused by the ageing pipes in the Bomu area, the contamination caused by that fire has not been cleaned up, despite Shell’s contrary claims saying that it had cleaned the place where the fire broke out in (Vidal, 2015a: 1). That same Bomu area is still contaminated up to now despite Shell and the government claiming that the place had been decontaminated. Ogoniland is another area which is being critical of Shell’s clean-up operations. It’s obvious that these foreign companies that the oils are rented to are less concern of the hazard their carelessness is causing to the people of Niger Delta, this is because Nigeria greedy politicians are more concern of the chunk some of money coming to their pocket with total negligence to the plight of these people. These foreign companies would have done it differently in their own country. As also claimed by Vidal (2015b: 2) “almost 60 Places in Ogoniland remained untouched despite being contaminated in the 1970s”. Shell has not yet come back to clean them up despite the fact that they were affected by the spillages more than 4 decades ago.

With the pressure from these Niger Delta villagers Shell has reportedly agreed to pay compensation to the villagers due to the damages its oil spills had caused. Business Insider (2015) says that, “Shell has agreed with Nigerian fishing community of Bodo in the Niger Delta to start the clean-up of two devastating oil spills in 2008”. Shell is reportedly to have also agreed to pay compensation to those affected villagers in the Delta region with all the affected complainants receiving their compensations from the company. As Business Insider, (2015: 1) says that

“Under a compensation deal hammered out in London in January, Shell's Nigerian arm agreed to pay £55 million (77 million euros) to people in Bodo following a three-year legal battle over the 2008 spills that devastated their environment”.

Gas flaring

Natural gas flaring is another menace in the Niger Delta area. Oil production in the area has caused natural gas flaring and this natural gas flaring comes with its own problems which range from respiratory problems for the people in the region, skin and eye irritation, to the damage to crops due to acid rain and also skin rashes. Flaring is a cheap mode of separating oil from gas and it is practiced in many countries as one of the cheapest modes of producing oil. The gas flare Tracker Website (2016: 1) says that

“Gas has always been flared in Nigeria since oil was discovered in the 1950s and the practice is still on going up to now and it is causing so many damages to the Niger Delta as a whole.”

Gas flaring is a real problem in the Niger Delta region and the practice leads to severe suffering among the regional people. The Nigerian government has been trying to curb the flaring by putting a lot of stringent measures on perpetrators. However this has not worked as most of the perpetrators are still practicing it. The government has also been imposing policies including banning the practice outright lightly. This has not worked as well due to the postponement of the out-right ban of the practices by the government. Nigeria flares about half of the gas it produces in every year and it is reportedly to be the second largest gas flaring country in the world after Russia as it is argued by Ubani and Onyejekwe (2003: 2)

“Nigeria flares 50% of her total associated gas produced which is about 850 billion cubic feet per year (Bcf/y). Because of an undeveloped Internal Gas Market; about 52% of current Gas production of 6bscf/d is flare”.

First of all, gas flares may lead to health problems on human beings including the respiratory problems mostly due to the burning of vast number of chemicals. There have also been observed skin and eye irritations as well as some other diseases including cancer, neurological, reproductive and developmental effects (The Gas Flare Tracker Site, 2016). Secondly, gas flaring also cause environmental problem in the Niger Delta area by releasing a lot of chemicals into the atmosphere. As Gas Flare Tracker website (2016) shows us that

“Gas flares have been linked to acidification of rain and waterways through the emissions of large quantities of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides into local areas which combine with atmospheric moisture to form sulphuric acid and nitric acid”.

Suggested Solutions to the Problems of the Niger Delta Region ***End the Conflict and Violence***

The first step to take in the Niger Delta issues is to stop the violence. The immediate solution would be the ending of the violence and conflicts that has been causing a lot of deaths and injuries amongst the Delta people. The Niger Delta area has become familiar with the conflicts after the MEND which never abandon the use of violence in increasing their voice. Unlike its predecessors, violent confrontations by the MEND group have actually caused an all-out confrontation with the government leading to the crush of the MEND eventually. The conflicts in the Niger Delta have been continuing for more than a decade and led to the dying and displacement of people in the region due to the kidnappings of international oil workers, kidnappings of corrupt politicians and all-out war between the militants and the government troops.

