

# **A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE NIGER DELTA CRISES, 1966 – 1998**

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**Abstract:** This essay examines reasons for the youth crises in the Niger-Delta Region from 1966-1998. It adopts qualitative method of content analysis. The work demonstrates the evident despoliation and degradation of the Niger-Delta environment without compassion as well as political marginalisation all of which condemned the people to life of want and misery. One of the important findings is that these developments prompted the Isaac Adaka Boro's "Twelve-Day Revolution" in 1966. The work argues that this revolt inspired later agitations. Although the essay contends that a number of palliative measures have been put in place by government to address these concerns, much is left to be desired as there is still evident arrested development in the region owing to several factors such as bad governance and corruption. It concludes, among other factors, that a possible way out of this quagmire is the country to have social cum political justice.

**Keywords:** Niger-Delta, Despoliation, Marginalization, Revolution, Agitations, Justice

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## **Introduction**

No objective discussion of the crises in the Niger Delta should ignore the historical exploitative and marginalized circumstances of the region by the Nigerian ruling

class cum oil exploration companies. The spate of the crises and conflicts in the region especially from the 1960s could be explained against political, economic, and social backgrounds. A political factor responsible for the Niger Delta is the country's flawed political development. The federal system of government currently being operated in Nigeria has two very fundamental and destabilizing features. To begin with, the regional arrangement up to 1966, and the states-structure between 1967, and date, divided the nation into three unequal regions, with the North being ascribed a population that is more than those of the East and West put together. The spectre of domination of the political system by the North has not been diminished by the new geo-political zoning arrangement.

The second aspect of the political problem is the political and demographic domination of the Nigerian state by the majority ethnic nationalities such as Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba and the attendant marginalization of the minority ethnic groups such as the Niger Delta region. But among the ethnic groups spread across the so-called south-south geographical zone, the Niger Delta people constitute the largest among the ethnic minorities, even as she currently sustains the country's main economic stay with her God-given natural resources such as crude oil and gas deposits (Ota, 2020). This political domination of the majority over the minority Niger Deltans has equally chained economic, social and cultural advancement of the latter on whose land Nigeria's highest foreign exchange earner is found. This is because; development of regional sentiments overshadows national development.

The implications of these structural imbalances have been manifested in recurrent revenue sharing formula that put the oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta at a disadvantage. These opened the gateway for the agitations for "True Federalism" and "Resource Control" (Ota, 2020) by mostly the energetic youthful age bracket championed by Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, in 1966. And until social, political and economic justices are achieved, youths' restiveness will persist. A country like Nigeria, national development can best be assured when there is equality and justice among its component heterogeneous societies.

### **A Brief Historical Review of Related Literature on the Niger Delta Question**

In order to appreciate the genuine grievances of the Niger Delta people, particularly the youths, a fair representation of literature is reviewed in this section. These literatures have all attributed the youth crises in Niger Delta to the sordid situation in the area. This “prompted Isaac Adaka Boro to carry out a revolt against the then federal military government of Nigeria in 1966” (Obubo & Emordi, 2023, p. 103). The duo further reviewed and x-rayed the marginalization of the region in the political affairs of the country and the consequential misery and poverty experienced by the people of the region. The dynamics of political and economic power in the region which sustained the oppression are also discussed by the writers. They argue that the exposure of the people to life of want and misery necessitated the need to turn their sources of frustration into instruments of development of the region with revolution.

Accordingly, the authors maintain that the political situation in Nigeria by 1964 partly inspired the Boro’s revolution. They extracted Boro’s prison memoirs entitled the “Twelve-Day Revolution” (1981), where they quoted him to have stated that:

In 1964, as if an answer to the crises of the minority elements of Nigeria, the country had degenerated into a political inferno. It was a time when anything that was right became wrong, a time when two wrongs made a right and two rights a wrong. The political poise of the country was in a riddle of uncertainties. I do not know exactly whether people give as much thought to the dangers in extreme greed. Greed in its extreme had been the cause of upheavals in many nations. What incited the peasant revolt of 1831 in England? Indeed, Britain’s loss of the American colonies in 1776? Further still, the dreadful French Revolution? Or the Second World War? Greed! The troubles in Nigeria were principally caused by the same monster (p. 106).

