

RESOLVING THE CRISIS IN THE NIGER DELTA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR PEACE AND STABILITY

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Abstract

The paper examined critically the challenges and prospects for peace and stability in the quest to resolve the escalating crisis in Niger Delta. The paper adopts purely the qualitative method for the successful undertaking of the research. The population used in the study encompasses individuals living within the Niger Delta region. Via careful enumeration, 27 individuals who are indigenes living in the area in the nine different states that makes up the Niger Delta were selected as the study sample for the research paper. The Data utilized for this study was collected via an open-ended survey which was sent to the mail of the respondents. This was done to reduce the huge financial cost that comes with the far distance between the researcher and the area of study, and also to ensure the security of the researcher considering the volatile state of kidnappings and insecurity in the Niger Delta.

Keywords: Niger Delta, Peace, Crisis, Stability, Challenges, Prospects, Oil firms.

1. Introduction

The Niger Delta residents and Nigerian security forces have engaged in a series of violent clashes over the years which have resulted in extrajudicial killings, incarceration without charge and severe limitations on freedom of speech, association, and assembly. These clashes and tumultuous incidents are associated with the government's use of oil earnings and the operations of the oil exploration companies in the region (Acey, 2016). As a result, these problems have attracted the attention of civil and human rights activists who are not happy with the incessant violation and deprivation of the socio-political and economic rights of the Niger Delta inhabitants (Oluwaniyi, 2010). In reaction to the lackluster attitude of the government in responding adequately to the plight of the people, the protesters resolved to destroying oil industry flow stations, halting production, or abducting hostage on a daily basis (Folami, 2010). While there are legitimate worries about kidnappings of oil workers and inter-community strife, the activities of the oil exploration companies in the Niger Delta are accountable for persistent human rights crimes. Currently, the oil rich region is characterized with issues ranging from organized criminality, resource-based conflicts, kidnappings, ethnicity clashes/violence, to armed robbery, human trafficking, protests and extrajudicial

killings. Most of the anger is directed at the international businesses and governments that have reaped billions of dollars in profits from oil extraction while leaving the region underdeveloped (Nwankwo, 2021).

The irony of the situation in Niger Delta has sent shocking waves to economy analyst and political scientists who continue to probe the reasons for such devastating situation. The Niger Delta is known to contain the largest reserve of oil and gas in Nigeria, which plays a key role in the growth of the Nigerian economy (Akpotor, 2019). Unfortunately the oil rich region is currently poverty-stricken, underdeveloped and swimming in environmental degradation amidst series of insecurity issues (Ite et al., 2013). Not only did the emerging oil industry destroy the agricultural sector, which was the cornerstone of the local economy, and create a serious environmental hazard for the people through the exploration, exploitation, and transportation of oil and gas, but it also created a serious value problem, as the hitherto cherished traditional value-systems are being weakened by the emergence of the petro-dollar related behaviour (Elum et al., 2016).

Although attempts has been made by the government to resolve issues in the Niger Delta, the inhabitants of the Niger Delta continue to face challenges that hinders them from totally enjoying the benefits of oil in the region. The huge cost of building infrastructures in the Oil rich region such as the creation of drainage systems (Daramola & Ibem, 2010), repair of oil pipes and leakages, repair and maintenance of damaged farm lands, insecurity threats, kidnappings and a host of other challenges remains an issue till date. While successive governments have made efforts in resolving the crises, most of the problems in the Niger Delta still exist till date (Sekkat, 2018). In light of the above, the main purpose of this paper is to assess the challenges and prospects for peace and stability in an attempt to resolve the crisis in the Niger Delta.

2. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this paper is to examine the challenges and prospects for peace and stability on resolving the crisis in the Niger Delta. Albeit specifically, the objectives of the paper are to:

1. Examine the causes of poverty in the Niger Delta amidst the abundance of oil in the region.
2. Determine the cause of incessant disputes and unrest among youths in the Niger Delta.
3. Investigate the perception of inhabitants in the Niger Delta towards the prospect of peace and stability
4. Identify the perception of inhabitants in the Niger Delta on challenges associated with achieving peace and stability in the region

3. Literature Review

The Niger Delta area is Nigeria's economic powerhouse, producing vast quantities of oil money. However, this creates a conundrum, since the large sums of money raised have not even come close to alleviating the widespread poverty in the Niger Delta (Inokoba and Imbua, 2010). In the present day Nigeria, oil exploration in the Niger Delta region poses a serious threat to the growth of inhabitants in the region (Kadafa, 2012). Conflicts over resources between communities and between communities and oil firms are two examples of these violence and crisis manifesting themselves (Mahler, 2010). Inhabitants of the Niger Delta suffer from an almost total lack of roads in spite of the fact that its wealth is funding gigantic infrastructural development in other parts of Nigeria including expensive peacekeeping missions across Africa (Babalola, 2014). Despite the fact that oil workers enjoy air-conditioned luxury, the Niger Delta inhabitants have to live without power, portable water and health services. This is a major source of distress for them (Maass, 2010).

So many inhabitants residing in the Niger-Delta region, according to (Ogbuleke, 2019), are quite dissatisfied with the current state of affairs. Individuals from minority ethnic groups in the Niger Delta claim the government favors the larger ethnic groups that have monopoly power over oil money. As a result, according to (Bischoff and Lambbrechts, 2010), people or groups that feel frustrated in the fulfillment of their objectives and demands typically respond by directing violent behavior against Oil companies facilities and their workers. Piracy and kidnappings have increased since the government failed to listen to the cry and protests of the people (Osaghae et al., 2011). The Niger Delta's wetlands and waterways make it difficult to

protect oil infrastructure and personnel from kidnappers and angry militants seeking for justice (Aghedo, 2013).

Oil output has suffered as a result, reducing available foreign currency for funding national development. A rapid increase in the price of oil may be caused by a breakdown in the flow of petroleum to refineries due to blown pipes. International diplomacy and foreign direct investment are put at risk, since hostage-taking puts a strain on foreign prisoners, their families, and the firms for which they work. Disturbingly, local residents and their towns are suffering as a result of this devastation (Ufuoma and Omoruyi, 2014).

Empirical Studies

There are pockets of armed revolt and insurgency across the Niger Delta. Inhabitants of the region have been exploited for decades as a result of the over-exploitation of oil, as well as the state's failure to provide basic infrastructure and an enabling environment to alleviate the unjustified environmental and human degradations that have resulted in disillusionment, rage, decay in rural areas and a high crime rate throughout the region (Edna & Raimi, 2018). More than 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass is found in the Niger Delta region (Kadiri, Eze, Orebiyi, Lemchi, Ohajianya, and Nwaiwu, 2014), which extends from Apoi to Bakassi, from Mashin stream to Benin's Bight of Benin, and has a coastline that is 560 kilometers long, or two-thirds of the country's total coastline. Mangrove swamps and low-lying alluvial plains make up the region's second-largest wetland, which is located near the mouth of the Niger River, one of the principal rivers of Sub-Saharan Africa (Nnaemeka, 2020).

Nine of Nigeria's 36 states are located in the Niger Delta region. Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River Delta, Edo, Imo Ondo and Rivers State are the states in question (Otali and Ujene, 2020). More restive than the other three states are Bayelsa (State), Cross River (State), and Delta (State). People from about 40 different ethnicities and affiliations live here, and they speak more than 250 languages (Musan, 2014). There are around 300 settlements in the area. Fishing and farming are the two most common jobs in the Niger Delta (Iruo et al., 2020). More than four decades after oil exploration began, the Niger Delta has emerged as the nation's primary source of revenue in terms of both local currency and foreign cash (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2017). Since 1975, the region's oil resources have accounted for 90% of the country's export profits.