The conflicts in the Delta region had been described by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) as a very vicious conflict which would end up escalating into an outright warfare pitting the Nigerian government troops and the Delta militants (Hazen and Horner, 2007: 1). However violence should never be an answer to any kind of protesting or increasing voice to express the regional demands. Rather, violence should be eliminated. Dialogue should be promoted and encouraged. It would be only peaceful dialogue, toleration and cooperation that would solve all kinds of problems in the region.

Violence, however, has been escalating rapidly since one of the former militant leaders, i.e. Tompolo was arrested on charges of corruption by the new Nigerian regime under Buhari. This have angered the militants a huge deal as they are going back to resorting to violent ways to show their complaints with the government. There has also been a series of violence in the area since May 2016. As it is reported by TRT World (2016) “gunmen killed two policemen in Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta as they slept in a security post on Monday evening and three soldiers were killed in a second attack.”

Reform the Structures and Operations of the Niger Delta Development Commission

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established by Olusegun Obasanjo, the then Nigerian President, in 2000 to deal solemnly with the issues of development in the Niger Delta region. As the Commission (2016: 2) states it “NDDC was established in 2000 with the mission of facilitating the rapid, and sustainable development of

the Niger Delta into a region that is economically prosperous, socially stable, ecologically regenerative and politically peaceful”.

The Niger Delta region is one of the fragile regions of Nigeria due to its status as the economic pillar of the country and its possession of the most of the oil produced in the country. Nigeria depends on imports therefore it needs foreign currency to survive. Thus, the oil from the Niger Delta region keeps the country on a survival by the help of the oil revenues. Therefore underdevelopment in the region leading also to the regional civil disobediences has a huge impact on the country. They would escalate to violent levels which would cripple the economy. The region had for long been suppressed due to the suppressive governments of the military rule which had marred the country after independence from British colonial rule. Therefore the voice of the Niger Delta people had remained suppressed with the politicians amassing a lot of wealth from the Niger Delta region at the expense of the Delta people. The people could not speak up due to fears of this suppression from the state security apparatuses. There was no viable developmental body to advocate for the development of the region during the military rules.

Therefore when the civilian government got into power they had to address the issues of the Niger Delta militants and then pave a way on how the issues could be managed. This development opened the way for the establishment of the Development Commission for the Niger Delta region. Since underdevelopment of the region is risky for the whole with its huge impacts on the economy of the country as a whole.

The NDDC has had different boards during different presidential periods in Nigeria. However, all boards have shown little or no progress in addressing the issues which have been of much concern to the development of the Niger Delta Region. As a proof, it is argued that if the boards would perform well in ensuring the development of the Niger Delta region, MEND would not have declared an all-out conflict against the government and the oil companies operating in the area. Therefore there is need for reformations of the Commission to ensure that would improve the development in the region.

The Commission has failed to ensure the needed development in the Niger Delta region as the people in the area still suffer from underdevelopment. The area is still one of the underdeveloped areas in the country despite the Commission was created almost two decades ago. Agokun (2011: 1) writes that, “Senate President, David Mark, described the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) as a failure and warned the newly appointed board members to sit up or be removed like their predecessors”. The Commission was created as a ray of hope for the Niger Delta people but then it is proving to fail to develop the region as evidenced by the poverty and underdevelopment in the area. Much of the failures of the Commission have been attributed to conflict of interests and internal frictions as it is argued by Hassan (2013: 1) that “Nominee for Managing Director of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Mr Basse Dan Abia, said that ego, internal frictions and conflict of interest were responsible for the inability of his predecessors to perform and deliver on the mandate of the commission”.

There should be reformations on the Commission to curb internal frictions and conflicts of interest to ensure that the board works smoothly on the development of the region. Employees of the Commission should be free of any conflict of interests to guarantee their neutrality and professionalism. The government should also ensure that internal conflicts are quashed immediately from within the Commission. Any employees of the Commission caught up in internal conflicts should be advised to set their differences amicably so that the difference would not affect the ethical side of the Commission. If the conflicts are personal and not work related or not ethical in any way, then the conflicting employees should be fired to avoid any kind of conflict damaging professionalism.

The Commission has also been marred by rapid corruption. It is reported as one of the most corrupted commissions referring to the allegations that the Commission has been issuing out contracts and tenders without proper procedures and render out money in corrupted ways. Therefore, there should be thorough investigations of corruption on the board. There should be audits each and every time and again to ensure that there is no misappropriation of funds by the Commission. The government should ensure that proper structures are made in the Commission for forensic auditing and loss of control to ensure that the Commission performs its operations in the mandated way for the development in the Niger Delta area.