More frightful was where the authors quoted Boro to have said that:

By 1965, it was a popular boast in some circles that... three tribes-controlled Nigeria. They had a firm grip in their tribal zones. One could tell what the results of an election in the East, West North, even before the campaigns started....Election manifestoes promised the high heavens and politics, an affair of people without conscience (and democracy was ravagely[sic] raped and the foundation of the nation was rocked. Nigeria was built on shifting sand from the world go, torn as it was among the most monstrous social and political vices. There grew a class of person riding from obscure poverty to aristocracy and fame; they were tribally bound and socially indebted to one clique or the other. The club, like a colossus, held the fortunes of the nation in its Palm (p. 107).

The above situation in the country had impacted in the youths, strong feelings of hopelessness and thus, Boro was not an exception. The work further demonstrated the post-independence challenges faced by Nigerians; one critical challenge still existed. Crude oil had come to supplement forest products, and with particular reference to the Niger Delta region, this new product according to the authors, intended to redefine the economic content of the region and it was exploited mindlessly without any consideration of the value of life in the area. Thus, in recognition of the situation, Boro formed the Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS) made up of able-bodied youths of about 200 strong militant group aimed at liberating the region, through arm confrontation from the claws of the state and severing it from the rest of the country, and with hope of sustaining itself thereafter.

Although the revolution failed, as they were severely crushed by the federal military government that resulted to many deaths of the youths, it inspired many of them to continue the struggle from where Boro stopped; it has helped to inspire new idea in the way the Ijaw, in particular, and the Niger Delta people as a whole see themselves, the governments and the oil companies to appreciate who are their problems. Thus, the Twelve-Day Revolution remains of great Importance in the annals of the history of the region.

In another literature, Ebilabo Obubo (2024), accused the British of planting regional and lopsided political and social structure in Nigeria, where the Niger Delta region is at the receiving end of pains. Going by the author's account, the British came and met heterogeneous nature of ethnically composed country that was much based on ethnic backgrounds. Yet, the British did not make any reasonable effort in welding these complex societies before amalgamating them. Rather than doing so, Obubo said, the British exploiters instead, foist on Nigeria a federal constitution in 1946, which further departmentalized the country in three regions that further widened these ethnic cleavages.

The work demonstrated that due to the failure of the British colonialist to practically reconcile and unite this ethnically rooted country, the country's party politics that began in the 1940s wobbled around these ethnic affiliations and sentiments, as regional block voting patterns became the order of the day, and has persisted till today. Unfortunately, and regrettably too, the philosophy behind the regional block voting system was equally transferred to governance and administration that characterised the background for lopsided infrastructure and development. The author accused the British of deliberately conducting ingenuine censuses that enthroned the dominance of the Fulani, whose Muslim background and administrative structure were viewed to be amenable to control in Nigeria's administrative system even after their exit. So, the failure of a genuine and reliable population census of Nigeria since 1905 is traceable to the official policy of the British colonial government, which sought to ensure numerical and electoral superiority for the former northern and region. Consequently, the minority ethnic regions, especially the Niger Delta that feeds and sustain Nigeria's economy through its God-given resources such as oil and gas deposits but could not have access to political power to better their lives occasioned by these ethnic sentiments decided to agitate or advocate for the inclusiveness and protection of their interests in the Nigeria project through the instrumentality of nationality groups.

Condemning ethnicity as a bane of national cohesion and development, Ota (2019, p. 123), puts forward that:

Ethnicity responded to changed Conditions and changed needs. for Example, the Richard's Constitution of 1946 which regionalised the country, and Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 which introduced the Federal principle and national's bicameral legislature of 180 members (with half coming from the Northern Region), both reactivated the existing but largely dominant socio-economic insecurity. This was transformed into political and inter-ethnic rivalries (2019, p. 123).

The work further states that:

Ethnic conflicts assumed a crucial political importance, especially with the emergence of ethnically and regionally based political parties. The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (Later the National Council of Nigerian Citizens) (NCNC) had been inaugurated on August 26, 1944 as a broad-based nationalist movement. But following the promulgation of the constitution in 1946, the Action Group (AG) was formed in March 1951 to exploit the new political development. On its part, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) was born on October 1951 largely as a reactionary regional political party whose major objective was to contain a perceived "Southern domination" of Nigeria. Whereas the NPC's emphasis was on the region rather than the ethnic group, the A.G was formed to protect the Yoruba ethnic group and to frustrate an obvious NCNC government from assuming power in the Western Region. The NCNC later became Eastern-based (p. 132).

The author states that, leaders of these parties combined individual opportunism with policy immobilization, and true nationalism was sacrificed for personal aggrandizement. Just like Obubo, this author also accused the British Colonialists that they (the British) capitalized on the ethnic differences and the political ineptitude of the indigenous political class to foist on Nigeria a federal constitution which was not necessarily forged on the anvils of compromise between the country's ethnic groups. It deliberately enthroned the dominance of the Hausa Fulani group in Nigeria's electoral and administrative process.