Despite the abundance of oil in the Niger Delta, the region is still the least developed in terms of both physical and socioeconomic development. Therefore some tagged the region as the sick man of the nation (Adam, 2018).

4. Design and Method

This section provides detailed explanation on the methodology used to conduct the study. It encompasses the sample population, administration technique, design, data collection instrument, analysis of data and results. The research adopts totally a qualitative approach. The researcher used an open ended survey to gather data in the qualitative method used. The Qualitative approach comes with much benefits such as providing the room for indepth-investigation, probing and interrogation of respondents based on the responses provided. In addition to that, both the researcher and/or respondents can attempt to have a comprehensive understanding of feelings and motivations via the qualitative method. Thus, a critical assessment of the opinions of inhabitants of the Niger Delta on the prospects and challenges for peace in the region will aid in the study's conclusion.

The adoption of the qualitative method was deemed best by the researcher as it is expected to convey properly the perceptions of inhabitants of the Niger Delta about the thematic issues of the paper, which focuses on the Niger Delta Crisis: Challenges and Prospects for Peace and Stability.

In addition to the above, the design was deemed appropriate and thus chosen by the researcher because the results are commonly more descriptive, giving room for the researcher to draw logical inferences and predict possible solutions from the data collected from the respondents. Not only that, the low cost nature of the qualitative method makes it more attractive for the researcher to use. Hence, the researcher used the open-ended survey in this assessment to collect important data. Despite the fact that there are other type of qualitative techniques to use (Creswell and Poth, 2018), the researcher opted for the open-ended survey because it is the most commonly used methods and the safest method during this period of crisis, conflicts and insecurity issues in the Niger Delta.

Population and Sample

The participants selected from the study were chosen from the nine (9) states that makes up the Niger Delta region namely: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, Imo

Ondo and Rivers State. Based on convenient sampling, the researcher selected three participants from each of the states in the Niger Delta region. This brings the total number of inhabitants residing in the Niger Delta region included in the study to twenty-seven (27). Attempt to increase the population sample for the study was hampered due to the heightened security issues affecting the regions.

Instrument

The researcher developed an open-ended survey that contains vital questions that aligns with the four objectives of the study. In order for respondents to have a comprehensive understanding of the implications of crisis in the Niger Delta, brief explanation was given on the purpose of the research and the survey contained instructions on how to respond to it, and its importance for government, and international organization to take necessary action. The items in the open-ended survey are instrumental in retrieving data on the variables that are relevant to objectives of the study.

The Procedure of Administration

The researcher was expected to reach out to each respondent personally to do an interview, but due to heightened security issues in the Niger Delta region and the huge cost of transportation, which severely hampered the researcher's mobility from conducting the interview, this was not possible. Instead, a distinct agreement was made with the contact person residing in the states for each respondent, leading to the production of an open-ended survey which was sent to the necessary respondents via a google form. The survey was requested to be filled as deemed feasible and turned in within thirty days of delivery. When queried on their informed consent regarding the ethical considerations, the respondents enthusiastically expressed their intention to take part in the study. Albeit they were given the freedom to abstain if they do not intentionally desired or wish to partake in it. From the 27 copies of open-ended survey that was administered, 21 copies were returned. This represents 84% return success rate. As a result, careful attention was given to the sorting, collation and transcription of the returned copies and reported appropriately by the researcher.

5. Data Analysis

The data used for the study were collected in qualitative formats and was analyzed thematically.

Objective 1: Causes of Poverty in the Niger Delta amidst the abundance of oil in the region:

The respondents were asked to indicate if they are aware or not of poverty in the Niger Delta and the causes of poverty amidst the abundance of oil in the region. The results reveal that most of the respondents are aware of the problem of poverty in the Niger Delta and their awareness level is high. Amidst the diverse responses gotten, a respondent emphatically stated that:

“I am aware of the problem of poverty in the Niger Delta. Our land, and water are polluted by the activities of oil companies exploring oil every day. We cannot go to farm, our crops are destroyed. I and my children have no choice but to manage drinking the coloured water as there is no clean water around us for us to fetch and drink. My friends Chukwuemeka and Odili too cannot go to farm again because their farmlands have been polluted by oil.”