There should also be a structured road map on the operations of the Commission which should be accountable to the president of the country and also to the Secretary of the presidency. The president should see developmental and progress reports from the Commission on a regular basis. The presidency should also be towing the Commission in line,

if they would go off line in their operations or if they would ever drag in initiating any program for the region. The presidency should also demand for random reports, i.e. progress reports or financial reports. In that case, the Commission should be able to give the required reports to the presidency.

There should also be a structured blue print by the Commission on the developmental projects they wish to engage in. Each and every incoming board of the Commission should be obliged to bring a blue print of their proposed projects for development in the region. And they should be compelled by the government through the presidency to ensure that their proposed projects on their blueprint are actually implemented before their tenure runs out. This is so important in the sense that it leaves no project unfinished and then other incoming boards would not have to finish projects proposed by previous boards first. Rather each new board would come on with their new ideas of development for the region. These blue prints should be one of the main aspects to be considered on recruiting the new boards which would be incoming to lead the Commission.

All these above mentioned reforms of the commissioned should be implemented as soon as possible to ensure that the region starts getting its development. Considering that the region is already lagging behind on development, the earlier these developments are initiated by the commission, the best for development in the region.

More Inclusion of the Region in Governance

The people of the Niger Delta region have been feeling as marginalized people by the Nigerian governments. They consider that the governments do not care of them mostly because of their close cooperation with the oil companies which cause most of the problems in their backyard. Also the greedy politicians enrich themselves at the expense of the locals who are suppressed by the state apparatus and wallowing in abject poverty. Therefore, there is need for inclusion of the Niger Delta people in the governance of Nigeria to make them feel belonging to the country as well and to push away the sense of marginalization inside them. The people of the region have for long been trying to make their voice be heard by the governments which have mostly turned a deaf ear. However giving opportunities of governance to the Niger Delta people would change their perception on the government and would make them feel that they are also equally citizens of the country who have equal opportunities with leaders in the country.

This has worked immensely on the case of Goodluck Jonathan who is actually from the Niger Delta as one of the presidents of the country. Goodluck Jonathan's ascendency to the throne of Nigerian presidency was a ray of hope for the Niger Delta people. It increased their faith in the government and their cooperation with the government considering that it was one of the most peaceful reigns in the Niger Delta region since the starting of the violent campaigns by the militants in the region. This inclusion of politicians actually erases the mentality of marginalization of the Niger Delta people. The Niger Delta locals should also be enacted into bureaucratic positions, military and judiciary at both state and federal level. This would help in feeling as part of the whole nation which decreases their level of disgruntlement.

Allowing Pressure Groups to Express Their Views on the State of Affairs in the Region.

In every democratic structure, pressure groups have the ability to operate without any vindication. Nigeria actually claims to be a democratic society therefore it should allow interest groups to operate in the country freely without any fear or any intimidation from the state level in any case. These interest groups should be allowed to vent their own expressions of the state of affairs in the country. There are so many pressure groups which have been operating in the Niger Delta. MOSOP is one of them and has always been vocal since its setup. The group as a peaceful group has been carefully monitoring the situations in the Niger Delta area especially in the Ogoni land. Despite being a peaceful and non-violent group, the members of the group have been witch hunted by the government and have suffered a lot of from brutality under different regimes of government. Wiwa was one of the most vocal members of MOSOP and one of its founding fathers who were brutally murdered by the government in 1995.

MOSOP's only crime to receive persecution from the Nigerian government has been its quest to ask for equal rights to its people with the rights of the governmental officials and right of international oil companies Therefore the government's response to the peaceful confrontations by the MOSOP pressure group was to silencing it, oppressing the top notch voices behind the movement and arresting and murdering the top activists of the group. This has to be stopped and all the pressure groups operating in the region should be given their own freedom. They would be able to operate without any threats or fear of being vindicated or being caught by the state. Overall, Nigeria should allow pressure groups to operate freely and also express their own views on regional developments.

This is very important in the sense that giving the people the right to be heard enables the government to know and learn the views of their citizens. This policy is very useful on policy making when the government would get the feedback about the demands and requests of the citizens. Such a process would also give a satisfactory feeling to the pressure groups and the citizens at large by making them feel that the government is making policies in accordance to their own views and preferences.