That arrangement, by giving the North a disproportionately larger space in the federal parliament, invariably assured it of continued dominance in subsequent national politics. In the end, the federal institutions under which Nigeria achieved independence in 1960 maintained only an illusion of stability. Political leaders were paranoid and sublimated each event in term of a master-plan for domination by either of three major ethnic groups. The Northern Region distrusted the eastern and western regions in much the same way as the Igbo distrusted The Yoruba, and vice-versa.

By accepting the federal arrangement and its inherent structural imbalance, the indigenous political class contributed immensely to the enthronement of ethnic politics. Because of the dominance assured the Hausa-Fulani-dominated North in the federal setup, the basic principle of division of powers between the central and regional governments meant not a co-ordinate an independent status for the trio, but a lessening of the powers of the regions and a corresponding increase in these of the federal government. The 1963 republican constitution did not settle this imbalance, but entrenched it instead, by giving the parliament special powers to handle any state of emergency.

This provision, in fact, placed the federation on a precarious pedestal. Situations like these would no doubt, give a sense of seeking national identity by the minority ethnic groups, especially the Niger Delta region whose goose lays the golden eggs for the nation demand for resource control to better their lots. But these healthy demands are unfortunately erroneously termed as 'youth crises' or 'restiveness'.

Ota (2020) discusses causes of the Niger Delta crisis, especially since 1999 to political, economic, and social backgrounds. Taking from the social and cultural perspective, the author asserted that, hunger, anger, illiteracy and unemployment have combined to produce an array of restive youths in the Niger Delta. These youths have invaluablely become a source of mobilization/recruitment by militant groups who have boldly and courageously responded to the many years of neglect through armed resistance and attacks on oil facilities and installations in the region. Traditional rulers in the Niger Delta have also been cited as instigating attacks on oil companies in order to extract concessions from them. In a way, this is an indication of an apparent lack of any sense of corporate social responsibility on the part of the

multinational corporations to their host communities. The situation is compounded by the obvious disparities in the infrastructural development of cities like Lagos and Abuja vis-a-vis the deplorable living conditions in the Niger Delta. The author quoted Amaechi thus:

... there are two kinds of injustices in the Niger Delta. The first is the one the Nigerian country inflicts on the people of the Niger Delta. We are denied our rights to existence, our rights to own our God-given resources to solve our difficult terrain and to develop ourselves in the committee [sic]of states. That is the larger picture. The smaller picture is the inability of people like us, those who are in government to manage the resources that we manage to squeeze out from the federal government (p. 125).

Going by the above quotation, the Niger Delta crisis is a function of the character of the Nigerian state. The current situation of anomie in the part of the country can, therefore, be located in the context of selfishness, greed, and insensitivity of the country's leaders.

Ota, Obubo and Uyabara (2024) have linked many challenges of Nigeria (the Niger Delta inclusive) to social injustice. One of the findings of the paper is that although Nigeria citizens have remained together within the same political space inspite of many challenges, there are obvious cases of inequality and glaring examples of the negation of the principles of social justices by the leadership class. The result of the breaches of the constitutional provision for social justice is Nigeria's inability to consolidate her diversity to achieve national development and nation-building as the case in other heterogenous federation like the United States. The 1999 constitution of Nigeria (as amended), unequivocally provides for social justice in section 14(1).

Similarly, section 14(4) of that constitution provides for the application of the federal character principle in the composition of government at the state, local government and the federal levels. This is a reflection of the need to harness the country's diversity for building a strong, united country anchored on the principles of social justice. However, these constitutional provisions are only high symbolically, and

have been repeatedly breached in terms of their practical application. In cases like these, youth crises are inevitable in the minority regions, especially the Niger Delta whose economy sustains the entire nation but could not access political power to better their lives owing to long entrenched regional sentiments during elections. These works have validated the youth's crises in the Niger Delta.