Similarly to the above response, another respondent stated:

I am aware of poverty and I am living in poverty. Almost all of us are poor here. See my house, see my farm, see the water we are drinking. The oil companies do not care about us at all. Before, I could manage two meals a day for myself, wife and children but now look at us. The government has forgotten us. They have destroyed our lands, our farms and our waters.

Also, in line with the above, 19 out of the 21 respondents testified that they are aware of poverty in the Niger Delta and that they have been affected by poverty in so many ways as a result of oil exploration in the region. To validate this point, 17 respondents asserted:

I have lived in this area for a long time. I am aware of poverty and I am aware of the causes of poverty. I have lost my means of livelihood due to the activities of oil companies in this area. Every day I keep hoping that the government will listen to my voice. I have lost my means

of survival but no one seems to care about poor people like me.

The above result shows clearly that the respondents in this study are much aware of the problem of poverty and its causes in the Niger Delta and it has become a fact that the activities of oil exploration companies in the region is account for the cause of poverty. This result is in consonance with the statement of (Ume & Chukwu, 2019) who stated that the Niger Delta inhabitants have to live without farmlands, power, portable water and health services. This is a major source of distress for them.

Objective 2: Cause of incessant disputes and unrest among youths in the Niger Delta:

Respondents for the study were questioned on what they perceived to be the cause of incessant disputes and unrest among youths in the Niger Delta. The results brings to limelight the perception of the Niger Delta inhabitants on the immediate causes to be the oil leakages from exploration companies, failure of the government to compensate the people for their damaged lands and waters, and scarcity of infrastructure necessary for the people's survival.

Most of the respondents noted that:

The federal government has failed to give adequate attention to the problem of the Niger Delta people. They have failed to listen to the cry and protest of the youths as the youths remain unemployed, have no jobs or lands to farm. The continuous activities of the oil companies are detrimental to the health and survival of the youths. There are oil leakages flowing into the waters and destroying the land. The youths keep crying and complaining but the government has not given sufficient infrastructure and support necessary for survival

A respondent further noted that:

No doubt, the deprivation of food, land and waters has made the youth to continue to attack the oil companies by destroying the oil pipes and kidnapping the oil workers. An idle hand is the devil's workshop. You do not expect the youth to be happy when they have no means to take care of their selves. The government which supposed to give hope to the youth seems to be in support of the oil companies destroying the lands and waters. These disputes and unrest among youths are associated with the government spending of oil earnings and activities of oil exploration companies in the region.

Objective 3: Perception of inhabitants in the Niger Delta towards the achievement of Peace and Stability:

The respondents were asked to indicate their perception of inhabitants in the Niger Delta towards the prospect of peace and stability in the region and to state what they think needs to be done to make the people happy and the environment stable.

Most of the respondents strongly believed that if the Nigerian government paid adequate attention to the cry and protest of the people and the youths of the Niger Delta by providing necessary infrastructure, providing job and employment opportunities as well as establishing poverty alleviation programmes, there will be peace in the Niger Delta. Few among the respondents stated that while the government has taken some actions, they have not involved the youth fully in the discussion process. They stated further that if the government provides sufficient compensation for the environmental damages caused by the oil companies there will be peace.

In an attempt to justify the above reasons, a respondent stated that:

I am very certain that once the federal government is ready to partner with the state government and provides enough compensation for the damaged lands and waters, most of the people engaging in violent clashes, protests and conflicts will calm down. This is based on my interaction

with some of the youths and individuals who have no farm to cultivate crops again. Most of them are jobless and continue to vent their anger by destroying oil pipes and kidnapping workers of oil companies. Once the government provides job for them and create programmes to reduce poverty, the people will be discourage to engage in violent activities.