Requiring Oil Companies to Protect Oil Facilities

There has been vast statistics attributing much of the oil spill in the Niger Delta region because of either sabotage or mere criminality like theft and robberies. Vidal (2015b: 1) argues that

“The scale of pipeline vandalism - which sees infrastructure tapped to steal crude oil - has now reached epidemic proportions. The government’s National Oil Spill Detection & Response Agency (Nosdra) recorded more than 900 sabotage incidents last year across the 12,700km of pipes belonging to local and international companies”.

There have also been a lot of astronomical costs which have been paid to repair those pipelines as it is also by Vidal (2015a) that “Pipeline vandalism in the Niger delta costs the state and oil companies \$14bn (£9.3bn) a year in 2014”. To be able to curb all these vandalisms and losses, the oil companies are obliged to apply strict security measures to be able to protect their facilities and make sure that oil spills are minimized to a greater extent. It is actually the duty of those oil companies to guarantee that their premises are secured and there would be fewer and fewer oil spills in the region. Some of the measures to be taken include 24 hour security surveillances, using cameras to ensure that the oil facilities are closely guarded at all times and employing the guards, having adequate equipment and ammunition to be able to fight any form of threat which would be brought on by the vandals or the robbers at large.

The governments of the country should pressurize the oil companies to oblige to the security requirements and policies to guarantee protection in their own facilities. Thus, the governments would also have to regulate the oil companies to give regular updates concerning their security plans and apparatuses to see how they organize their security in terms of minimizing their oil spills. The government should also make sure that the oil companies’ sign pledges of minimizing any oil spills due to vandals. This should be put into law with the oil companies which should also have their own blue prints with security plans. Those plans, on the other hand, would be reviewed by the governments on a regular basis.

Conducting Human Rights Impact Assessments on the Region

There should also be massive assessment of the level of human rights violation in the region. The governments should assess how the oil production in the region has actually violated the basic rights of the people. There should also be a review and laws as the guarantees of minimizing the violations of the human rights in the region. Every person in the world has the right to good health, but then the oil production in the Niger Delta region has actually deprived some of the citizens in the region of their right to good health. Gas flaring, for example, causes health problems to the people of the region implying that their right to good health is being violated by this oil production issue in the region.

One of the most documented human rights violations in the Niger Delta region is the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa who was killed with other activists because of his complaints to the government based on his Ogoni people complaints which the government suppressed with violence. Adeola (2000: 1) argues that Wiwa and other activists’ death was a violation of their human rights. Since everyone has a right to free trial, Wiwa and his fellows were supposed to be tried on a fair judicial system. However, their rights were violated and they were tried unlawfully and unfairly by the government. Those human rights violations should be stopped especially by conducting human rights assessments and analysis by the governments.

Increased Derivation

Nigeria is not practicing true federalism. The system of the country is more centralized than being a federal system as the country is believed to be. The country is just federal on paper but otherwise it is being run in the way of a unitary state considering that all the aspects of the government are centralized and the states do not really have their own state autonomy. Rather, everything is centralized. This form of federalism has become a problem for the country which has

been witnessing poverty and ethnic clashes. Due to this centralized system the majority revenues of the all states have been transferring to the government. As it is mentioned by Nolte (2002: 175)

“the federal government was given authority over the Distributable Pool Account (DPA), which consisted of a percentage of each state’s export revenues. These included agricultural products, mineral resources and crude oil, which soon turn out to be the most important export resource as oil prices increased”.

This form of system ensured that most of the revenues of the country is transferring to the federal government and it actually gave the states little control over their own state resources. The government argued that this is necessary to create uniform standards for the whole nation as some states had more resources than the others.

This centralized federal system has backfired badly to Nigeria as a whole considering that it ensured self-enrichment of greedy and corrupted politicians. Nigeria has been marred with military and oppressive rule throughout its political history after independence from Britain and those military rulers actually used that centralized system to garner richness for themselves at the expense of the poor commoners from all over the country. The politicians who took over the control from the military regime have also been part and parcel of the looting of the revenues of the country. Thus, the funds benefit the politicians more than it does to the common people.