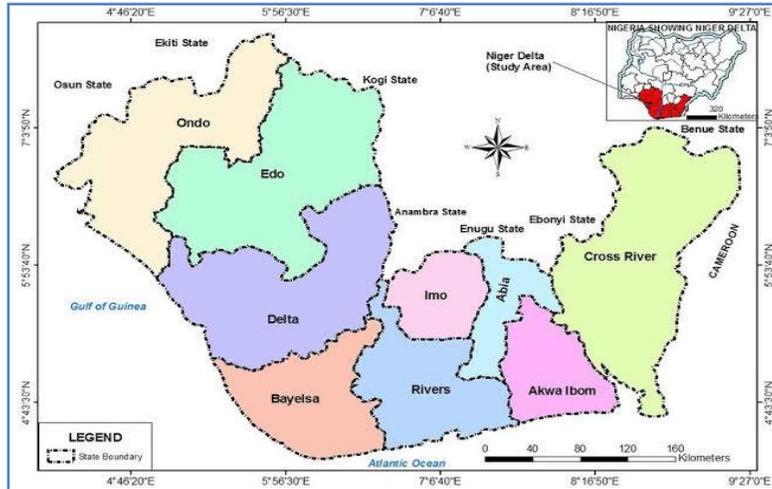
### **Geographical Location and Physical Features of the Niger Delta Region**

Boro (1982) described the Niger Delta as the area strictly occupied by the Ijaw. According to this account, "Ijaw is the aboriginal home of the Delta" (p. 203). But Ota (2020) has it that what is geographically referred to as the Niger Delta in Nigeria is the stretch of wetland that covers an estimated area of about 70,000 square kilometres. It consists of distinct ecological zones which are characteristics of larger river deltas in a tropical region, coastal ridge barriers, mangrove and fresh water swamps and forests. The Niger Delta mangrove forests cover some 6,000 square kilometres, while the fresh water swamps cover about 11,700 square kilometres. When combined, the region accounts for approximately 7.5% of the total land mass in Nigeria, which extends from Apoi to the Bight of Benin, as it equally covers a coastline of 560 kilometres and about two-thirds of the entire coastline of Nigeria.

Politically, the Niger Delta region, according to Ota, comprises, originally, six "core" states and threes "peripheral" states in Nigeria. The "core" states, according to him are Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, (recently de-listed) Delta, Edo and Rivers, while the 'peripheral' states are Abia, Imo, and Ondo. The region has an estimate population of 20 million, comprising some fifty ethnic groups and over 3,500 communities speak about 260 dialects. The major ethnic group are Ijaw, Ogoni, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ibibio, Isoko, Anang, Kalabari, Ishan, Edo and Igbo among others. Almost all of these groups are located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The States that make up the Niger Delta are also contiguous.

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**A contemporary map of Niger Delta**



**Source:** Retrieved online, 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2025.

According to Boro, “the Niger Delta, compared to other parts of Nigeria is a geographical complex, with a criss-cross of creeks and a dense forest nourished by heavy rains almost throughout the year. The Niger Delta has sufficient land to accommodate four of the largest cities in the world – London, New York, Buenos Aires, Moscow – more than enough humidity to bathe the extreme aridity of the entire Sahara; and a physiognomy glooming enough to repel the most adventurous of explorers” (p. 57). Boro supports his assertion with Mary Kingsley’s words when he said:

Kingsley believes the great swamp regions of the Bright of Biafra are the greatest in the world and that in its immensity and glow, it has grandeur equal to that of the Himalayas (p. 57).

Because of its peculiar location, the Delta is characterized by creeks, rivers, streams and canals which are also home to seasonal swamp forests and low land in the coastline of the Atlantic Ocean and is largely populated by fishermen, with sprinkling of farmers. More importantly, the Niger Delta is the source of Nigerian huge earning from oil. It is therefore, vital to the economy of the Nigerian State,

given the fact that export from crude oil account for about 80% of total Federal Government revenue.

### **Colonial Foundations of Rebellions in the Niger Delta before 1966**

The Niger Delta region right from the outset had occupied a pride of place in the historical evolution of Nigeria as a country. It had played a vital role in the economic as well the political development of Nigeria. In fact, the Niger Delta region had for years, acted as the economic hub of the country and by implication, the treasure base of Nigeria. Even before the advent of colonial rule, the region was the apex centre of economy relation between what later became Nigeria and the wider world. At a point in time, greater part of this region was referred to as the oil river region because of the role she played in the palm oil producing place.

Unfortunately, the Europeans, particularly the British exploited the palm oil wealth of the region and used it as a link into the hinterland. By implication, rail lines and roads were constructed from that region to other parts of the country for easy evacuation of raw manufactured goods. Due to the soured relationship between the host region and the foreigners, there were some levels of restlessness. The soured relationship at that point in time, according to Obubo and Emordi, was due to the way the Royal Niger Company (RNC) got itself involved in the palm oil trade relations with the kingdoms in the region. Injustice characterized the relationship. The development was evident when Nembe people, under King William Koko, revolted against the company in 1894 -1895 and king Nana Olomu of Itsekiri also did in 1096. They resisted the company's attempt at shutting them out of the trade in palm oil. The people's attempt at demanding for legitimacy, justice and perhaps, survival, led to a gun-boat attack on Nembe people at Akassa and against the Itsekiri at Ebrohimi. As the authors conclude, these revolts seem to have sign posted what were to come in subsequent years.