Some of the respondents indicated that:

"Yes, the government needs to provide job for the people. Give them employment opportunities so they can have food on their table and take care of their children and family. If the government fails to do these, there will continue to be serious crimes and conflicts in the Niger Delta."

Few respondents stated that that the willingness of the federal government to engage the youth and necessary stakeholders in the region will help to restore peace and stability if the people sensed that their plights and concerns is of interest to the government:

The government needs to show willingness to engage the youth and other stakeholders in a round table discussion and make them feel that the problems of the people is of great interest to them By so doing, the youths will calm down and listen to the solutions and offer of the government and there will be peace.

Objective 4: Perception of inhabitants in the Niger Delta on challenges associated with achieving peace and stability in the region:

Respondents were questioned on the envisage challenges associated with achieving peace and stability in the Niger Delta. Findings showcases that respondents stated numerous challenges

that may hinder the achievement of peace and stability in the region. Among the diverse challenges listed are: inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructures, bad water and farmlands, lack of job and unemployment, and inadequate attention by the government to the plight of the people.

In consonance with the above submissions, summarized below are other explanations and highlights of the perceived challenges by the respondents:

The Nigerian government will face a big challenge in achieving peace and stability in the region due to the numerous problems the people are face.

Few respondents further noted:

The Nigerian government needs to visit the region and have a full understanding of the critical situations if they want peace in the region because the people are suffering and there is no hope at all even for the future generations. But I doubt the Nigerian government will want to fulfil the demands of the people due to the large funding that is needed to repair the damaged farmlands and environment.

Other respondents noted:

No one seems to be interested in the degrading state of the environment. Look at the people, they have no food to eat or sufficient means to survive. The government is not giving full attention to providing jobs, neither is it making attempts to repair the damaged infrastructures and build new ones that will alleviate the condition of the people.

5. Conclusion

The research examined the prospects and challenges for peace and stability in the Niger Delta amidst the escalating conflicts and/or crisis. The finding of the paper reveals that most of the inhabitants are aware of the problem of poverty and the causes in the region. Most of the inhabitants are in agreement with one another regarding the damages caused by the activities and operations of oil exploration companies in the area. Some said that the Nigerian government has failed to pay adequate attention to the problems in the Niger Delta and as a result the youths are engaging in violent protest, sabotaging oil company's activities by kidnapping their staff and vandalising oil pipelines. The paper reveals that insufficient funding, inadequate care and attention from the federal government, lack of necessary infrastructures, unemployment, and poverty alleviation programmes are among the numerous challenges that inhabitants of the Niger Delta are facing. Therefore the research concluded that the federal government of Nigeria needs to prepare itself well if it is ready to achieve peace and stability in the crisis ridden region.

6. Recommendations

In consonance with the findings of the research, highlighted below are the recommendations:

The federal government of Nigeria needs to provide enough funds to repair the damaged infrastructures in the Niger Delta and to build new ones that will help the inhabitants to survive the challenges of survival.

There is a need for Nigerian government to change its attitude towards the inhabitants of the Niger Delta by making provisions for employment opportunities and establishing poverty alleviation programmes that will cater for the peculiar needs of the region.

There is also a need for the Oil companies and the government to make available sufficient compensation for the degrading state of the environment caused by oil exploration activities as this will pacify the anger of the people.

The issue of damaged farm lands and polluted waters remains one of the challenges affecting the health and welfare of the Niger Delta inhabitants. This can be corrected by enacting laws and policies that will strictly regulate the exploration activities of oil firms and that will protect the farm lands and waters.

Corruption must be checked, and the people of the area must be included in the development of policies that affect their well-being. When it comes to allocating federal funds, corruption and mismanagement of fund poses a huge problem. To solve this, the federal government

needs to monitor how the state, municipal, and community governments share funds allocated for the development of the Niger Delta and assess critically if it really gets to the affected individuals in the region.

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