There should be increased derivation whereby each and every state would be able to manage a huge chunk of its own resources without any hindrances from the federal government. Each state should be able to develop itself. Most of the proceeds from the oil revenues have actually been looted to develop the North as the Northern people have been the ones who have ruled Nigeria largely and have been on the pinnacle of the federal government. Therefore they have been benefitting immensely from the oil more than what the Niger Delta people have, even if the latter is the rightful owners of the oil. As it is explained by Nolte, (2002: 177) “Even more than Babangida’s rule, the Abacha years were characterized by the personal enrichment of the government’s (mostly northern Nigerian) supporters, as an estimated 25 per cent of Nigeria’s export revenues were skimmed off illegally by groups associated with his government”.

There is a need for the practice of real federalism in Nigeria. Federalism actually refers to the distribution of power between the central federal authority and its other constituencies like the states. The Niger Delta region should be in charge of its own resources through a federal system which gives its own authority not limited by the federal government. Then it will be collecting its own revenue from its own resources and then paying royalties to the government. This way can ensure development in the state because the state would be in charge of its own resources. Thus, the region would be in total control of its resources and in total charge of the revenue from those which would enable the region to develop itself. Then there would not be corrupted misappropriation of its funds. Rather, the funds would be used for much needed development in the Niger Delta region.

Revisiting the Amnesty Program

The Amnesty Program was initiated by President Yar’Adua in October 2010 in response to the militants in the area. It was as an empowerment program to make sure that the youths of the region would be desisted from violence and instead be empowered in different trades. The program actually succeeded in ensuring that majority of the Niger Delta people would be able to go to the schools, colleges and different institutions to empower them to shun violence. The program also aimed the disarmament of the militants and their reintegration into the community. Thus, they would be given the opportunity to be able to get back in the community and to reshape their lives without engaging in confrontations with the government. The leaders of the militant groups were also awarded with lucrative deals by the Nigerian government including contracts, tenders, top jobs and many other top government initiatives. This program was a success in the form of getting people out of the bush and getting them to schools.

However the program could do little in addressing and solving the real problems affecting the Niger Delta region which still is a time bomb with the potential to explode at any time. The program could only manage to empower a few people. However, it failed in terms of the development of the whole region. Amnesty program also failed to tackle inequality in the region and to include the militants in development programs of the region. The program has only focused on the short term benefits of the militants without any meaningful long term developmental programs or development frameworks. Therefore, this program was only a short term security measure and it did not have any long term. To ensure development of the Niger Delta region, this amnesty program should be revisited by dwelling more on

development of the region rather than mere empowerment of just a few people and by including long term developmental policies and projects. Otherwise, the faith of the region would be new uprisings by the new generations of the militants.

Reviving owned Refineries

One of the basic reasons the Niger Delta crisis or conflict is still prominent is because Nigeria oil refineries are not operating properly. The rentier state concept has a negative hold on Nigeria. The downstream industry in Nigeria is well established, with Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) has four refineries, two in Port Harcourt; Port Harcourt Refining Company (PHRC), and one each in Kaduna; Kaduna Refining & Petrochemical Company Limited (KRPC) and Warri; Warri Refining & Petrochemical Company Limited (WRPC) (NNPC Group, 2016). These refineries don't operate in full capacity; the refineries in Warri and Port Harcourt only operate in 30% (Nigerian Crude and Gas Industry, 2001: 1). The refineries have a combined installed capacity of 445,000 bpd. A comprehensive network of pipelines and depots strategically located throughout Nigeria links these refineries.

Reactivating the above mentioned refineries in Nigeria to its full capacity for production would cut short the percentage of raw product given to the foreign states to refine. This would not only create more job opportunities for the citizens, but it would also yield more revenue for the nation. The theory of rentier state depicts that countries that receive substantial amounts of oil revenues from the outside on a regular basis tend to become self-sufficient from their societies, unaccountable to their citizens and in fact dictatorial in their dealings. The re-activation of the refineries would partially solve the problems of being a rentier state.

It is estimated that demand and consumption of petroleum in Nigeria grows at a rate of 12.8% annually. However, petroleum products are unavailable to most Nigerians and are quite costly, because almost all of the oil extracted by the multinational oil companies is refined overseas (rented out), while only a limited quantity is supplied to Nigerians themselves. However if the local refineries in Nigeria are fully equipped with the required equipment and manpower, Nigeria would be capable to refining her own crude oil and little or none would be rented out, leaving the country with more revenue for the nation.