### **A History of Oil Exploration in Nigeria**

The Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC) which is a product of the 1907 merger of the British Shell Trading and Transport Company and the Netherland Royal Dutch Group of Companies is known to be one of the pioneer oil exploration companies in Nigeria. In 1937, the company obtained an exploration

concession from the British colonial administration with exclusive rights over the whole area of the country, including the Southern Cameroons which was administered as part of colonial Nigeria. Using Owerri in the present Imo State as its base, the company commenced the investigation of a totally unknown territory after merging with the D'Arcy Exploration activities in the country in the early twenties.

By the period the Shell D'Arcy Petroleum Company Limited started exploration in 1938, oil had not been found in commercial quantity anywhere in West Africa, and there was little indication of West Africa becoming a major oil-producing Zone. Between 1939 and 1940, the Shell D'Arcy survey party called Thyssen survey party which used Okwelle, Okigwe in the present Imo State as its base, and undertook geological survey of the neighbourhood of Okigwe, extending to about 12-15 miles South-West wards in the direction of Owerri. The Shell D'Arcy exploration parties were forced to suspend activities in the 1940s as a result of the outbreak of the Second World War (Udeke & Okolie-Osemene, 2012).

According to Udeke and Okolie-Osemene, by the end of the Second World War in 1945, the British Petroleum Company joined Shell D'Arcy in the exploration activities in Nigeria 1946. This occasioned the remaining of the company's name to Shell-BP. The company thus, became jointly financed by the Royal Dutch-Shell Group of Companies and the British Petroleum Corporation on equal basis. In September 1946, exploration activities resumed seriously with more ground and aerial surveys. The authors' further state that it was during this period that the Niger Delta area was chosen for serious search for petroleum as it was considered more likely area to contain hydrocarbon accumulation. It is imperative to know that drilling of exploration wells by the company first took place in Owerri in 1951, and secondly in Uyo province between 1953 and 1954. But it terminated further appraisal drilling occasioned by disappointing results from neighbourhood appraisal results.

By 1956 however, results of tests carried out at the company's exploration well in Otuabagi at the then Oloibiri distinct in the Brass Division of present-day Bayelsa state has shown a larger quantity of oil than so far discovered in the other exploration wells. More wells later drilled in the vicinity also confirmed a major oil field. By the end of the year, oil was also found in commercial quantity at Afam in

the then Umuahia Province. In 1958, the discovery of larger quantity of oil took place at Bomu, 14 miles south of Afam in the then Ogoni Division of today's Rivers State. These early discoveries gave further impetus for the intensification of exploration activities and to the discovery of Ebebu and Ughelli oil fields, west of the Niger Delta in 1959. Before this discovery, all discoveries were in the then Eastern Region of Nigeria. Following the initial discoveries at Oloibiri and Afam, Shell-B.P. Petroleum Development Company had started oil production. Through pipeline connection between the Oloibiri District and Kugbo Bay with the support of cargo vessels carrying crude oil to port - Harcourt, the Company was able to export its first cargo of crude oil in 1958 from the temporary oil export terminal.

The commencement of oil production at the Oloibiri district was followed by the transfer of Shell - B.P. headquarters from Owerri to Port - Harcourt in 1957. Apart from nearness to the oil fields, Port - Harcourt was considered due to the availability of infrastructural facilities such as adequate harbour and port facilities to handle materials and heavy oil equipment. The availability of air transport and communication links with Lagos state, the then Federal Capital of Nigeria, was a further advantage of Port - Harcourt over Owerri. The movement to the Port-Harcourt, which was completed in 1959, started in 1957 when the company began the construction of its office buildings, workshops, training centres, material handling facilities and residential area of 400 housing units. In 1958, the rate of production was 4000 barrels per day. This figure doubled the following year with the beginning of production from the Afam and Bomu fields. To handle the increasing rate of production, a decision was taken to build an oil terminal at Bonny but at the entrances of Bonny River was a bar which even small tankers could not pass through when fully loaded. This made the dredging of the Bonny Bar inevitable between 1959 and 1961 to enable the movement of bigger tankers. A total of four tanks were constructed at the terminal with a total capacity of 30,000 barrels.

With the success at Otuabagi in Oloibiri district, other oil companies developed interest in oil exploration in Nigeria. By 1958, the first export of crude oil of about 1.8 million barrels left the shores of Nigeria for Britain, valued at the equivalent of about one hundred and seventy million Naira (₦170 million). With time, the production of crude oil rose considerably, with a lull experienced during the country's civil war of 1967 - 1970. After the cessation of hostilities in 1970, crude oil production increased

and so did earnings from oil exports. But paradoxically, these have not impacted positively on the lives of the vast majority of Nigerians, especially the people of Niger Delta region, which in no small measure trigger youth crises in the region, and by implication, in Nigeria.

### **Post-Independence Marginalisation: Causes of Niger Delta Crises**

Going by Saturday Independent Newspaper, February 7, 2009, political factors contribute to the youth crisis in the Niger Delta. One of the political factors responsible for the state of affairs in the Niger Delta according to the newspaper is the country's flawed political development. This could be best described by the words of a former Governor of the oil-bearing Rivers State when he states that:

The greatest problem that that the Niger Delta people have is the Federal structure.... Everybody is rushing to the Federal Capital just because of the oil in our land here and we are not allowed to see it, smell it, or touch it. And this began first under the British [colonial] government. It was a 100 percent derivation of what is produced in your land and then it came down to 50 per cent. Then one morning after the war it came down to zero (2009, p. 1).

But more painfully is the use of the arbitrarily gauged census figures to determine political demography. The use of this arithmetic to determine political and demographic domination of the Nigerian state by the so-called majority ethnic nationalities and its attendant discrimination, marginalization, oppression and exclusion of the minor ethnic nationalities such as the Niger Delta region can no doubt, calls for "True Federalism" and "Resource Control".

Economically, evidence abounds that the debate about resource control which in many instances misconstrued as youth crises is a reflection of the pitiable economic arrest and poverty in the Niger Delta regions. In agreement with the youth crises, Obubo and Emordi, have this to say:

The evident despoliation and degradation of the Niger Delta environment without compassion condemned the valuable people, particularly the women, to life of poverty and deprivation in view of the fact that their sources of livelihood–hitherto fertile land for farming and water for fishing – have been destroyed.... (p. 103).

Regrettably, the issues surrounding these debates and agitations have not been adequately addressed by the ruling class whose interest is to protect its advantages. Environmental degradation as well as the criminal neglect by successive governments to provide the basic human needs of Nigerians, especially those in the Niger Delta, has intensified feelings of marginalisation and the concomitant restiveness characteristic of the area. Put differently, the history of the exploitation and neglect underscores the persistence and intensity of the crises in the Niger Delta.

#### **Social and Cultural factors**

Furthermore, social and cultural factors also breed hunger, anger, illiteracy and unemployment in the Niger Delta region which have combined to produce an army of restive youths. These have invariably become a source of mobilisation/recruitment by militant groups who have boldly and courageously responded to the many years of neglect through armed resistance and attacks on oil facilities and installations in the region. This could be viewed, according to Ota (2020) as a response of an apparent lack of any sense of corporate social responsibility on the part of the multinational corporations to their host communities....

This circumstance thus, erodes social and cultural justice in Nigeria, especially on the people of the Niger Delta. In a society where principle of “all people are equal” is absent, anarchy or unrest is inevitable. The marginalization and social cum cultural exclusion of the Niger Delta people from national affairs in a reasonable degree exposes the people to life of want and hopelessness as there were no jobs for them, especially on the educational system that has been prostrate for long, thus further disempowering them. Hence youths in the region turn to justice with demands for resource control or seek for true federalism whenever they confront real or imagined instances of injustice.

### **Key Rebellions in the Niger Delta, 1966 - 1998.**

The long years of neglect and deprivation, marginalisation, coupled with the insensitivity on the part of previous Nigerian governments and oil companies, had created an “atile” in the Niger Delta region since 1966; a region that came to be associated with unrests. It had been pointed out in chapter one of this long essay under a reviewed literature that it was the evident despoliation and degradation of the Niger Delta environment without compassion that prompted Isaac Adaka Boro to carry out a revolt against the then Agui Ironsi led Federal Military Government of Nigeria in 1966. Below is a brief combined discussion of Isaac Adaka Boro’s “Twelve-Day Revolution”, Ken Saro Wiwa led “Movement for the survival of Ogoni people (MOSOP), and the famous Kaiama Declaration” between 1966 - 1998.