Conclusion

The oil production in the Niger Delta region has been problematic from the onset, since the first days of drilling of the oil in the region. As this paper shows it, oil production is indeed a curse for the Niger Delta people. The people are benefiting a little from the oil which is actually in their backyard. Rather, the people from other areas of the country are benefiting from it on their own behalf. This is very unfair for the locals of the land who suffer from the consequences of the oil production as the oil production is causing problems for them rather than providing improvements in their lives.

The rentier state system that Nigeria operates on doesn't yield the related quantity of the refined produce. Rentier states across the world majority of them are utilizing the revenue appropriately but the case of Nigeria the result is different. The Niger Delta Region of Nigeria can't continue to endure the devastating measures that the government unleash at them. As a rentier state, the evidence of such system is supposed to be seen all over. There are lots of problems related to the oil production in the area including health problems. Gas flaring and oil spillages are causing damages for the people. The ordinary citizens of the region are the ones who are suffering the most from the oil production. This is, however, unfair for them. The oil is in their own backyard and it is making them suffer from it rather than benefit it. Therefore the oil is actually a curse other than being a blessing for the Niger Delta people at large.

Death has been another factor which is related to oil in Niger Delta. Many people have died as the result of their protest to the injustices of the oil production in the region. One of the most prominent figures, in this respect, is Ken Saro Wiwa who was killed for his uprising against the oil companies as well as the government. Death has also been witnessed by the death of the militants being killed by the government due to their uprising against the government. These deaths are the proof that oil is a curse other than being a blessing in the region. Violence has been another factor reigning in the region. Violence has been rocking the region for a long time with kidnappings of foreign workers, killings of some of them by the militants and also an all-out insurgency by the militants. This violence has caused many to be injured and dead. Those happenings are another factor which brings us to the conclusion that the oil in the region is a curse not a blessing for them.

Poverty is also rampant in the region and the basic welfare facilities in the region including health and education performances have been very lows compared to those in other regions. Thus, the region is purported to be one of the

poorest regions in Nigeria. This fact also proves that oil has been a curse other than a blessing in the region. To curb most of these inequalities and problems which make oil a curse in Nigeria, the government should find the ways of stopping the atrocities on the Niger Delta people and improving their lives and as well as developing the area. The first step the Nigerian government can take in this essence is to stop the rentier state system.

More specifically, Nigeria should stop being a rentier state and instead should become totally in charge of its own resources and export only its surplus. Despite being one of the biggest oil producing countries in the world Nigeria is still importing petroleum products from the other countries. Nigeria imports most of its fuel products including petrol and kerosene. The reason behind its importing of petroleum products is its existence as a rentier state. It sells majority of its crude oil to the outside world therefore it is not producing any petroleum products locally. This leads to huge problem in terms of a negative balance of trade. Therefore Nigeria should shun being a rentier state and then begin producing its oil products for itself. This would stop it from importing petroleum products since it would be producing from inside. In that case, the country would export only its excess oil to other countries. This helps in reducing the fuel prices as the fuel would be produced locally and there would not be any other charges to cover import costs. All these measures would make the life easier and more manageable for the locals.

The Niger Delta region is one of the biggest palm oil hubs in Nigeria. In fact the region is actually one of the most fertile regions in Nigeria. However the oil production is hampering the efforts of agriculture in the region. Therefore, the government needs to bring more stiff penalties for those polluting the environment in the region so that all the sectors of production would be fully utilized in the area. Before oil production the people of Niger Delta have relied on farming and fishing but all these activities have been hampered by the environmental degradation being caused by oil production hence leaving the people of the region without any other source of livelihood and without any means of production. Nigeria has actually abandoned all other sectors of production to concentrate solemnly on oil. However this move has been disadvantageous to the Niger Delta people in the context that the heavy handed and aggressive oil production methods in the area are causing heavy pollution and environmental disintegration hence relegating the locals to paupers.

The implementation of new policies like derivation of power would give the region its own autonomy to spend its own resources which would make it possible for the region to blossom. Only then would oil, which has forever been a curse to them, turn into a blessing for the region and regional people. The Nigerian government should also revisit the refineries in the country. This would drastically reduce the rentier percentage of her black gold and utilize its own refineries in sustaining a higher percentage of the income generated by oil. The Nigerian government has the responsibility to implement all those measures only which can transform oil from being a curse to being blessing for the region and the regional people.

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