#### **Isaac Adaka Boro’s Twelve-Day Revolution, 1966**

It has been severally pointed out in this work that the mindless despoliation and degradation of the Niger Delta environment without compassion condemned the vulnerable people to life of want and misery. Again, marginalization and political exclusion of the Niger Delta people from national affairs occasioned by regional sentiments over national cohesion and development had further exposed the people to life of want and poverty. This situation in the country impacted in especially the youths, feelings of hopelessness and thus, Boro “was not an exception”.

Thus, in recognition of the above situation, Boro began the attempt at exposing Niger Delta region and its people to the world with a view to freeing them from internal colonialists and continuous exploitation of their resources by multinational oil companies. In the words of Obubo and Emordi (2023, p. 103),

... the revolt failed but remains a landmark in the history of the region and ethnic nationalism in Nigeria, evident in how it inspired many social movements and declarations of Bill of Rights such as the Ogoni Bill of Rights.

### **Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP)**

Having the same ideas of Boro in liberating the citizens from marginalization and oppression, the movement for the survival of the Ogoni people was born under the leadership of Ken Saro Wiwa in 1992. MOSOP is widely viewed to be a leading movement to advocate for resource control and better environmental management since Isaac Boro's revolution. Okeke et al (1998, p. 217) write:

... probably the first group of Nigerians to articulate a demand for Resource control in the 1990s. In the movement for the survival of the Ogoni people (MOSOP), they began a campaign for the right of ownership of the oil in Ogoni land and to determine how to exploit them without reference to any authority in the area.

Similarly, the Ijaw Youths Council (IYC) came into being with the aim of fighting for justice and equity in the Nigerian state. Formed in the early 1990s, it came to climax on December 11, 1998 in the general convention of Ijaw Youths at Kaiama (Isaac Boro's home town) with the issuance of a document, otherwise known as the Kaiama Bill of Rights or Declaration. Thus, like MOSOP, the crux of the IYC struggle was in relation to social neglect, economic and political marginalisation and underdevelopment of Ijaw land in particular, and the Niger Delta area in general.

Like the Boro's revolt, all the discussed revolts failed, but they all made landmark in exposing the unfair and exploitative character of the Nigerian social and productive relations. In justifying or supporting these movements, Oladipo Falina(1998, p. 88) writes, "In Nigeria, ethnic nationalities' demands are made first, for certain ways of distributing national resources, political offices, civil service jobs, positions in the Army, Air Force, and the Navy (Armed Forces), et cetera".

### **State Responses and Implications of the Niger Delta Crises**

As repeatedly demonstrated, the plight of the Niger Delta people whose crude oil has sustained Nigeria for several decades is better imagined than discussed. The people are severely marginalised and denied of most of the good things of life owing to the centrifugal administrative structure. This, as stated severally, necessitated the youth crises in the region in particular, and Nigeria as a whole. But instead of genuinely assuaging the people's fears and misery, the federal

government authorised the military to barrage the region with troops, killing and shooting the inhabitants, especially the youths who form the socio-economic organisations such as the movement for the survival of the Ogoni people (MOSOP), the Ijaw Youth Congress(IYC) et cetera to demand for the control of their

God given resources corrects the imbalances of the federal structure, or to out rightly stop the marginalisation that has been going on for too long.

This is not to say however that the successive governments did not address the issues at all. Some palliative measures have been adopted by the various governments. For example, Olusegun Obasanjo proposed the bill that established the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) as an agency to implement programmes of sustainable development for the Niger Delta region. But because the crises were still escalating, as the NDDC could not tame or solve all the teething problems, Musa Yar' Adua established the Amnesty programme in 2008 with the aim of not only dousing the crises but also disarming the youths to give peace a chance to further address the country's multiple challenges or problems. This Yar' Adua's initiative seems to have reduced the unrests in the Niger Delta region but have not entirely resolved them. Again, the creation of the Federal Ministry of the Niger Delta is a further boost to the peace deal in the region. Unfortunately, and regrettably too, these laudable initiatives have not yielded the expected development for the people due to a number of problems including bureaucratization, underfunding and corruption.

Another official response of the Federal government of Nigeria to the perennial unrests in the Niger Delta region is the contraction of "Tantita Security Service Nigeria Limited" to safeguard oil pipelines and installations in the area. Owned by Government Ekpemupolo, fondly addressed as Tompolo, the Tantita security services is to safeguard oil companies and their installations in the Niger Delta region. But until this contract, Tompolo, who was made a billionaire and become the most cherished ex-militant under Goodluck Jonathan's administration, was declared wanted by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) for corruption charges under Muhammadu Buhari's led federal government. Even Yar's Adua, who later gave amnesty to these youths, at one point, was fingered to have haunted

Tompolo due to his stance against injustice. A Sahara reporter bluntly puts it this way:

The Joint Task Force (JTF) attack the village of Oporoza in the Niger Delta. It is uncertain whether president Yar' Adua ordered or acceded to the attack-perhaps to test the waters for a longer engagement or whether the JTF is operating outside the Federal Government. Both scenarios are of critical concern in their implications about the Nigerian government, the likelihood of escalation and the collapse of any peace initiatives. Particularly alarming is the decision to target Tompolo, a Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta MEND leader [sic] who is said to have been active recently in talks with the Federal government and who is seen as a political leader of the moment (*Sahara Reporters*, May 15, 2009).

But haven't recognised the influence of Tompolo, the Buhari government instead of keep haunting him (Tompolo) later decided to engage him with the Tantita contract with a view to dousing the escalating pipeline vandalism and blowing up of oil installations in the region.<sup>6</sup> Managed by Kestin Pondei, the Tantita company offers a diverse range of specialised security solutions designed to protect critical infrastructures in Niger Delta. Its primary responsibilities include intelligence and risk management, proactive threat assessment and mitigation strategies. Others are technology and system integration, development of advanced surveillance, access control, and monitoring system, security devices and equipment such as provision of alarms, CCTV cameras, fire detectors, and tracking systems among others.

### **Establishment of the Willink's Commission and Creation of Rivers State and Calabar-Ogoja (Cross River State)**

Although the Willink's commission predated the creation of the two aforementioned states- Rivers and Calabar-Ogoja states, it is viewed that the two states were considered also because of Boro's agitations and subsequent declaration of the Twelve-Day Revolution. It was the fears of the minority groups such as the Ijaw in the Niger Delta region which characterized the agitations to project and protect

their interests within the Nigerian project that necessitated the establishment of the Willink's commission in 1958.

This commission was appointed to investigate the fears of the minorities about the domination by the minority ethnic groups. A major request or demand made by the minorities was the creation of more states to accommodate their interests. To grant this request, the British government suggested that it would delay granting independence to the country for at least two more years. But in their hasty desire to attain self-rule or independence, Nigerian leaders turned down the suggestion. They agreed, however, to provide for creation of states in the independence constitution. But unfortunately, and regrettably too, political considerations and the love of power by the so called major ethnic groups prevented the implementation of the desired demands of the minority ethnic groups (Ojiaku & Iroha, 1982).

### **Conclusion**

This essay has articulated a number of factors that are responsible for the youth crises in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. In justifying the youth crises in the region, the work demonstrated that the evident despoliation and degradation of the region's environment with no compassion which condemned the valuable people to life of poverty and want provided the background for these crises since 1966 or even earlier. Worse still, the essay contends that economic marginalisation, social and political exclusion from the central or federal government since 1964 ushered in fear to the people of the Niger Delta that triggered in particular, the first recorded post-independence revolution in the area led by Isaac Adaka Baro, in 1966. This revolution though failed, inspired in the youths to continue the struggle from where Baro stopped; it has helped to inspire new ideas in the way the Ijaw, in particular, and the Niger Delta people as a whole see themselves, as later agitators such as MOSOP and the IYC with the same ideology with different approaches toed this line.

In order to douse these crises, the successive governments at the centre adopted a number of palliative measures to include the setting up of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) in 1960, the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development

Commission (OMPADEC) in 1993, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000, the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, 2008, and the Niger Delta Amnesty programme in 2009. All these were not only aimed at developing the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria, but to assuage the anger and frustration of the people since the situation could not be helped by the deployment of military personnel to curtail. Despite these developments, insecurity in the Niger Delta and the threats of youths to set off bombs in part of Nigeria are a major attraction of the media. While the government has labelled this set of agitators as unregistered youths who were unable to accept offer of amnesty before the closing date of October 4, 2009, ex-militant leaders have continued to decry the appalling conditions in the region.

A possible way to come out of this quagmire is that, the Federal Government must not only be vigilant but should also ensure that development programme and projects in the region are fast-tracked. Disturbing cases of rivalry and corruption in the bodies and agencies set up to do this such as the one that led to the dissolution of the NDDC with the Federal Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs overseeing it for the period of investigation and inquiries even though it also only ended in a utopian dream' should be promptly and appropriately addressed. There should also be corporate social responsibility on the part of oil-producing companies in the region. But more importantly, the criminally ignored social justice and people-oriented development must be stopped or reversed in Nigeria as a whole because as has been earlier identified in this essay, corruption as well as social injustice are major clogs in the wheels of progress and development in Nigeria even.

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